

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY URBAN WORKING WOMEN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to understand the problems and issues faced by urban working women in India. The objectives also included identifying the key socio-economic attributes contributing to women's status, safety and security, and to study women's involvement in various activities/ organizations for improving of family, community and society. The study was confined to the urban working women in white collared jobs in the city of Rourkela, 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 Rourkela 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, single parent, separated, have different issues at stake in the workplace. Some problems are definitely common, like mental and physical stress, lack of proper balance between employment and family care, unfair treatment in the workplace, stressful life and work place discrimination etc. But some challenges are age or category specific, like prejudiced and stereotyped thinking, safety and security issues, ego hassles with colleagues, 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, effective child care policies and appropriate grievance redressed mechanisms for women in place at the workplace.

Keywords: Gender Discrimination, Health issues, equality, Problems and Challenges.

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. 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. It is generally perceived that gender bias against working women starts right from the stage of recruitment. Most of the Indian men are not ready to accept that women are capable enough to work side by side with men in all the sectors, other than in a few limited ones like teaching, nursing and in clerical sectors. Their capabilities are generally underestimated as a result of which Indian women have a tendency to opt for less demanding jobs even if they are highly qualified. Women have the responsibilities to effectively manage their multiple roles in domestic as well as professional lives. Men generally do not offer any help in the households work. This makes the life of working women extremely stressful.

Background Information:

While a majority of the women still face discrimination and gender bias, in the last few decades, the number of women successful in politics, technology and business etc. is definitely on the rise. Society has started seeing women in a different perspective. They work as lawyers, nurses, doctors, social workers, teachers, secretaries, managers and officers etc. There is no profession today where women are not employed. However, it is true that working women have to face problems by virtue of their sex. For centuries women have been subjected to exploitation and torture, physically, sexually and mentally. There are innumerable challenge and problems faced by them both at home and workplace. What we generally see today, in addition to various media and journal reports is that in the workplace women generally face mental stress, sexual harassment, discriminatory practices, safety and security issues etc (Martin, 1989). India's patriarchal society thinks of women only as homemakers and sexual objects and is generally subjected to exploitation and torture (Dube, 2001).

Women in the Workplace:

Women in the workforce earning wages or a salary are part of a modern phenomenon, one that developed at the same time as the growth of paid employment for men; yet women have been challenged by inequality in the workforce (N. Andal 2002). A

woman is a social animal. To keep her in captivity, without access to work or finance or interaction with the outside world, is less than fair (Eisenhower, 2002). Economic, social and political empowerment of women is essential for the development of any society. Working women are essential for the development of the society, so empowerment of women is important to the process of upliftment of economic, social, political status of women.

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. During earlier days there were some man-made boundaries for women but now women play vital roles in different sectors. Women today are breaking that boundary and are playing the dual role of balancing domestic life as well as professional life, giving a boost to their societal status in the process. The major problems for working women arise out of the dual responsibilities of the working woman - domestic work as well as office work. Though more and more women are coming out in search of paid employment and their families also need their income, the attitude towards women and their role in the family has not undergone much change. Women continue to be perceived as weak, inferior, and second-class citizens. Even today, looking after the family and children is generally perceived to be the primary responsibility of the man.

Research Problems:

The study evinces the following research problems for the study at hand related to problems and challenges faced by working women in the workplace:

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.
4. Tolerance of abuse, violence, harassment and discrimination.
5. Sexual harassment, mental pressure and safety problems.

Objectives of the Study:

The study attempts to address the following key research objectives:

1. To gain 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.

Research Methodology:

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 Rourkela city. Rourkela 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 100 working women of the organized sector using a mixed-methods approach that included face to face interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and questionnaire. Seventy-five responses were found to be complete and valid the data.

Results and Discussions:

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.

Table 1.1 Perception of prevalence of sexual harassment or underestimation on the basis of gender (in nos.)

	No. Of Respondents	%
Yes	40	47
No	35	53

Percentage distribution of perception of prevalence of sexual harassment or underestimation on the basis of gender,

Inference: According to the above information 53% of females agreed that sometimes they felt hesitant to work with male colleagues and 47% 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. Have you ever faced sexual abuse of any kind in your workplace?

Table 1.2 Experience of sexual abuse at workplace (in nos.)

	No of Respondents	%
Yes	12	16
No	63	84

Inference: According to the above information 84% women said that they had not faced any kind of sexual abuse at their workplace, but a good 16% women agreed to have faced sexual abuse at workplace. If yes, did the office authorities take any strict measures against the accused persons?

Table 1.3 Response of the higher authority towards sexual harassment (in nos.)

	No of Respondents	%
Yes	8	11
No	22	29
Can't Say	45	60

Inference: According to the above information 60% of the females are not aware whether their organization took any action against the accused, signifying lack of transparency or even lack of sensitivity to women's problems in workplaces. Almost 30% women are of the opinion that no strict actions were taken, while only a small 11% felt that sufficient

actions were taken. Do you suffer from any health complications like mood swings, depression, concentration problems due to problems at workplace?

Table 1.4: Women suffering from health related issues due to problems in the Workplace (in nos.)

	No of Respondents	%
Yes	60	80
No	15	20
Can't Say	0	0

Inference: According to the above information 80% women suffer from health

complications, 20% women have not faced any kind of health complications like headache, depression, concentration problems etc. What in your opinion is more convenient when faced with the situation of harassment based on gender discrimination?

Table 1.5: perception of women to behave when faced with the situation of Harassment based on gender discrimination in the workplace (in nos.)

	No of Respondents	%
Suffer in silence	0	0
Quit job	39	52
Fight against Injustice	33	44
Can't Say	3	4

Inference: According to the above information there is an equal division of opinion among working women for either quitting their jobs, or to fight it out, if they face any harassment based on gender discrimination Conclusion and

Recommendations Conclusions:

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

1. 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.
2. Women are discriminated against in all walks of life.
3. Women are subjugated, dominated and exploited both at work places and home.

4. Women are generally unable to give proper and quality time to households, kids and family.
5. Working women generally face workplace sexual harassment, mental pressure, and safety issues.
6. Females are also highly judgmental about other female colleagues and try to put one at any given opportunity.
7. Women face problems leaving kids at home and going to office early in the morning.
8. Child rearing problems are always faced by working women.
9. People make particular perception or draw conclusion about characters of working women.
10. The social system cannot accept the new roles of women who end up feeling misunderstood and distressed.

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