

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN IN TODAY'S INDIA

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to examine the status of working women in India and highlight the Issues and Challenges faced by working women with special emphasis on gender inequality, educational and health status, and victimization. In 21st century the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns. All most all categories of women are working in various sectors under constrained environments. They are facing several problems personally, institutionally, and also in family. This study is purely based on secondary resources. The study reveals that women of India are relatively looked down and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by government. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. The study concludes by an observation that access to education, health benefits, and change in social and family structure are the only enabling factors for empowerment of working women.

Key words: women employees, socio-economic status, work life balance, issues, challenges

I. INTRODUCTION

In the history of India, the role of a woman mostly was restricted to household and domestic responsibilities. As the times are changing, the role of women in the family and society is also changing. Women are working and are contributing to the nation's GDP also now a day. Working women i.e., those who are in paid employment, face problems at the workplace just by virtue of their being women. Social attitude to the role of women lags much behind the law. The attitude which considers women fit for certain jobs and not others, causes prejudice in those who recruit employees. Thus women find employment easily as nurses, doctors, teachers, secretaries or on the assembly line. Even when well qualified women are available, preference is given to a male candidate of equal qualifications. A gender bias creates an obstacle at the recruitment stage itself. When it comes to remuneration, though the law proclaims equality, it is not always practiced. The inbuilt conviction that women are incapable of handling arduous jobs and are less efficient than men influences the payment of unequal salaries and wages for the same job. But in most families her salary is handed over to the father, husband or in-laws. So the basic motive for seeking employment in order to gain economic independence is nullified in many women's case. Problems of gender bias beset women in the industrial sector when technological advancement results in retrenchment of employees. Women workers in India are faced with lot more challenges than their counterparts in the other countries. They are not given first priority in social and economic decisions in her own family. In some cases women women employees are oaid less salary than men [4]. According to United Nations Development Programmer (UNDP) report, women are involved in doing 67% work of world; still they are socially and economically deprived. They are receiving only 10% of the universal income and have 1% part in global assets. This discrimination also persists in their work place in unorganized sector. In informal sector, women workers don't get same wages for same nature of work for same hours done by men. They are exploited at workplace.

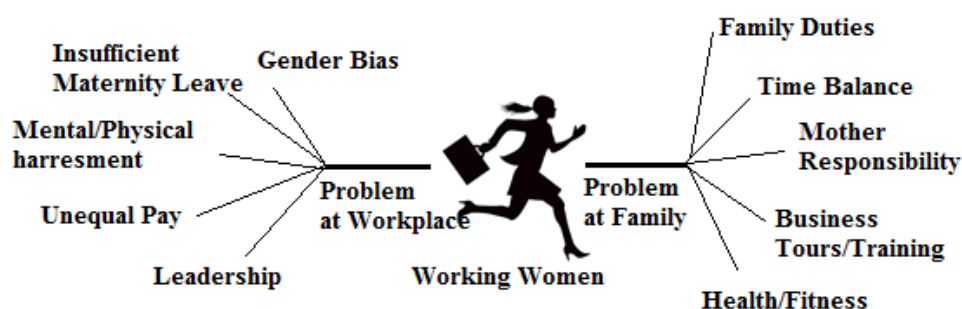


Figure 1. Problems faced by working women [7]

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In Veda's in India, woman was considered as utmost powerful goddess and in family as representative of goddess. But in society in 21st century she was given the least priority. A girl child in the family or society is assumed as a burden in many of the cases. G.Delina and Dr. R. Prabhakara Raya [1] had analyzed that the problems faced by the working women of Pondicherry in terms of work-life balance are quite high their results also indicate that the work-life balance of individuals affect their quality of life. Their study was able to measure the work-life balance of working women finding that married working women find it very hard to balance their work and personal life irrespective of the sector they are into, the age group they belong to, the number of children they have and their spouse's profession. They also analyzed that the IT sector working professionals were found to have more difficulties in balancing work and family. Conflicts in work-life balance of working women affects their health reporting more stress, headaches, muscle tension, weight gain and depressed than their male counterparts. Zameer Ahmad Bhat [2] analyzed Women have proved, time and again, that they are in no way inferior to men in all walks of life. The male dominated society is not yet ready to accept it. Women just need the necessary support and encouragement of the family and the society. Women have been playing a paramount role in the socioeconomic development of any country across the world. it remains true that Indian women still constitute a large body of under-privileged citizens. Even the global picture about the status of women seems no different from that of India. Whether the issue is improving education in developing world, or fighting global climate, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, empowering women is a critical part of the equation. And we require serious, positive, down to earth policy on empowerment of women. Dr. Rinku Rani [3] analyzed that working married women have to face more difficulties in their lives as compared to non-working married women. It concludes that on some aspects working married women cannot contribute significantly for the well-being of their family. Their attention is diverted because of working in two situations. They cannot give proper attention to their marital lives and this cause marital mal adjustment. Working women because of the added responsibilities of job may suffer from more severe causes of maladjustment at home or in the office, while on the other side they have to take care of the children, husband, and in-laws and perform other domestic duties. Mitra [9] analyses the causes and comes to some important conclusions: "Relationship between women and professions could be perceived as one of women in full-fledged professions, medicine, law, academics, etc and another in the semi-professions-like nursing, teaching, clerks etc." Sophia J. Ali [10] "investigated the challenges facing women in career development. She found that most of the women employees were dissatisfied with career development programmers and women were discriminated against in career development opportunities. The study recommended that organizations should strive to ensure that career development programmers were set to enhance career development among-st women employees. Top management should also be committed to the career development of women, and organizations should also introduce affirmative action to urgently address career development of women."

III.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the challenges that are faced by working women in India
2. To study about the issues faced by working women in India
3. To offer useful suggestions or remedies in the light of findings

IV. CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN

Different age group of working women have different kinds of problems and challenges. 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. [5]. Four major challenges faced by working women in India are identified:

Work-life balance: Working women tend to be like a pendulum clock oscillating between work demands and home chores. Between these oscillations, there are social expectations to match up to and the constant anxiety of keeping up with demands of both the worlds, knowing that the slightest error can cost her so much more than her male counterpart. Most women find themselves juggling responsibilities at home and outside, adding to the workload and emotional burden. At the same time, at home, a woman is expected to continue fulfilling her 'natural' duties as a mother and wife, and is put under extra scrutiny when she chooses to work outside the house. The combination of juggling caring commitments for children and family as well as doing paid work and facing physical health problems could increase the risk of experiencing mental distress.

Productivity: Today's world understands productivity, in both professional and personal lives, is integrating responsibilities throughout the various parts of lives. The ability to be able to work outside the household means that all domestic responsibilities, including household chores and rearing children, are not viewed as 'professional' at many workplaces. Workplaces are often unwilling or unable to provide the flexibility women need, which also plays a role in affecting their mental health.

Career over family: India has grown to be more welcoming to women at work. However, if a working woman opts to focus on her career over having children or having a family, she is frowned upon. In India, society is still fighting the patriarchy, and men are still considered the sole "breadwinner of the family". Hence, working women often face the question, "Do you really need to?" This is also one of the reasons for higher attrition rates of women at work.

Finding the 'me-time': The guilt of working all the time – even after regular working hours – has become a norm. For women to be able to find some time to focus on the self has been challenging. The complicated mix of managing family, work, and social life means that there is very little me-time left. Added to that, the norm of long working hours leads to outright unhealthy living conditions like severe lack of sleep and poor food habits. This leads to the negligence of wellbeing, with sacrifices made of the body and mind. Sleep disturbances interfere with dopamine levels, leading to an imbalance associated with bipolar and schizophrenic disorders. Self-care is not being selfish but being empowering towards oneself. It's imperative to be able to have a nurturing relationship with oneself. But in a fast-paced and often chaotic life, women tend to put their own needs on the back burner. So many women constantly put everyone and everything first, allowing their own needs to suffer.

V. ISSUES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN

Women are forerunner of society and play an important role in society, in all fields of life. Without their contribution no society can nurture properly. But still they have been facing severe issues and problems from the family, society, and workplace. Issues faced by working women are studied in this section.

1. Men versus Women Issues

Men and women are always two sides of the same coin. Each one of them has their unique charisma and each one thinks and handles the situation differently. While a man may be a practical, woman could think farfetched. But it is still a shame that irrespective of being equally talented there is always discrimination in the eyes of the beholder. In 21st century's work place, where people of both gender participate in all activities with equal vigour and enthusiasm such vague differentiation is the biggest challenge for a woman. One must understand that a working woman loves concern but not sympathy. She wishes to be recognized with her talent and not her gender. As colleagues men and women need to combine their synergies and work in union. Such a first step will definitely be the giant leap for mankind.

2. Gender Bias:

Gender bias is another challenge that many women experience at their work place. Though we can say that corporate offices are bridging the gender gap slowly, private institutions and government offices are still way far behind. Jobs that require frequent travel, physical exertion etc. are still open for men only as they are considered more eligible than women. Many companies while hiring women employees ask them openly about their marriage and further family planning as they cannot afford the maternity leaves and other flexibility perks. One must understand that women are blessed with the opportunity to bring another soul into this world and this factor must not be a hindrance for their growth and progress. It is a promising change to see that many social welfare organizations like the UN are raising this concern globally and is pledging to remove gender bias in the workplace.

3. Sexual Harassment:

One of the most shameful and heart wrenching challenges that a women face in the working environment is the kinds of sexual abuse she is exposed to. Mostly women fall prey to cunning men who lure them on the pretext of love and sexually harass them. Many men have the notion that a working women are compromising in nature which is the foundation for such vicious deeds. To curtail this challenge, there are social welfare organizations which are discussing women empowerment on multiple forums and have raised voice against harassment of women at the workplace. This technique has forced the law and order to include several severe punishments against these ruthless men. Women who stand up for their self-respect do not fail to voice out their difficulties but naive and fretful women still need to be fed with courage and must be taught to fight back against these vengeful men and show them their place.

4. Maternity leaves:

Growing from a woman to a mother brings about a lot of changes in anyone. She learns to nurture a small being inside her. Elders say that as a woman becomes a mother, care and patience become her inseparable virtues. But no one can perceive the changes and challenges that she is about to face at work place before and after the baby is born. Handling mood swings and morning sicknesses without showing a slightest discomfort, travelling to and fro with her baby belly, avoiding office parties and late night meetings as her health may take a toll, listening to her boss's taunts as she constantly applies check-up leaves, maternity leaves etc. are simply too hard for a pregnant woman. Most of the firms have policies where maternity leaves are granted for the first two babies which is appreciable. But once the lady resumes office post her maternity break, she may be in for surprise as her role would no more be the same. She may have to begin from beginning all over again.

5. Lack of role models

Women have time and again proved their capabilities in the work front but still, the top cream layer is mostly occupied by men. The challenge here is female leaders are many but role models are few. Hence when women try and look for leaders whom they can emulate, they are left behind. While male leaders are many and they train their successor with full vigour a women leader learns everything the hard way. When women look up to men for guidance and mentorship they feel they are disconnected and disoriented as there is a great difference in their objectivity and style of communication. But this challenge is slowly minimizing as more and more women are entering as managers, politicians, presidents, CEO's and in the next few years to come, there will be more leaders who will turn role models for the generations to follow.

6. Power play

For generations, women have succumbed to the power play that men have played. With the dawn of the millennium, women are ready for a tough fight. Many women leaders have stated vehemently that it took them lot of time and plenty of courage to survive the power play politics and reach their current position in their work place. Driven by emotion and instinct, for a women surviving office politics is one of the toughest challenges as it can hurt her inner soul and disturb her mental peace. Rather than falling prey to this false ego, able leaders should encourage healthy comradeship among fellow employees be it man or woman. Also, practicing the art of treating criticism as a feedback mechanism is the best way to tackle this challenge on the work front.

7. Ego clashes

Adam was the first human being in this world and then came eve. Men always try to prove their superiority while at work. An alpha male will feel his ego is crushed when he has to report to a women manager. Howsoever the lady is kind to him; he will try to find faults against her approach or mode of work etc. Women who are at a higher rank face this challenge while interacting with her peers, subordinates and superiors. Out of the three, handling her peers is the toughest job for a woman as she needs to imbibe special communication skills.

8. Restroom gossips

Office without gossip mongers is like cake without icing. Tea breaks, lunch time, rest room meetings are the venue and time when gossips are created and spread across. When a women reaches a respectable position in her work place there are always plenty of speculation about her journey to that position. Some comment on her ability while some comment about her friendly attitude. Such comments sound too harsh and many a times forces the girl to put down her papers. But on a deeper thought, this challenge can be easily handled if you can sit calm and think. All you will need to do is not to reciprocate any hard feelings. Women should know to face and win over this emotional challenge in her stride. In a world where good and bad co-exists, women must grow their emotional quotient and let their work speak for them instead of engaging in verbal battles.

9. Lack of Support from Family

While this is not an issue directly at the workplace, if a woman doesn't have the support of her family, it affects her performance at work. If the man is able to share some of her responsibilities, she would be successful woman [6]. Spouses and parents in law sometimes are unwilling to share responsibilities at home and with respect to childcare. This makes it all the more difficult for women to focus on work.

10. The Infamous Glass Ceiling

Of late this is a term thrown around a lot with respect to women in the work place. The imaginary ceiling up to which a woman can grow in her career is a concept that is taken for granted in the Indian society. There are several reasons why very few women make it to the top rungs of a firm – family commitments and gender discrimination in the workplace are just a couple. When two people are considered for the same role, many a time a male employee is chosen over a woman simply because they don't have as many strings attached like pregnancy and childcare.

11. Unequal Pay

A majority of working women continue to be denied their right to equal pay, under the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 and are underpaid in comparison to their male colleagues [8]. Women in a lot of firms are still paid 20-30% less than their male counterparts, often without valid reasons. Unless women are paid the same as men for the same work, it is very difficult to retain female workforce.

12. Security

Last but not the least the most threatening challenge for women at work place is their security. With more and more cases of physical assault and abuse being reported in dailies and news channels, women need to learn the art of self-defence for their security. Many organizations have employed special security services for helping their women employees to get back home at late nights. Not just working women but every girl should always be prepared to face the wrath of uncivilized men and hence must equip themselves with defence mechanism and face their challenge with oozing self-confidence.

VI. SUGGESTIONS / REMEDIES

Every problem in the universe has a solution if it is addressed properly. But the problems of women are not addresses properly many a times. Women by themselves should put effort to solve their problems. They should educate her children to share responsibilities to make life better and fruitful [6]. Some probable remedies for problems afflicting working women that could help them to overcome the problems that they face in the family, work place, and society are:

1. Proper safety and security measures by parent organizations
2. Sensitive and supportive partners at home
3. Effective child care policies
4. Appropriate grievance redressal mechanisms at workplace
5. Teaching gender equality to male children at home and school and practicing it

VII. CONCLUSION

In the 21st century women have proved their stupendous presence in almost every industry and huge in numbers. They are strong, smart, technically competent and emotionally valiant in comparison to their male counterparts. But despite achieving these great laurels, women still face many obstacles in their workplace. Along with gender bias and sexual harassment there are other issues that are big hurdles for women to grow high up in the career that they have chosen.

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