

International Journal of Agriculture Extension and Social Development

Volume 7; Issue 7; July 2024; Page No. 358-366

Received: 14-04-2024
Accepted: 15-05-2024

Indexed Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal

Work-related stress: A hidden threat to the health of women

*Sonia Bhandal, Sukhdeep Kaur Mann and Mandeep Sharma

Department of Extension Education and Communication Management, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Punjab, India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26180723.2024.v7.i7e.826>

Corresponding Author: Sonia Bhandal

Abstract

Throughout history, women in India were traditionally confined to domestic roles, primarily as mothers and homemakers. However, their role and presence in society have evolved significantly. With women constituting nearly half of the population, their contribution to the Indian economy cannot be underestimated. Recent data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey Report 2022-23 indicates a substantial increase in the Female Work Participation Rate, reaching 37.0% in 2023. This surge is attributed to the Government's concerted efforts to empower women through policy initiatives aimed at their long-term socio-economic and political advancement. Today, economic realities demand women's active engagement in the workforce to support their families financially. Nonetheless, balancing work and family responsibilities poses significant challenges that can affect women's psychological and physical well-being, impacting their job performance. Juggling roles as caregivers, parents, and professionals can lead to considerable stress and strain. Prolonged exposure to occupational stress can have severe consequences, affecting not only women's mental health but also their physical well-being, relationships, and overall quality of life. Therefore, the present study was planned to analyze the trend of women participation in workforce and what are various factors causing occupational stress. The paper also highlights the initiatives taken by the Government of India to reduce working stress. Additionally, the strategies are also discussed to manage occupational stress at various levels. The study will provide valuable insight to policymakers and organizations to support and empower women to thrive in their personal and professional lives.

Keywords: Work-related stress, threat, health, women, government initiatives

1. Introduction

India is renowned for embracing the principle of "Unity in Diversity," reflecting its rich culture, varied regions, diverse traditions, cuisine, languages and other aspects (Gupta *et al.* 2023) [9]. The nation's progress depends significantly on the contributions of its population. Historically, the role of women in India was conventionally confined to family responsibilities, encompassing duties as a mother and homemaker. However, contemporary India is experiencing a remarkable surge in the presence of women in the workforce, actively competing with men in all aspects of work (Surbhi, 2015) [35]. Influential factors such as urbanization, technological advancements and women's education have significantly transformed these traditional norms in India. The women's education stands out as a crucial catalyst in driving this notable shift. Starting from 2010, India has witnessed a good improvement in its female literacy rate. In the year 2010, the female literacy rate stood at 80.35% and over time, this rate has steadily rise to 91.95% in 2021. Notably, between 2010 and 2021, there has been a substantial increase of 14.4% in the female literacy rate. Examining the progress on an annual basis, there was a 0.6% rise in the literacy rate in 2021 (Global Data 2022) [8]. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey Report (2022-23) published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on October 9, 2023, there has been a noteworthy improvement in the Female Work Participation Rate in the country with the remarkable

increase by 4.2 percentage, reaching 37.0% in 2023, based on the 'usual status' concept of measuring work participation. This remarkable rise in the female work participation rate is attributed to the Government's decisive agenda, which focuses on ensuring women's empowerment through policy initiatives geared towards their long-term socio-economic and political development. Women in the present day undeniably enjoy increased educational opportunities and a broader array of workplace options. However, their multiple roles of caregivers, parents, and professionals can give rise to significant stress and strain (Patel, 2023) [23].

Stress serves as the fundamental factor driving all adaptive bodily responses, while the circumstances prompting stress are termed as stressors (Selye, 1965) [32]. Perceived stress encompasses both biological and psychological tension, including positive (eustress) and negative (distress) aspects (Selye, 1974) [33]. It involves emotions regarding life's uncertainties, unpleasant situations, and a lack of confidence in problem-solving abilities. The term 'stress' is derived from the Latin 'stringer,' meaning 'to draw tight,' illustrating its constrictive nature. Stress represents a complex interplay between mind and body and is a contributing factor to disease manifestation, with variations observed among individuals (McEwen, 2006) [16]. The circumstances leading to stress are termed stressors. People's reactions and adaptability to stressors can vary, even when faced with the same stressor (McEwen and Wingfield, 2003) [18].

Advancements in modernization, cultural shifts, evolving social norms, and workplace demands contribute to an increased prevalence of anxiety, depression, and persistent psychosocial stress among individuals (Liu *et al.*, 2017) ^[14]. An individual experiencing perceived stress will demonstrate behavioural responses. The brain plays a crucial role in perceiving and adapting to both social and physical stressors through various interacting mechanisms (McEwen *et al.*, 2015) ^[17]. As perceived stress intensifies, the mortality rate tends to increase, resulting in a higher number of deaths (Prior *et al.*, 2016) ^[27]. Although, at work and at home, women suffer from prejudice and are discriminated against. They struggle to maintain a balance between work and family since they are unable to give their family useful time (Anmol and Kumar, 2017) ^[2]. The obstacles faced by working women at the workplace may be exacerbated by environmental effects, sociocultural effects, and senior and subordinate relationships (if there is a gender gap between senior and subordinate) (Shivi, 2015) ^[34]. Therefore, to support the well-being of working women, it is essential to provide resources, such as access to mental health services, support groups, and self-care practices. By acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by working women in India, we can foster more inclusive and supportive communities that empower women to succeed both in their professional and personal lives (Mehta, 2013) ^[19].

2. Workers Population and Employment Type

The significance of women's employment extends beyond their empowerment, encompassing the optimization of the national economy and leveraging their effectiveness in various professions. In India, enhancements in education and employment opportunities have been extensively encouraged to ensure gender-neutral work force participation. An investigation of the Indian workforce statistics based on employment types indicates that in urban areas, the proportion of salaried/wage-earning females surpasses that of males. Conversely, in rural areas, the engagement of self-employed females exceeds that of males. The involvement in casual labour is nearly equal for both genders in rural areas, whereas it slightly tilts in favour of males in urban areas. In the self-employed category, where the female employment share is highest at 63 percent in rural areas, it's crucial to note that these figures can be misleading as significant number of women are employed as unpaid family workers in family farms and businesses, involving activities such as caring for livestock etc (PLFS Report 2019-20).

3. Concept of Stress

The dictionary defines word "stress" as a mental or emotional strain, tension, or pressure exerted on an object. The concept of stress in the field of life sciences was introduced by Hans Hugo and also known as the "father of stress," He defined stress as the force, pressure, or tension subjected upon an individual who resists these forces and attempt to uphold its true state. Michie (2002) ^[20] defined stress as the psychological and physical state that results when the resources of the individual are not sufficient to cope with the demands and pressures of the situation. Thus, stress is more likely in some situations than others and in

some individuals than others.

According to Werther (1996) stress can be a reaction exhibited by the people who have to face excessive pressures on account of various demands placed on them defined stress as a concept which is familiar to both the layman and the professional, it is understood by all in general context, but by very few when a more precise account is required. Stress can also be leveled as the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the workers. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury defined stress as a discrepancy between employees perceived state and desired state, when the employee considered such discrepancy important defined stress as an internal reaction to any force that threatens to disturb a person's equilibrium. When people feel helpless to exert, control or direct the demands placed upon them, a sort of tension is created which ultimately leads to stress. Various forms of stress exist in life and they can have impact on both mental and physical well-being. For example, experiencing financial stress may contribute to feelings of anxiety or depression. Similarly, relationship stress can manifest as anger or resentment. Addressing these different types of stress is crucial for maintaining overall well-being.

4. Occupational Stress

The modern world which is said to be world of achievements is also a "world of stress" one finds a sense of identification to an individual within a community as it satisfies needs and creates sense of worth and emotional wellbeing. Consequently, there has been a noticeable rise in the participation of women across various occupations in recent years. Employment opportunities for women have expanded globally. Therefore, women are increasingly developing a heightened awareness of their careers and embracing a more professional mindset. In the present era, economic demands have also necessitated women's active participation in the workforce to contribute financially to their families. However, the challenge of managing both work and family commitments can substantially influence the psychological and physical well-being of women, ultimately impacting their job performance. The struggle to find equilibrium between career and family responsibilities is a widespread issue encountered by working women globally (Surabhi 2015) ^[35]. In the traditional Indian society, women are frequently anticipated to fulfill the roles of homemaking and caregiving, with their identity closely linked to marriage, family and children. This scenario can pose challenges for women engaged in work outside the home, making it challenging to navigate and effectively balance their work and family obligations, leading to a notable level of stress in their lives (Patel 2023) ^[23]. Occupational stress is defined as the physical and emotional harm that occurs when job demands exceed the capabilities, resources, or needs of workers. This can happen when individuals face excessive workloads, challenging colleagues or managers, unrealistic deadlines, or job insecurity. The repercussions of occupational stress can be notably severe for women, given the multiple roles they often navigate as caregivers, professionals, and mothers (Moreno *et al.* 2020) ^[22]. Acknowledged as a global

phenomenon, occupational stress carries substantial health and economic consequences in both developed and developing countries (Hassan 2019) [11].

Occupational stress is stress involving work. According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition, occupational or work-related stress "is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope." According to Osipow and Spokane (1998), occupational stress can be defined as the physiological and emotional responses that occur when

police perceive an imbalance between their job demands and their capability. Occupational stress is physical or psychological disorder associated with an occupational environment and manifested in symptoms such as extreme anxiety, or tension, or cramps, headaches, or digestion problems. According to Cotton and Hart (2003) occupational stress has been defined as a situation where occupation related factors interact with the employees in a manner that disrupts or enhances his/her physiological conditions forcing them to deviate from normal functioning.

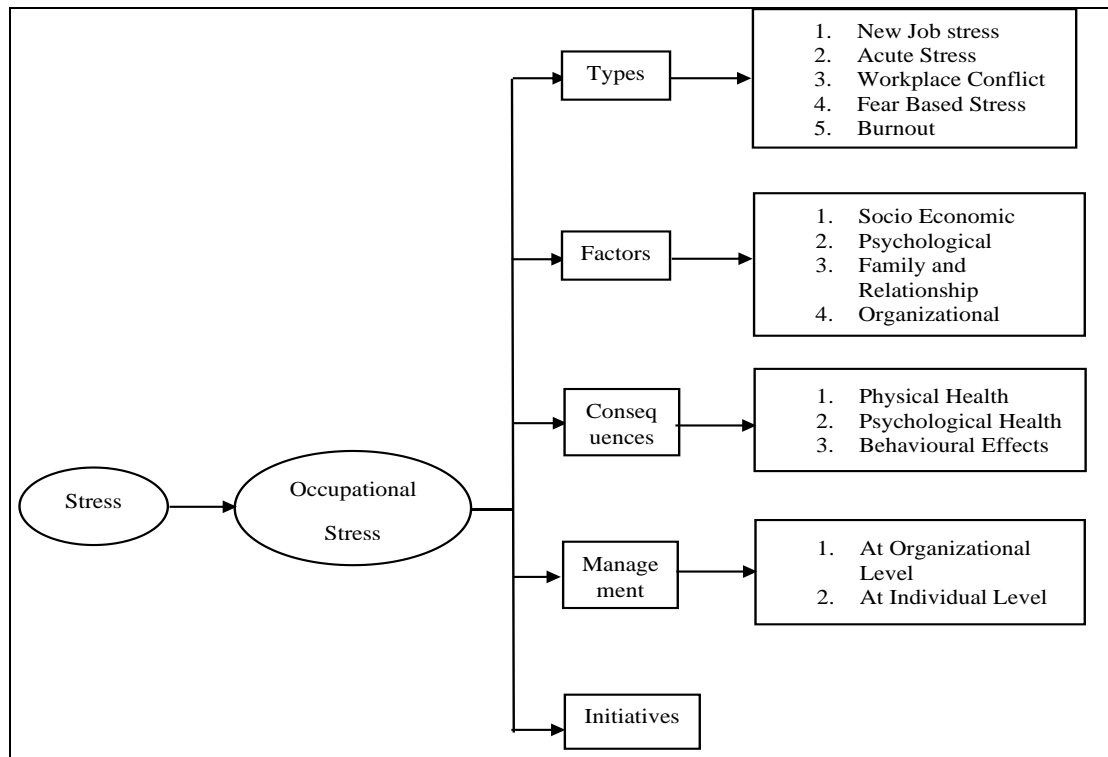


Fig 1: Conceptual Model of Occupational Stress

Types of Occupational Stress

Here are five common types of workplace stress:

- **New Job Stress:** New employees often experience a sense of being overwhelmed during the onboarding process. They are required to manage multiple tasks simultaneously, including understanding their job responsibilities, forming connections with colleagues, adapting to a new company culture, and striving to perform at a high level to create a favourable first impression.
- **Acute Stress:** This type of stress is situational and arises from transient factors like an imminent deadline or a significant presentation. Typically, acute stress tends to diminish once the specific stressful event is over.
- **Workplace Conflict Stress:** Workplace conflict may arise from disagreements over business decisions or clashes in personalities. This conflict can manifest in forms such as gossip or bullying, leading to detrimental effects on employees' mental health. Additionally, it can result in reduced productivity and increased rates of absenteeism.
- **Fear-Based Stress:** Circumstances that threaten their

job security can create challenges for employees, impeding their performance. Examples of such situations include the prospect of layoffs, strained relationships with their supervisors or unforeseen additional responsibilities for which they were not adequately prepared.

- **Burnout:** Employees undergo burnout when they sense prolonged physical and emotional exhaustion from work, impacting their overall effectiveness. Various factors, including being part of an understaffed team or consistently facing unrealistic deadlines can contribute to the occurrence of burnout.

5. Stress and Gender

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) for 2020-21, India's current population stands at 1,441,459,746, comprising 51.6% males and 48.4% females. The sex ratio in 2023 is reported as 1020 females per 1000 males, with rural areas showing a ratio of 1037 and urban areas reflecting 985 females per 1000 males. Comprising nearly half of the entire population, we can assert that the contribution of women to the Indian economy is not like a tiny dot on a complete page.

Living in the 21st century proves to be a source of stress for many. Interestingly, stress affects men and women disparately, and their responses to stress also differ. This divergence in stress response creates what is commonly referred to as a "stress gap" between men and women. Research suggests that women tend to experience higher levels of stress compared to men. When both men and women are under stress, their bodies undergo different reactions physiologically (Mantracare 2023) ^[15].

As per the 2015-16 National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) report, females were found to experience a significant majority of depressive disorders, both in terms of current prevalence (female: 3.0% and male: 2.4%) and lifetime prevalence (female: 5.7% and male: 4.8%). Any disparity within families, households, and communities is often justified using the hollow rules of the prevailing culture. A young girl subjected to such irregularities tends to shape her life in alignment with these norms. These disparities contribute to variations in knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences, and intelligence between men and women (Rathore *et al* 2020) ^[30].

For example, when men experience stress, they often respond more effectively and come out of stress when they are alone and becoming self-focused. They tend to alleviate stress when they have the opportunity to decompress, taking, for instance, 15 or 30 minutes to emerge from the stress phase. Physiologically, the male body reacts distinctively to stress, often exhibiting higher blood pressure (hypertension). Moreover, extended exposure to stress may lead to chronic stress, escalating the risks of various diseases like heart disease and stroke. On the other hand, women do not tend to respond positively to stress when they are alone. Instead, they actively seek emotional support and have a need for communication. Women exhibit better stress responses when they are in groups, particularly in the company of other supportive women. Stress often induces anxiety in women, and if it persists over an extended period, it may escalate into depression. Women may also experience fatigue, and in tandem with this, there may be a tendency towards weight gain.

6. Factors Causing Occupational Stress

• Socio-economic stressors

Socioeconomic stressors refer to challenges and pressures that individuals or communities experience as a result of their social and economic circumstances. These stressors are often linked to the broader socio-economic environment and can impact various aspects of people's lives. Addressing socioeconomic stressors often involves comprehensive efforts to address systemic issues related to economic, educational, and social inequalities. Social policies, community development initiatives, and efforts to promote economic and educational equity are essential in mitigating the impact of these stressors on individuals and communities.

• Psychological stressors

The American Psychological Association (APA) describes psychological stressors as an emotional reaction to an external stimulus. Stress can manifest as a temporary or prolonged condition, determined by the transient or persistent nature of its origin. The activation of specific hormones, including noradrenaline and cortisol, is prompted by stress. These hormonal changes induce physiological responses in the body, potentially affecting both mental and physical well-being. However, according to the National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom, individuals respond to stress in diverse ways. While a situation might be perceived as stressful by one person, another individual may view it as motivational. The point at which psychological stress becomes problematic is when it disrupts an individual's health and overall well-being.

• Family and relationship stressors

Family stressors refers to any factor or situation that affects one or multiple members of a family or the entire family system at a specific time. It influences the emotional bonds among family members, their mood, well-being, and the overall maintenance of family relationships (Randall and Bondenmann 2013) ^[28]. Family stress may arise when individuals within a family face an overwhelming number of stressors that exceed their capacity to cope. These stressors can result from various events that accumulate over time or a single intense circumstance, whether originating from within the family or external sources.

Manifestations of family stress can include:

- Disagreements
- Unfulfilled commitments
- Health challenges

• Organizational stressors

Organizational stressors, commonly known as workplace stressors encompasses the psychological and physiological stress responses arising from unfavourable aspects of an individual's job and work environment. It arises from the perceived imbalance between job demands and an individual's capacity to cope with or fulfil those demands. Employees across different levels and industries can be affected by organizational stress. The repercussions of organizational stress can manifest in various detrimental outcomes for both employees and the overall company. These consequences may include reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, elevated turnover rates, and adverse effects on physical, occupational, and mental health.

7. Consequences of Occupational Stress

A cause-and-effect relationship underlies every aspect of life, including stress, which leaves its impact on human beings. Prolonged exposure to stressful situations gives rise to significant physical, psychological, and behavioural effects. The ensuing section briefly outlines the effects of stress on women employees.

Table 1: Factors causing Occupational Stress

Socio-economic Stressors	Psychological Stressors	Family and Relationship Stressors	Organizational Stressors
Interference of relatives and neighbours	Pessimistic Attitude	Marital disagreement	Inter role distance
Absence of servant or Domestic help	Perfectionism	Rebellion teens	Role stagnation
Unexpected guests	Low self esteem	Caring for ill family members	Role expectation conflict
Compulsory socialization	Procrastination	Children with special needs	Role erosion
Financial pressures	Temperament/Anger	Anxiety about children’s future	Role overload
Troubles with in-laws	Lack of assertiveness	Husbands’s job insecurity	Role ambiguity
Lack of social support	Unnecessary worries	None to care children in absence	Poor working conditions
	Personal inadequacy	Husband’s unhealthy habit	Rotating shifts
	Self-role distance	Inter generation problems	Inappropriate leadership style
	Mental Harassment	Lack of cooperation from family	Transfers
			Poor working relationships
			Job insecurity
			Workplace culture
		Sexual Harassment	

- **Physical Health-** Medical evidence substantiates a connection between stress and physical health. For example, stress has been directly linked to conditions such as heart disease. Additionally, stress can contribute to adverse effects such as high blood pressure, ulcers, arthritis, headaches, constipation and skin diseases.
- **Psychological Health-** Elevated levels of stress are often accompanied by emotions such as anger, anxiety, depression, nervousness, tension, and boredom. These changes in an employee's behaviour can significantly impact job performance, leading to a decline in self-confidence, lowered self-esteem, difficulties in concentration, and diminished job satisfaction.
- **Behavioural Effects-** Responses to stress can lead to the development of defensive behaviours like denial, illusion and xenophobia. Women employees dealing with stress may immerse themselves in routine tasks, pretending to be occupied. In some instances,

individuals may choose early retirement or due to decreased efficiency, management might initiate their departure. Such situations are likely to have a detrimental impact on employees' overall performance. This situation may result in heightened absenteeism, increased work accidents, and a decline in production. Moreover, the career prospects and promotional opportunities of an employee are likely to be adversely affected.

8. Managing Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is a prevalent phenomenon in the workplace, carrying adverse effects on both individuals and organizations. Hence, it is crucial to implement strategies at both organizational and individual levels. Various methods exist for women to effectively manage occupational stress and promoting enhanced psychological well-being.

Table 2: Technique for managing occupational stress at various levels

At Organizational Level	At Individual Level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Identification of needs ✓ Job Clarification ✓ Distribution of Job Responsibility ✓ Taking timely feedback from employee ✓ Workshops on managing job-related stress ✓ Maintaining Healthy Working Environment ✓ Recreation Hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Prioritize self-care ✓ Seek support ✓ Communicate with your employer ✓ Establish boundaries ✓ Set achievable goals ✓ Seek training and development opportunities ✓ Music Therapy and Socializing ✓ Leading a Balanced Life

At Organizational Level

1. Identification of needs: First of all, mental health tendency should be identified after that factors and challenges that affect the mental health, should be taken into consideration. Mental health may be affected by excessive work at home or due to the excessive workload or gender discrimination at the workplace, etc. The better the problems are identified, the better the problems can be solved. According to a study by Han *et al.* (2021) ^[10] the Penney and Spector’s model posits that organizational stressors, such as perceived organizational injustice, can elicit negative psychological responses in employees. Therefore, it is crucial to identify and manage these factors to prevent mental health problems in employees.

- 2. Job Clarification:** Job clarification helps in minimizing the role conflicts within an organization that arise from inadequate delegation of work and responsibilities. Job clarification involves the meticulous and clear assignment of tasks and responsibilities to employees.
- 3. Distribution of Job Responsibility:** The allocation of job responsibilities should align with the position and capabilities of the employees. This approach ensures satisfaction among employees and enhances their efficiency in the workplace.
- 4. Taking timely Feedback from Employees:** It is essential for the organization to assess the acceptability of the strategies formulated, and implemented, considering both employee perspectives and the overall

benefit to organizational growth. Obtaining timely feedback from employees facilitates a better understanding of the reasons behind any disparities between planned strategies and actual outcomes. And what are the factors that hamper the efficiency and capacity of the employee?

5. **Workshops on managing Job-related Stress:** To mitigate stress levels among employees, the organization should organize workshops focusing on strategies to avoid negative stress, recognizing stress symptoms, coping mechanisms, and understanding how stress can be channeled positively.
7. **Maintaining a Healthy Work Environment:** An organization can maintain a healthy work environment by taking corrective and strict actions against wrongdoings, and unethical behaviour of the senior or employee. The organization should do fair treatment with all by motivating the employees to participate in the activities of the organization, taking into consideration their ideas, and suggestions, and giving them recognition for the same. Establishing better co-operation and coordination among leaders and subordinates, etc.
8. **Recreation hours:** The recreation hour concept was first tried by Google. This free time is given to employees they can do any activity they like such as sleeping, playing, listening to music, etc. By doing this, the efficiency of the employee increases as they feel relaxed while working, and as a result, they are less prone to stress.

At Individual Level

1. **Prioritize self-care:** Taking care of your physical and mental health is essential for managing stress. Make time for regular exercise, engage in stress-reducing activities like meditation or yoga, and prioritize self-care practices like getting enough sleep and eating a healthy diet.
2. **Seek support:** Don't be afraid to reach out for help. Talk to a trusted friend, family member, or therapist about your stress, or consider joining a support group. Having a network of supportive individuals can make a big difference in managing stress.
3. **Communicate with your employer:** If you're feeling stressed at work, it's important to communicate with your employer. Explain how you're feeling and discuss ways to reduce stress in the workplace, such as adjusting your workload, adjusting your hours, or seeking support from HR.
4. **Establish boundaries:** Establishing clear boundaries between work and personal life is crucial for reducing stress. Set aside specific times for work tasks, and make a point to disconnect from work outside of those hours.
5. **Practice mindfulness:** Mindfulness practices, such as meditation and deep breathing, can help to reduce stress and increase focus. Incorporate these practices into your daily routine, and consider seeking out a mindfulness or meditation course to learn more.
6. **Set achievable goals:** Setting achievable goals and priorities can help to reduce stress by giving you a sense of control and direction. Focus on what you can control, and break large tasks down into smaller,

manageable steps.

7. **Seek training and development opportunities:** Consider seeking out training and development opportunities to improve your skills and increase your confidence in the workplace. This can help to reduce stress and increase job satisfaction.
8. **Music Therapy:** Listening to soft music generally calms down the sensory organs of an individual. As a result, the individual feels relaxed and fresh. Music is connected to the emotions of an individual and thus, listening to music when a person is weak generally relaxes them.
9. **Leading a Balanced Life:** The employee needs to maintain a work- life balance to lead a stress-free life or to avoid negative stress as both professional and personal lives are interrelated each other. If a person is facing trouble or difficulties in coping with personal life problems like family demands, quality family time, etc. Then the person will not be able to manage his work properly as he's not focused and vice-versa. Thus, the main aim of any employee should be to balance work and life properly.
10. These are just some of the strategies you can use to overcome work stress in India. Remember, managing stress is an ongoing process, and it's important to be patient with yourself and seek help when you need it. By taking steps to manage your stress and prioritize your well-being, you can reduce stress and achieve greater success in both your personal and professional life (Potdar 2023) ^[26].

9. Initiatives Taken by Government and Organizations To Reduce Working Stress

There are many factors which effect mental health and emotional wellness of working women, like del responsibility of office and home, caring of children, pregnancy and reproductive health related issues which are only faced by women and other related issues, posting at far place from their family, etc. So, if all these things are going well her stress level can be reduced for somehow and she can be able to do her work at office as well as home in relaxed set of minds (Bhatti *et al.* 2023) ^[5]. There are many special provisions under Government of India for benefits of working women. This type of provisions helps in to reduce the various factors which effect the stress level of the working. These are very helpful for the working women at various critical situations and help them to face the many challenges. These are mentioned below.

- **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961:** The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 is a crucial legislation in India that protects the rights of women during pregnancy and childbirth. It is applicable to all businesses, whether in the private or public sector, that have more than ten employees. The Act provides for fully paid maternity leave for a period of up to 26 weeks, which can be availed of before and after childbirth. The leave period can be extended by up to eight weeks in case of complications or illness. A woman is eligible to claim maternity benefits if she has worked for at 80 days in the twelve months before childbirth. The Act was amended in 2017 to make it more beneficial for women employees. The Maternity Benefit Act 2017 increased the duration of paid

maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks, making it easier for women to balance their work and family responsibilities. The Maternity Benefit Act is a significant step towards promoting gender equality in the workplace and ensuring the well-being of women employees. By providing maternity benefits, organizations can support women through their pregnancy and childbirth, which can ultimately lead to a healthier and more productive workforce.

- **Child adoption:** According to the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 in India, female government employees are entitled to child adoption leave for 135 days if they have fewer than two surviving children and the adopted child is under the age of one year. This leave is granted to support the adopted child's initial transition period and to allow the mother to provide necessary care. The Act recognizes the importance of parental caregiving to children and promotes gender equality in the workplace.
- **Equal Remuneration Act, 1973,** prohibits gender discrimination in employment, pay, promotion, and training. This law provides for payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers for the same work of similar nature without any discrimination.
- **Working Women's Forum:** The (WWF) is a women's organization in southern India. It was founded in 1978 by Jaya Arunachalam in Madras (Chennai). The WWF aims to empower poor women in southern India by providing microcredit, a trade union, health care and training. It works with the poor women working in the informal sector, such as street vendors, silkworm growers and silk weavers, handicraft producers, washerwomen and fisherwomen. 7,00,000 plus women have been brought together through WWF through the issue of credit and other services were also added such as that of child care, family planning, and education.
- **Posting at same station:** The Government of India has given detailed instructions to its office to ensure that the husband and wife are assigned to the same station. So that they can live a normal family life and ensure their children's education and welfare.
- **Creche service:** The provision of the creche facilities for female employees is now mandatory in India under the Maternity Benefit Act, 2017. This amendment requires employers with 50 or more employees to provide creche facilities within a prescribed distance from the worksite. The creche should ideally be located within 500 metres of the workplace and be open for at least eight hours a day. The creche facility should comply with minimum building standards and norms and offer age-appropriate curricula. Overall, providing creche facilities at the workplace is a crucial measure that promotes gender equality and allows working mothers to balance their work and family life. It is also beneficial for the children's development and well-being, as they can receive proper care and attention in a safe and nurturing environment.
- **Child care leave:** Women employees who have minor children and have exhausted their earned leave are granted child care leave for a maximum of two years during their entire service to care for upto two children, whether for rearing or for any other reason, such as examination, sickness, etc. Other leave benefits are also provided to women employee, such as leave for miscarriage, leave for illness arising due to pregnancy, delivery, premature birth of child etc.
- In order to ensure social security to the workers including women in the unorganised sector, the Government has enacted the **Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act 2008.**
- **Central/state advisory committee:** A Central Advisory Committee has been set up at the Centre under the Act to advise the Government on providing increasing employment opportunities for women and generally reviewing the steps taken for effective implementation of the Act.
- **Indira Gandhi Matritva Sehyog Yojana (IGMSY):** It is being implemented as Conditional Maternity Benefit for pregnant and lactating women to improve health and nutrition status to better enabling environment by providing cash incentives to pregnant and nursing mothers to partly compensate wage loss both prior to and after delivery.
- **The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013** has been enacted, which covers all women, irrespective of their age or employment status and protect them against sexual harassment at all workplaces both in public and private sector, whether organised or unorganised.
- **Working women hostels:** In India, working women often face challenges in finding safe and affordable housing. To address this issue, the Indian government has launched several schemes to provide hostels for women. These hostels are designed to cater specially to the needs of working women, with facilities, such as 24-hour security, nutritious meals, and comfortable accommodations.
- **Special allowance for women with disabilities:** The special allowance for child care is granted to women with at least a 40% disability who are employed by the Indian government. The amount of the allowance has been increased over time and currently ranges from Rs. 1500 to Rs. 3000 per month, depending on the recommendations of the Seventh Central Pay Commission. It is important to note that the allowance is only granted for the first two surviving children and is not admissible for multiple births during the first child-birth.
- **Age relaxation:** Age relaxation is available for women in various government appointments in India. As per the guidelines of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, women candidates can avail of age relaxation of upto 5 years for general category vacancies and upto 10 years for vacancies reserved for SC/ST candidates. This means that women who have crossed the upper age limit for a particular job can still apply for the position and get age relaxation based on their category. These policies aim to promote gender equality and encourage more women to take up government jobs.
- **Protective provisions for women employees**

➤ **Safety/Health Measures**

- Section 22(2) of the Factories Act, 1948 provides that no woman shall be allowed to clean, lubricate or adjust any part of a prime mover or of any transmission machinery while the prime mover or transmission machinery is in motion.
- Section 27 of the Factories Act, 1948 prohibits employment of women in any part of a factory for pressing cotton in which a cotton opener is at work

➤ **Regarding Night Work**

- Section 66(1)(b) of the Factories Act, 1948 states that no woman shall be required or allowed to work in any factory except between the hours of 6 a.m. and 7 p.m.
- Section 25 of the Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966 stipulates that no woman shall be required or allowed to work in any industrial premise except between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m.
- Section 46(1)(b) of the Mines Act, 1952 prohibits employment of women in any mine above ground except between the hours of 6 a.m. and 7 p.m.

➤ **Prohibition of Sub-terrain Work**

- Section 46(1)(b) of the Mines Act, 1952 prohibits employment of women in any part of a mine which is below ground.

➤ **Separate Latrines & Washing Facilities Provision exists under the following-**

- Section 57 of the Contract Labour Act, 1970.
- Section 42 of the Factories Act.
- Section 43 of the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979.

- **Organizational approach for managing stress:** Stress-related issues cost businesses billions of dollars per year in absenteeism, accidents, and lost productivity. As a result, managing employee stress is an important concern for organizations as well as individuals. For example, Renault, the French automaker, invites consultants to train their 2,100 supervisors to avoid the outcomes of negative stress for themselves and their subordinates. IBM Corporation encourages its worldwide employees to take an online stress assessment that helps them create action plans based on their results. Even organizations such as General Electric Company (GE) that are known for a “winner takes all” mentality are seeing the need to reduce stress. Lately, GE has brought in comedians to lighten up the workplace atmosphere, and those receiving low-performance ratings are no longer called the “bottom 10s” but are now referred to as the “less effective” (Adivel and Matilada 2018)^[1].

10. Suggestions

- **Flexible Work Policies:** Governments can encourage employers to adopt flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting, part-time work, or job-sharing. These options allow women to better balance their professional and personal responsibilities.
- **Childcare Support:** Affordable and accessible childcare facilities can significantly reduce the stress

faced by working mothers. Government subsidies or tax incentives for employers who provide on-site childcare can make a difference.

- **Mental Health Programs:** Investing in mental health awareness campaigns and providing counselling services can help women cope with workplace stress. These programs should address both physiological and psychological stressors.
- **Gender-Sensitive Workplace Policies:** Governments can enforce policies that prevent discrimination, harassment, and unequal treatment. Creating safe and inclusive work environments contributes to stress reduction.
- **Training and Skill Development:** Offering training programs to enhance women’s skills and confidence can empower them to handle work-related challenges effectively.
- **Work-Life Balance Initiatives:** Encouraging employers to promote work-life balance through wellness programs, stress management workshops, and time management training can benefit working women.
- **Support for Self-Employment:** Initiatives that promote women’s entrepreneurship and self-employment can provide an alternative to traditional employment and reduce stress associated with hierarchical workplaces.
- **Night Shift Opportunities:** Amending labour laws to allow women to work night shifts, with appropriate safety measures, can expand employment opportunities and reduce stress related to rigid work hours.
- **Research and Data Collection:** Governments should invest in research to understand the specific stressors faced by women in different sectors. Data-driven policies can address these challenges effectively.

Remember that reducing occupational stress among women requires a collaborative effort involving employers, policymakers, and society as a whole. By implementing these initiatives, we can create a more supportive and equitable work environment for women.

11. Conclusion

Occupational stress is a serious issue that can have negative effects on the well-being of working women. The consequences of prolonged exposure to occupational stress can be severe. It is essential to address the root causes of occupational stress and provide support and resources for women to manage and cope with stressors in the workplace. Women themselves can take proactive steps to manage their stress levels. Overall, it is crucial to recognize the impact of occupational stress on working women’s well-being and take steps to address it. By doing so, we can support and empower women to thrive in their personal and professional lives.

12. References

1. Adivel GS, Matilda BZ. A study on occupational stress among working women. *International Journal of Human Resource Management and Research*. 2018;8:113-120.
2. Anmol P, Kumar A. Problems faced by working employees in BPO sector. *North Asian International*

- Research Journal of Social Science and Humanities. 2017;3(8):1-6.
3. BambooHR. Occupational stress; c2023. Available from: <https://www.bamboohr.com/resources/hr-glossary/occupational-stress>. Accessed 2023.
 4. Bhardwaj N. Women and Work in India: Trends and Analysis; c2022. Available from: <https://www.indiabriefing.com/news/women-and-work-in-india-trends-and-analysis-24758.html/>. Accessed 2022.
 5. Bhatti S, Chayal K, Dagar A. Investing in emotional wellbeing: a key component of working women's health and success. Delhi: International Books & Periodically Supply Service; c2023. p. 275-286.
 6. Devi O. Occupational stress and its management among young working women from nuclear families of Ludhiana city. Ph.D. Dissertation, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India; c2018.
 7. GlobalData. Female Literacy Rate in India (2010 - 2021, %); c2022. Available from: <https://www.globaldata.com/datainsights/macroeconomic/female-literacy-rate-in-india/>. Accessed 2022.
 8. Global Wage Report. Women and work: how India fared in 2022. Available from: https://iwwage.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/IWWAGE_Trends_Report_2023.pdf. Accessed 2022.
 9. Gupta R, Chaudhary R, Vatta L. Working women in India: status, threats and constitutional support. Delhi: International Books & Periodically Supply Service; c2023. p. 153-163.
 10. Han S, Harold C, Oh S, Kim J, Agolli A. A meta-analysis integrating 20 years of workplace incivility research: antecedents, consequences, and boundary conditions. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*. 2021;43:1002.
 11. Hassan MU. Emotional intelligence and subjective well-being: exploration of teachers' burning dilemma. *Problems of Psychology*. 2019;13:101-12.
 12. Karnwal A. Constitutional Provisions for Gender Equality: Must Know Facts. Available from: <http://probono-india.in/blog-detail.php?id=85>. Accessed c2020.
 13. Kumari K. Stress and self-esteem among working women. Ph.D. Dissertation, Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar, India; c2021.
 14. Liu MN, Li N, William AL, Khan H. Association between psychosocial stress and hypertension: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Neurological Research*. 2017;39(6):573-580.
 15. Mantracare. Stress and Gender. Available from: <https://mantracare.org/therapy/stress/stress-and-gender/>. Accessed 2023.
 16. McEwen BS. Protective and damaging effects of stress mediators: central role of the brain. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*. 2006;8(4):367-381.
 17. McEwen B, Bowles N, Gray J. Mechanisms of stress in the brain. *Nature Neuroscience*. 2015;18(10):1353-1363.
 18. McEwen BS, Wingfield JC. The concept of allostasis in biology and biomedicine. *Hormones and Behavior*. 2003;43(1):2-15.
 19. Mehta A. A study of how emotional intelligence reduces occupational stress among teachers. *Abhinav International Monthly Refereed Journal of Research in Management & Technology*. 2013;2:2320.
 20. Michie S. Causes and management of stress at work. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. 2002;59:67-72.
 21. Ministry of Women and Child Development. Measures taken by the Government for gender equality/socio-economic development/empowerment of women; c2015. Available from: <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=133441>. Accessed 2015.
 22. Moreno FA, Tian L, Huebner ES. Occupational stress and employees complete mental health: a cross-cultural empirical study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2020;17(10):3629.
 23. Patel K. Overcoming occupational stress and improving psychological wellbeing of working women. Delhi: International Books & Periodically Supply Service; 2023, 113-124.
 24. Pathak P. Stress analysis among working women. B.Com Project Report, University of Delhi, Delhi, India; c2015.
 25. Piyush. Sex Ratio in India 2023 State-wise, Women and Men; c2022 Report. Available from: <https://www.studyiq.com/articles/sex-ratio-in-india/>. Accessed 2023.
 26. Potdar M. The impact of work stress in India: statistics, case studies, and research reports; c2023. Available from: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/impact-work-stress-India-statistics-case-studies-research-reports>. Accessed 2023.
 27. Prior A, Frenger-Gron M, Larsen KK, Larsen FB, Robinson KM, Nielsen MG, *et al*. The association between perceived stress and mortality with multimorbidity. *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 2016;184(3):199-210.
 28. Randall AK, Bodenmann G. Family stress. In: Gellman MD, Turner JR, editors. *Encyclopedia of Behavioral Medicine*. New York: Springer; c2013. p. 771-773.
 29. Rani BS. Role satisfaction and role stress of working and non-working women. Ph.D. Dissertation, Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad, India; c2006.
 30. Rathore N, Vatta L, Ranawat R. *Women and Diversity*. New Delhi: Satish Serial Publishing House; c2020. p. 156.
 31. Savariau J. Occupational stress. Available from: <https://www.slideshare.net/JenniferSavariauMorr/occupational-stress-70716910>. Accessed 2017.
 32. Selye H. The stress syndrome. *American Journal of Nursing*. 1965;65(3):97-99.
 33. Selye H. Stress without distress. *Bruxelles Medical*. 1974;56(2):205-210.
 34. Shivi M. Challenges faced by working women at workplace, family and society- its major issues, impact and remedial measures. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*. 2015;2249-4642.
 35. Surbhi. Occupational Stress among women working in Service Sector in Ludhiana. Ph.D. Dissertation, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India; c2015.
 36. Tyagi. Occupational stress and mental health of youth

- working at BPOs in Metro Cities. Gujarat Manovigyan Darshan. 2012;8:16-22.
37. World Health Organization. Stress at the workplace; c2016. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Occupational_stress&oldid=1064902993. Accessed 2016.