URBAN WORKING WOMEN ARE FACING PROBLEM IN INDIA-A STUDY

Arnab Chowdhury[1] & Jayanta Mete[2]
Student, Dept of Education,University of Kalyani, kalyani, Nadia,West Bengal India.[1]
&
Professor, Dept of Education, University of Kalyani, kalyani Nadia, West Bengal, India.[2]

ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to understand the problems and issues faced by urban working women in India. The study was confined to the urban working women in white collared jobs in the city of Kolkata, India. A mixed methods approach involving face to face interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaire technique including both close-ended and open-ended questions was chosen for effective elicitation of data from the respondents. Methods triangulation was adapted for establishing validity and reliability of the study. The study was based on primary data collected from Kolkata city to find out the possible solutions for working women which could help them to overcome the problems that they face in the workplace.

The results of the study showed that different age group of working women have different kinds of problems and challenges and different categories as married, single, divorcee, separated, have different issues at stake in the workplace. Some problems are definitely common, like mental and physical stress, stressful life and work place discrimination etc. But some challenges are age or category specific, like prejudiced and stereotyped thinking, safety and security issues, and problem of glass ceiling etc. Some probable solutions for problems plaguing urban working women that could help them to overcome the problems that they face in the workplace are proper safety and security measures by the parent organizations, sensitive and supporting partners at home, and appropriate grievance redressal mechanisms for women in place at the workplace.

Keywords: Women Harrasment, Urban, Working woman, Problems.

Introduction

In the history of human development, women have been as vital in the history making as men have been. In fact higher status for women vis-à-vis employment and work performed by them in a society is a significant indicator of a nation's overall progress. Undoubtedly, without the active participation of women in national activities, the social, economic or political progress of a country will deteriorate and become stagnant. But ironically and tragically, women employees in general, are not taken very seriously by their superiors, colleagues, or society at large. Having a career poses challenges for women due to their family responsibilities. Traditionally Indian women had been home makers but in the recent decades, proper education and better awareness, in addition to the ever increasing cost of living has made them to go out and choose careers. In a patriarchal society like India it is still believed that a man is the primary bread winner of his family not women. Although Indian women have started working outside their homes but still they have a long way to go both culturally, socially and economically, to bring in positive attitudinal changes in the mind-set of people.

Review of Literature

The literature review shows that more focus is on married working women than on unmarried working women (Karl, 2009). It is also seen that focus is more on organized sector rather than unorganized sector of working women (Shalz, 2011). Eggins (1997) advocates for more facilities to women in the workplace, suggesting that "…it is an important part of developmental strategy as well as an act of social justice" The World Bank (1991) estimates that Indian Women make up one-third of the labor force. Singhal (1995)is of the opinion that, "Participation of women in workforce is essential for economic development and population planning."

Somjee (1989) has some very strong critical comments. She has said that "in the history of women's studies, which is not very long, a variety of approaches have been adopted in order to understand women's problems and find solutions to them. such approaches range from how women are perceived in various cultures and historical settings, given their biological functions and what nature 'intended' them to do, to their decline in power and status vis-à-vis men in the complex social evolution, to a widely shared emphasis on the need to make women equal through the economic on the need to make women equal through the economic and legal route which treats them as individuals rather than those having the sole responsibility for looking after the family."

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Educated urban women are presumed to be more aware of the opportunities and challenges of the workplace or educated urban women can better understand their roles and limitations in the workplaces and are perceived to be bold enough to develop their own personalities, with or without encouragement from their families. An assessment of the problems and issues plaguing urban working women is therefore a necessity for better understanding of workplace dynamics related to women. The present study therefore aims at finding out if women face challenges in the workplaces which pose problems for them, and what are those particular challenges that women face working in the various sectors and what credible solutions and coping mechanisms can be offered to help them lessen such problems, so that women can understand their own value and ability to face problems in different ways. The study also aims at finding the problems of different age group working women and different categories of women like single, married, separate/divorcee, widow etc. Understanding the problems in a clear way would assist us in finding adequate answers in reducing the problems.

Research Problems

The study deals with with the following problems and challenges faced by men in the work place:

1. Balancing between paid employment and family care.
2. Work related stress problems faced by working women.
3. Victims of physical harassment and unfair treatment in the workplace.

Objectives of the Study

The study attempts to address the following key research objectives:

1. To gain ideas about the problems and challenges faced by urban working women in the workplace.

2. To identify the key socio-economic pointers contributing to women's status, safety and security.

3. To find out possible solutions that could help them to overcome the problems that they face in the workplace.

Implication of the Study

The study would help us in understanding the present status of women in our society what kind of problems they are going through

1.To find out possible solutions for problems and issues faced by working women.

2.To find out the gaps between the problems faced and probable solutions to the problems faced by working women.

3.The study can yield results that can help us in better understanding the problems and challenges faced by working women.

Limitations of the Study

All scientific inquiries are subjected to few limitations, although these may differ with respect to the magnitude of limitations. The findings of the present study are subject to the following limitations:

1. The study area was confined to one small township. Thus the results of the study are applicable only to similar kind of situation analysis.
2. The study pertains to a certain time period. The result may not be valid for over a longer period of time due to fast changing socio-economic and socio-cultural setting in this study area.
3. Because of limitation of time and other resources involved in research, the present study was restricted to a limited number of samples. The result drawn from this study, therefore may have limited application i.e., it cannot be assumed to provide information, capable of generalization over other regions and could have regional biasness, but surely the broad similarities specific to a particular gender, will provide some insight to the study.
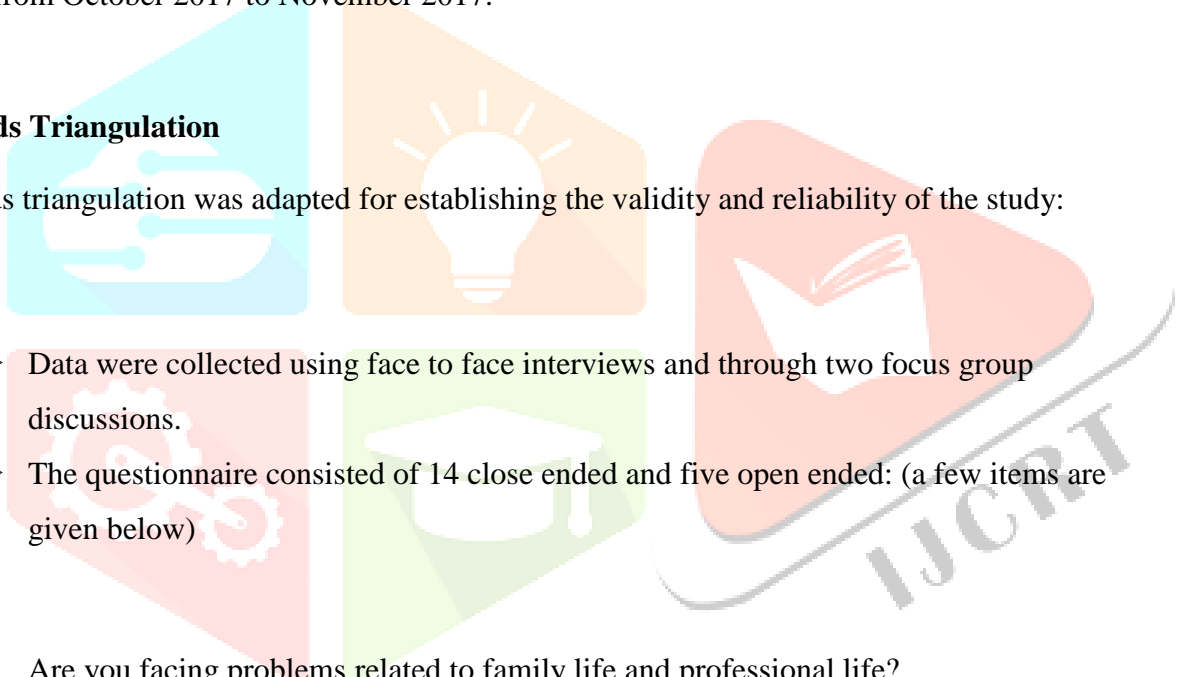
Research Methodology

Nature and Scope of the Study

The study is exploratory in nature and seeks to identify the problems and challenges faced by urban women in different professional sectors like public sector enterprises, banks, schools and colleges, hospitals, commercial organizations etc. Further the study also aims also at finding out the

organizational supports for women employees so that the women employees are able to give their best to their organization and are able to reach their full potential. The present study surveyed only urban women employees in white collared jobs who have been in their jobs for at least six months. The study was conducted within Kolkata city. Kolkata city is a steel plant city; multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural. This diversity makes it more attractive for this research study. The places covered for the study were the local schools, colleges, banks, hospitals, Public Sector enterprises, Engineering services, Commercial organizations etc. Primary data was collected from 200 working women of the organized sector using a mixed-methods approach that included face to face interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and questionnaire. Eighty responses were found to be complete and valid. The data collection period ranged a one month period from October 2017 to November 2017.

Methods Triangulation

Methods triangulation was adapted for establishing the validity and reliability of the study:

➢ Data were collected using face to face interviews and through two focus group discussions.
➢ The questionnaire consisted of 14 close ended and five open ended: (a few items are given below)

- Are you facing problems related to family life and professional life?

- Do you suffer from any health complications like mood swings, depression, concentration problems due to problems at workplace (yes, no or can't say)?

- Do you have any additional comments about your fears, frustration, wants, needs, career, boss, team, workplace, workplace environment etc. please elaborate?

Data collection process

Both qualitative and quantitative aspects have been taken into consideration for the study. The methodology followed was a questionnaire-based survey among the urban working women of the selected localities, in addition to face to face interviews and FGDs. A pilot study among 40 of different working women of Kolkata town was initially conducted to test the validity of the questionnaire. Data were collected using the personal contact approach. Questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 200 working women located in Kolkata city, out of which 90 valid and complete responses were returned. Each of these 90 women was interacted with and interviewed face to face. Some related questions were asked of them and the comments noted down. In addition to face to face interviews, two focus group discussions were conducted with eight women in each group. Different methods were used for collecting data on the working women. The questionnaire consisted of 14 close ended and 5 open ended questions to meet the objectives of the study. The items in the questionnaire included urban working women issues related key parameters like sexual and mental harassment, promotion issues, family care issues, discrimination based on gender, workplace discrimination and prejudices, safety and security issues etc. The statements/items for the questionnaire were formed after consulting relevant literature and some preliminary study conducted in the area. Besides the attitude scale, the survey questionnaire also included a section to capture the general profile of respondents. They were asked about their demographic background including age, education level, marital status, occupation, years of experience, nature of organization etc.

Results and Discussions

The study addresses the following key research objectives:

1. To gain sufficient knowledge about the problems and challenges faced by urban working women in the workplace.

2. To identify the key socio-economic pointers contributing to women's status, safety and security.

3. To study women's involvement in various activities/ organizations for upliftment of

family, community and society that can lead to their overall development.

4. To find out possible solutions that could help them to overcome the problems that they face in the workplace.

The questionnaire consisted of 14 close ended and 5 open ended questions to meet the objectives of the study. The items in the questionnaire included urban working women issues related key parameters like sexual and mental harassment, promotion issues, family care issues, discrimination based on gender, workplace discrimination and prejudices, safety and security issues etc.

The graphical representation of each of the items is given below:

1. How long did it take for you to get promoted in comparison to male colleagues of the same position?

Table 1: Time Taken for Women to get promoted as compared to their male colleagues (in nos.)

	No. of respondent	Percentage (%)
Equal time	60	67
Longer	15	17
Earlier	15	16

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of time taken for women employees getting promoted as compare to their male colleagues
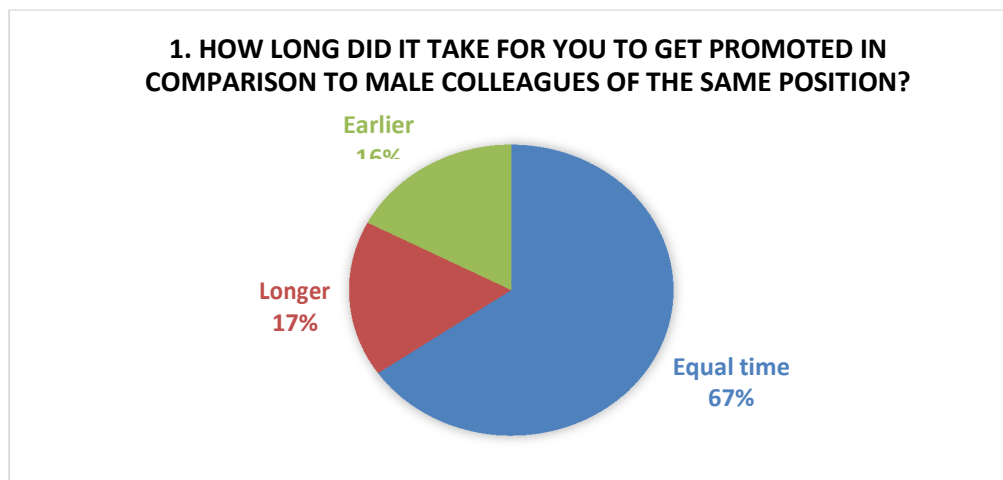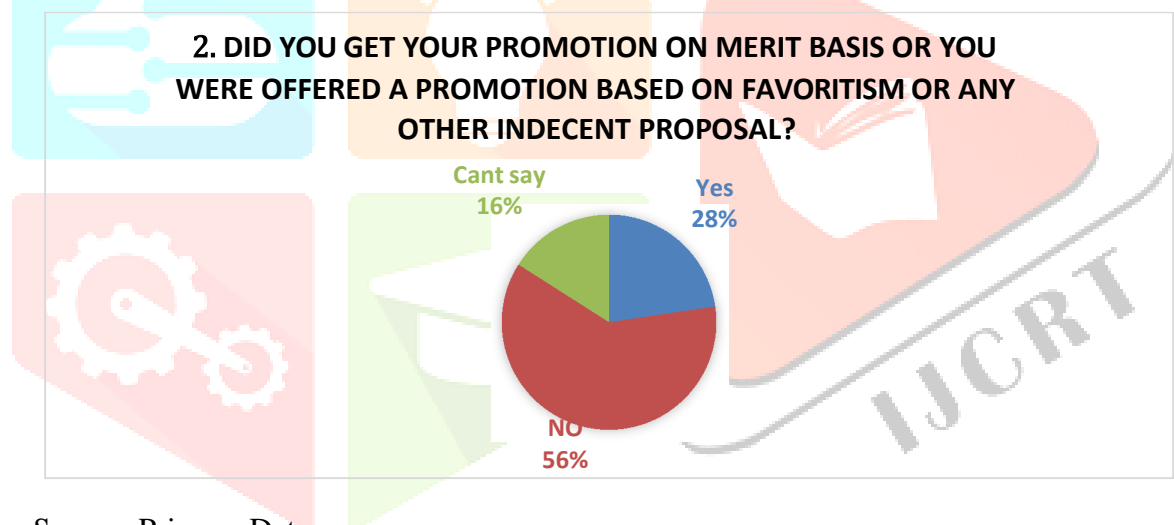

Source: Primary data

Inference: According to the above information 67% of female employees were promoted at the same time irrespective of their gender, 16% women were promoted earlier than their male colleagues and 17% took longer than their male peers. The above data reflects that gender bias related to promotions do not prevail much in the working atmosphere.

2. Did you get your promotion on merit basis or you were offered a promotion based on favoritism or any other indecent proposal?

Table 2: Basis for Women getting promotion on merit (in nos.)

	No. of respondent	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	25	28
No	50	56
Can't say	15	16

Figure 4.2: Percentage distribution of women getting promotion on merit basis/others


Source: Primary Data

Inference: According to the above information 56% felt that their promotion was based on merit and not on the basis of favoritism or any other indecent proposal, 16% were not sure about their answers and 28% agreed that favoritism prevails in workplaces.

3. Do you work as much as your male colleagues or are you required to work less than male?

Table 3: Time spent on women (in nos.)

	No. of respondent	Percentage (%)
Yes	40	44
No	30	33
Can't say	20	23

**Figure 3: Percentage distribution of time spent on work**

Source: Primary Data
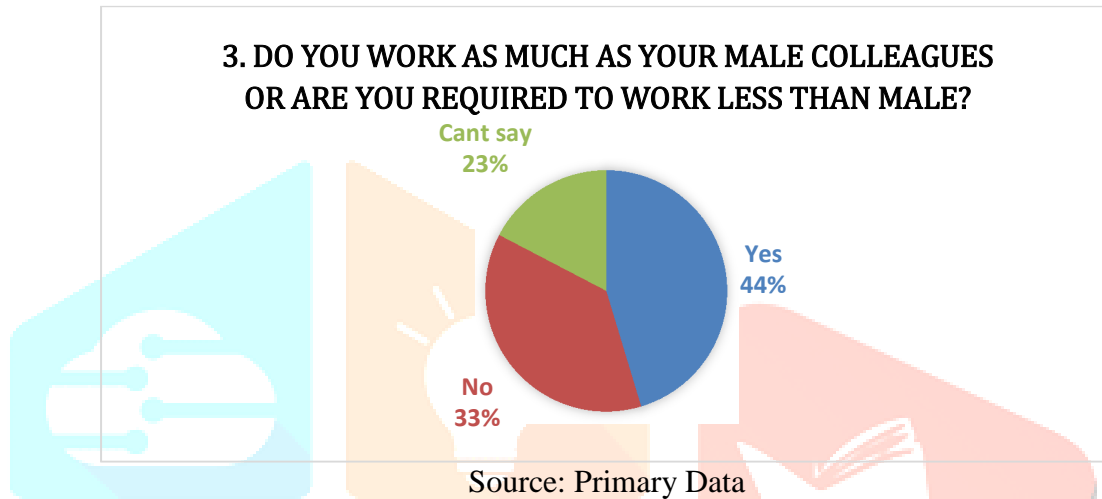
Inference: According to the above information 44% women agreed they were working as much as male colleagues, 23% women were not sure about their answers and 33% women agreed they were not working as much as their male colleagues because sometimes post or position also matter in work process. Accordingly duration of work hour factor also differs for men and women.

4. How is the attitude of your boss towards you?

Table 4: Attitude of boss towards female colleagues as perceived by the women Employees (in nos.)

	No. of respondent	Percentage (%)
Co-operative	35	39
Neutral	50	56
Abusive	5	5

Figure 4: Percentage distribution of attitude of boss towards female colleagues as perceived by the women employees

4. How is the attitude of your boss to-wards you?
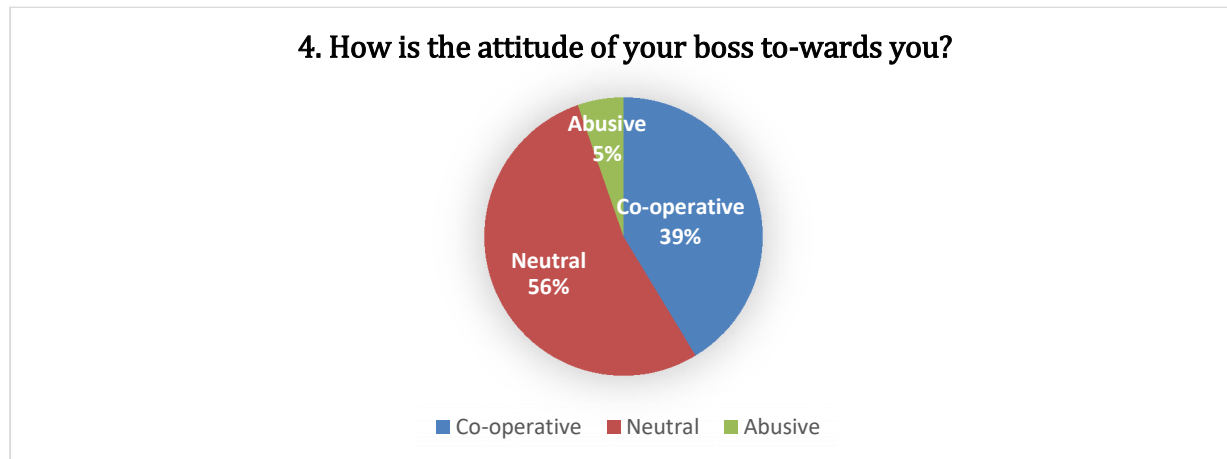
Source: Primary Data

Inference: According to the above information 56% female agreed that their boss attitude towards them were neutral, 39% women said that their boss was co-operative with them and 5% women said their boss attitude towards them were abusive.

5. Do you sometime feel hesitant to work with male colleagues because they may sexual harassment or underestimate you on the basis of gender?

Table 5: Perception of prevalence of sexual harassment or underestimation on the basis of gender (in nos.)

	No. of respondent	Percentage (%)
Yes	50	56
No	40	44

Figure 5 Percentage distribution of perception of prevalence of sexual harassment or underestimation on the basis of gender (in nos.)

5. DO YOU SOMETIME FEEL HESITANT TO WORK WITH MALE COLLEAGUES BECAUSE THEY MAY SEXUALLY HARASS OR UNDERESTIMATE YOU ON THE BASIS OF GENDER?

No 44%

Yes 56%
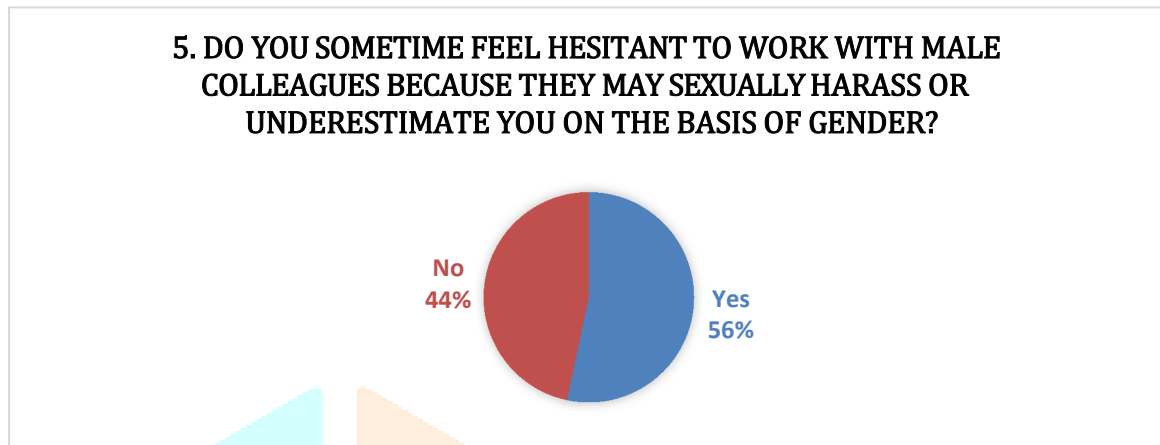
Source: Primary Data

Inference: According to the above information 56% of females agreed that sometimes they felt hesitant to work with male colleagues and 44% said that they were not comfortable with male colleagues. The reason for such high percentage of women not feeling comfortable working with their male colleagues could be their lack of self-confidence, or the inherent distrust for men in our society, reinforced down the years by negative experiences and general awareness.

Key Findings

1. Sexual harassment by male colleagues is a reality. Mental harassment by female colleagues is also a reality.

2. Working women face problems because of their female colleagues (jealousy, rivalry, competition etc.)

3. Colleagues, both men/women draw conclusions about women's character, sometimes without any basis.

4. Financial independence gives women more respect in the society as perceived by the working women.

5. Working women feel they are facing more mental pressure and depression than non-working women.

6. Not much aware about Acts and Policies favouring women in the workplace.

7. Health issues are also an important problem for working women.

8. Working women are forced to leave their small children at home because of their work.

   Lack of proper support system.

9. Life as a single parent very challenging for working women.

Conclusion

Conclusions related to the challenges and problems faced by working women drawn from the analysis of responses:

➢ Professional women feel isolated and burdened by the simultaneous demands of their new aspirations on one side and the traditional way of life on the other.

➢ Women are discriminated against in all walks of life.

➢ Women are subjugated, dominated and exploited both at work places and home.

➢ Women are generally unable to give proper and quality time to households, kids and family.

➢ Working women generally face workplace sexual harassment, mental pressure, and safety issues.

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