



Short Review Paper

Women workforce transformation from occupational stress to wellness: Transit towards Aatmanirbharata

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Abstract

Women workforces are shouldering the equal responsibility in all spheres of organisational functionality. Though the day-to-day activity gives rise to some stressful situations, which are gender neutral in their nature, the impact is critical on women for their inexorable dual role. This research study has focused on Occupational stress which is a double-edged weapon. The antecedents of occupational Stress will also function as the descendent of occupational stress sometimes. In both the situations, coping mechanisms or Aatmanirbharata from the women employee's perspective and from the Organisation's front would find a solution towards a congenial workplace for women in the persona of Organisational wellness. The study through the evidence from the thorough literature review from a wider perspective has developed the model as a Aatmanirbharata model of Occupational stress.

Keywords: Women workforce, Occupational Stress (OS), work life and strategies.

Introduction

Human element is the center of all economic activities, no organization can think of viability of operations and effectiveness without the efficient utilization of human resources¹. While rendering the service, the employees pass through various twists and swirls demanding their optimum time and energy. Many a time it spills over the space of personal life as well.

Stress is often maintained at the optimum level; it contributes positively towards efficiency². But the causes of stress are many and its effects on individuals and organizations are enormous³. Since as compared to the male counterpart, women face more stress at the workplace since they must perform the dual role of housewife and office staff⁴.

Effective utilization of human resources, both men and women, requires a proper system of stress management in the organization. Further, the rapidly changing technological, socio-economic, and politico-legal environment and trend towards globalization of business and industry, effective management of stress has been gaining more and more popularity among the academic circle also and has become a challenging job at present⁵. So, the present study focused at to analyze the effect of OS among women employees and the related HR strategies to solve them.

With the increased number of women employees, the sensitization about women employee related issues is understood in a better way⁴.

Unlike their counterparts they must shoulder the responsibility of a homemaker. This dual role encompasses the ripples of challenges while bringing the balance in personal as well as in professional life. The dual role of working women is just equivalent to pursuing two full time jobs at a time⁶. This makes employed women experience strain on their time and energy⁷.

Research has shown that higher the stressful incidents per day, more the chances for having low satisfaction at the end of the day⁸ and the chances for experiencing stress buffering effects increases. In addition, in her personal life, who do not get their spouse support in household management are also experiences high level of stress⁹.

Moreover, the career aspirations in her, in turn pushes her to the greater degree of commitments in the organizational performance, leading to a higher time demand from her¹⁰.

Further, the congenial work environment would bring career advancements but most of the cases the organizational culture related compression would lead her to the stress which is the key element to be addressed for the good health of women employees as well as the organization. At this point it is the HR policies, and the related strategies would help the women employee to rebuild her robust work-life¹¹.

Objectives: i. To analyses the effect of OS on work life balance of women workforce. ii. To suggest Human resource strategies as an intervention to cope up with OS among women workforces.

Research Methodology

The study is carried on with the thematic review on OS among women workforce in various settings. This thematic research study has involved the effect of OS on Women employee's work-life and the HR strategies to delimit the effect of OS on women employees. The study through various literature review have analyzed the clockwise and anticlockwise relationship between the occupational stress and the dependent variables. This cycle could be delinked by administering the coping mechanisms from both personal and Organizational front.

Discussion: Effect of OS on Women Employee's Work: OS is the reaction found among employees who are unable to reach to the expectations of the organizations and the personal/social life. Stress is the outcome of the hostile physical and mental responses that appear when the job demand does not match with the personal and professional traits of an employee¹². In specific with the women employees the case becomes severe due to their dual role.

Women must be treated as an employee who is a woman. To be specific, the roles of women in social context must be respected and considered. The organization culture towards this plays an important role. The gender sensitizes workplace is always congenial for her to perform to the optimum level. The functional as well as emotional factors play a major role here. The functional factors like, role assignment, target setting, flexible timing (when the need arises), involving her in decision making etc., whereas the emotional factors like considering her suggestions, providing an opportunity for her new initiations, being sensitized for celebrations etc.

This would bring in a confidence in her performance and the support from her male colleagues would ignite new productive performance from her. This would bring in a new spar in her personal life as well which in turn prove to be positive for her professional growth. Reich and Nussbaum 1994¹³ in their study found that 60% of working women in United States reported that job stress was their foremost problem. Nelson, D. L., & Burke, R. J. 2000⁹ reported that women employees are having greater level of stress compared to men.

Kristina Gyllensten and Stephen Palmer, 2005¹⁴ observed that, manifold responsibilities, delay in career advancement, bias, and labeling results in stress among the women. They confirmed that women reported higher levels of stress compared to men. Ansuman, Adithya and Madhulita, 2014¹⁵ determined that maximum number of women are with reduced mental health. According to the authors, workplace environment is one among the major factors in determining mental health status of working women.

Effect of OS on Women Employee's Personal Life: The study involves the social, family and health perspective of women employee under the purview of personal life.

“Stress could be reflected in feeling, behavioural and thinking change¹⁶. Acute comebacks to stress may be in the areas of feelings (for example, anxiety, depression, irritability, fatigue), behaviour (for example, being withdrawn, aggressive, tearful, unmotivated), thinking (for example, difficulties of concentration and problem solving) or physical symptoms (for example, palpitations, nausea, headaches). If stress persists, there are changes in neuroendocrine, cardiovascular, autonomic, and immunological functioning, leading to mental and physical ill health (for example anxiety, depression, heart disease)¹⁶.”

Work and family have increasingly turn out to be opponent sectors, both in demand of energy and time in same proportion, leading to liable for work life conflict¹⁷. The struggle is intensified by the cultural incongruities of motherhood, as women are extensively expected to seek self-fulfillment in challenging careers, they also encounter immense stress to detriment themselves while involving in “intensive parenting”¹⁸. Added concerns faced by working women are concomitants with finding adequate, affordable access to elderly care. This inter role (work and life) conflicts are neither compatible nor complementary to each other. The concern increases when either of the role demands more time/energy/money than in normal days¹⁹.

Results of research of Boles, J. S., et al, 2001²⁰ indicate that there is significant correlation between Work Family Conflict and negative job attitudes. The related effects include decreased overall job satisfaction and higher risk of attrition²⁰. Researchers have found that the per week work hours, rate of recurrence of overtime work, stubborn work program, uncooperative manager, and an uncongenial work ethos results in the instances, where working women will experience conflict between their work and family life. However, authors argued that quality of role portrays the major role related to OS than the quantity of roles that matters. It is found to be obvious, as there is a positive association between multiple roles and good mental health when a woman likes her job and likes her home life²¹.

Repercussion effect of Occupational Stress from the Work and family conflict: OS works as a double-edged weapon. In few cases due to work life imbalances, the concentration and focus on the job will be a miss out. This in turn leads to occupational disfunction leading to the stressful situation. OS is reflected as work-role conflict, work-role strain, and work-role ambiguity²². Each has the potential to affect Work Family Conflict (WFC). The root cause for work role conflict superficially looks like lies in designing the job but practically it arises when the position is filled by a woman employee²³.

An attitude towards women employees that they are less focused in their job assignments and the Job description should be gender sensitive than gender neutral. Then the confusion in rendering the role doesn't arise²³. This would also reduce the stress spill over on family roles. Role overload is the result of having too many things to do in each time²⁴.

It is found that role overload and role conflict were predictors of WFC yet did not find significant results for role ambiguity. Research studies have identified several variables that influence the level of WFC and FWC (Family Work Conflict). Variables such as the size of family, the age of children, the number of hours worked outside the home, the level of control one has over one's work hours, flexible or inflexible work hours and the level of social support impact the experience of WFC and FWC²⁵.

However, these variables have been conceptualized as antecedents of WFC and FWC; it is also important to consider the consequences these variables have on psychological distress and well-being of the working women.

The Thematic Model: The thematic model of the effect of occupational stress of women employees is depicted as follows, based on the variables taken for the current study:

It is evidenced from the literature review that the dependent variables namely, Effects on personal life, Effects on work life and work life imbalance are triggered by the independent variable Occupational Stress. And the occupational stress in turn arises due to factors of personal life, Workplace issues and work life imbalance. In the later case, occupational stress takes up the dependent variables place whereas all the other three factors become the independent variable.

Human resource strategies: An integral element of stress management in the workplace is the diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation by the human resource management. The company is responsible for the initiation of these three programs through the human resource department especially helping the newbies to fit in to their roles without stress and to retain the key employees in the organizations³.

In the occurrences of OS, a human resource manager must come into foster sanity. Here are the suggestions listed out in consultation with the human resource management professionals.

The suggestions are framed in preventive as well as protective ways. In other words, they are in reactive and proactive frames.

Implementing wellness programs: OS emphasizes on the introduction of wellness programs by the human resource professionals²⁶. These programs assist in managing women employee's lives by eliminating stress at work and home. Such programs are EAPs, also known as employee assistance programs, workshops specially made for effective stress management, fitness subsidies, indoor and outdoor games area, gyms at work. Additionally, this package includes corporate cafeterias, amenities like dry cleaners, ladies rest rooms, women employee's concierge services and pharmacies²⁶.

Flexible work arrangement: Other guidelines for managing OS comprise flexible work arrangements and schedules. This would result in ease in reaching work. Here the flexible work arrangements should be arranged in consent with women employees otherwise the possible adverse effect might arise²⁷. The uncertain work timings would result in further concerns. Examples of flexible work arrangement include teleworking, flexible working hours, part-time schedules and job sharing. This can help working women in maintaining a work-life balance.

The flexible work arrangement provides the freedom of accomplishing the critical and urgent assignments based on their priority²⁷. This enriches the morale and motivation among working women rather than tying them with stubborn time bound restrictions.

Providing the health and safety measures: Human resource works with health and safety departments, to formulate policies on the suggestions that the women employees have identified⁴. Through the health and safety department, employees should be provided with sessions on self-protection against organizational harassments, mentoring assistance, workshops on fitness, in hand programs on meditation and yoga for managing stress. Although these standards are not statutory, their impact on managing OS is incredible.

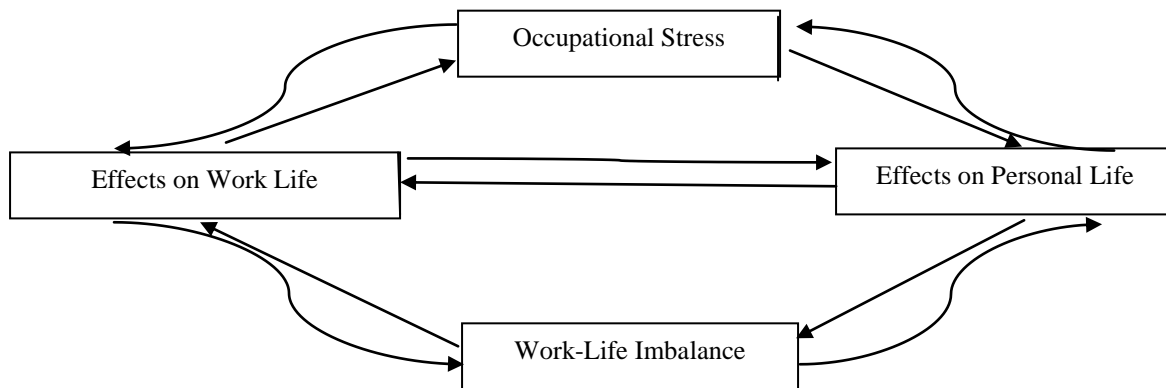


Figure-1: Thematic Model.

Identification of primary causative agents: OS in workplace calls for a joint report on the primary relative agents. Usually, human resource emphasizes on analyzing the reasons for a women employee’s distress¹¹.

It is inevitable, for the human resource to decrypt this point before exploring the options for treatment. Once the causative factor is identified, depending on its effect on a women employee’s performance, treatment needs to be administered.

Review irrelevant policies: Few irrelevant policies in relation to health and safety at work might have a negative effect on women employees. As a result, the working women could be stressed. It is the duty of human resource to modify such policies and direct the terms of implementing useful policies towards stress management in workplace. Usually, the new policies must be relevant to the initiation of strategies on how to manage OS effectively.

Showing empathy: The humanitarian concern when blended with the services of human resource professionals, few wonders could be felt in goodwill among women employees in the organizations.

For instance, in the cases of injuries, though the victim is eligible for statutory compensation, the stress she undergoes could be eased through the helping approach of the human resource personnel by initiating a meeting with personal injury lawyers. Even while handling mentoring sessions for women employees, the element of empathy is essential.

Results

While addressing the Occupational stress the role of personal coping mechanisms and Organizational coping mechanisms are found in much research articles. Individual approaches include training and one-to-one psychology services—clinical, occupational, health or counseling. They should aim to change individual skills and resources and help the individual change their situation¹⁶. It is found out from the study that few organizational strategies blended with personal coping mechanisms would surely lead women workforce towards realization of their work life goal. The strategies like supportive organizational climate, job enrichment, and Career planning and counseling and stress control workshop and employee assistance program have been considered as the good strategies to resolve the puzzle of organizational stress. The current study could be able to bring out the following coping model of occupational stress.

Conclusion

Women probably need to be identified as “women” who are employees rather just as an employee and sidelining her womanhood. During the research study it is found that OS is a significant cause for women attrition as well. Thus, the growing importance of interventional strategies is highly felt at the organizational level to reduce the stress level of women employees to maximize their performance through ensuring better quality of work life. The future study would focus on the statistical comprehensions based on women employee’s opinion.

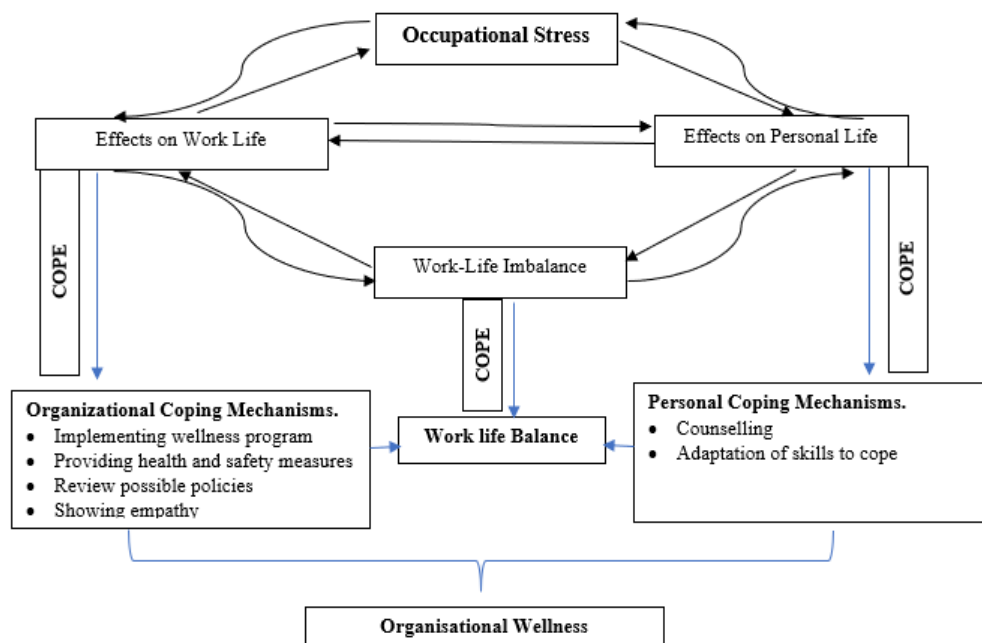


Figure-2: The Coping model of Occupational stress.

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