

## Stress Causing Factors among Women and Strategies to Cope Up

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### Abstract

Stress is a psychological, physical or emotional reaction, resulting from an individual's response to environmental anxiety, conflicts, pressures and similar other stimuli that intimidate a person's ability to manage. When a person face a situation which brain is incapable of handling, it puts the body on alert by secreting required hormones for fight-or-flight situation, such as, rapid heartbeat, increased blood pressure, condensed blood supply to the skin, increased respiration, and additional release of sugar into the system to coup up with the additional energy requirement. The word Stress is derived from the Latin word "Stringer" meaning to draw tight. There are many definitions of stress, such as *tension* or *pressure* to medical explanation for the physiological response of human body to certain stimuli. Stress has different meanings to different people. From a common perspective, stress can be described as feeling tense, anxious or worried, or having the depression. Scientifically these feelings are manifestations of the stress experienced an intriguingly complex programmed response to the perceived threat that can have both positive and negative results (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996). Murtaza & Siddiqui, (2011) describes that causes of stress are diverse but include: Social Stressors (associated with family life, marital relationships, isolation, rejection etc), Occupational Stressors (too much or too little work, over promotion or under promotion, conflicting job demands, incompetent superiors, working accessing hours and interactions between work and family commitments etc), and Environmental Stressors (arising from extremes of temperatures and humidity, inadequate lighting and ventilation, noise etc). In context to this the present research is survey based and intends to study stress causing factors among women in Salem city through a structured questionnaire. Major dimensions of stressors like; sociological factors, psychosomatic factors and family and relationship related factors have been investigated, moreover some **mental and physical stress management strategies to cope up adopted by women** have also been covered under the study.

### Key Words:

Stress, Stressor, *Factors*, Coping strategies, Stress Management.

## Introduction

Social scientists, consider stress as people's interaction with their environment and the resulting emotional disturbances that can sometimes accompany it. In humans stress is defined as anything that disrupts the normal person's physical or mental well-being. Stress can display itself in simple as bad mood while an acute display may be an act of aggression. Stress is caused by a stressor or a stimulus. Stress can be positive or negative. Positive stress is called eustress and negative stress is called distress. But a stressor is not in itself either positive or negative or good or bad, it is how one reacts to it that determines its positivity or negativity. For example, one person may perceive stressor as a motivator, whereas another person may perceive it as a constraint. One individual may perceive it as a challenge, another as a threat (Joshi, 2007). A certain level of stress can act as a motivator. However, if this stress exceeds the resistance level of the individual, it can turn into distress. The perception of stress varies from person to person depending on his/her stress limit. There are many reasons and sources of stress for every person. Also, while some people tend to work better under pressure, there are others who cannot bear it at all. Stress can arise from various factors like social, economic, political, work, family, personal etc. People who work outside and people, who work at home like (Indian Home Maker Women), perceive stress differently because both working in a different environment and the stress level also varies accordingly. While some people are aware of the stress causing factors and have learned some stress management strategies others still feel it difficult to get a remedy. As women plays a dual role in the society, she works in office as well as in home, so she is comparatively more stressed than her male counterpart. Studying the stress among women is the need of hour, in order to know how stressed, our women are and what different methods they adopt in managing the stress.

## Background and Literature Review

Stress is generally defined as an individual's physical and mental reaction to a stressor in the surrounding environment (Antai-Otong, 2001). This stressor can arise from mental or emotional states, as well as physical activities. Apart from its existence, stress condition is relative in nature. That is, extreme stress can be harmful in many terms, mentally and physically whereas moderate stress is seen as normal and it may be resulted in desirable achievements. For this reason, some researchers argue that a certain amount of stress is, in fact, essential for survival; it adds flavor to our life, put challenges and provide opportunities (Zautra, 2003). Stress is an integral part of all aspects of an individual's life. In the workplace, as in other areas, stress can play a positive role by increasing alertness among staff and mobilizing their adaptive capabilities

(Atteya, 2012). Beehr & Newman, (1978) had defined stress as a situation which will force a person to deviate from normal functioning due to the change (i.e. disrupt or enhance) in his/her psychological and/or physiological condition, such that the person is forced to deviate from normal functioning.

Williams & Huber, (1986) define stress as “a psychological and physical reaction to prolonged internal and/or environmental conditions in which individual's adaptive capabilities are overextended”. They argue that stress is an adaptive response to a conscious or unconscious threat. They point out that stress is a result of a “perceived” threat, and is not necessarily related to actual environmental conditions. The amount of stress that is produced by a given situation depends upon one's perception of the situation, not the situation itself. In other words, stress is a relativistic phenomenon. It is thus particularly important for individuals to identify stressors that they face at work. Several demographic factors also influence the behavior of people at work. The relevance of workplace stress to well-being has been recognized, but little attention has been given to the incidence of this problem (Law *et al.*, 1995).

Chiang, et al. (2010) investigated the relationships among job stressors, coping resources, and job stress. Data were collected from 255 food service employees in the hotel and catering industry. Hierarchical regression showed main significant effects of job demands and job control and three-way (job demands  $\times$  job control  $\times$  work-life balance practices) interactions on job stress. Other results further demonstrated that high job demands coupled with low job control and the availability of work-life balance practices resulted in a higher level of stress. Fawzi, (2004) investigated the effect of job-related stress on job performance among hospital nurses, and the effect of social support from coworkers on the stress-performance relationship. She found out that perceived social support from coworkers enhanced the level of reported job performance and decreased the level of reported job stress. Selye, (1983) argues that stress has a positive side called eustress that is less well-known and less frequently used in colloquial language and negative called distress. Eustress or “good stress” refers to a psychological response to a stressor that is interpreted as having positive implications for well-being. Distress and eustress represent distinct constructs and are not at opposite ends of a continuum (i.e., the lack of distress does not indicate the presence of eustress) (Quick, et al., 1997).

Bhagat, (1983) has accounted that work progress can seriously be harmed due to external stressors. There are many features of work life that can become exterior stressors. These include authority as used by managers, boredom, issues of structure, no growth situations,

disproportionate responsibilities, vague demands, value clashes, and impracticable workloads. A person's personal life (e.g., family, friends, health, and financial situations) can also cause stressors to negatively impact on job performance. Moreover, Wood & Fields, (2007) advise that building up a good connection between the leader and the team in jointly setting up strategies enables an organization to lessen stress while increasing job satisfaction.

Home-work interface can be known as the overlap between work and home; the two way relationship involves the source of stress at work affecting home life and vice versa affects of seafaring on home life, demands from work at home, no support from home, absent of stability in home life. It asks about whether home problems are brought to work and work has a negative impact on home life (Alexandros-Stamatios, et al., 2003). Bakker & Demerouti, (2007) note that job characteristics, such as decision latitude, an important variable in Karasek's, (1979; 1998) demand-control model of job strain, satisfy the need for autonomy, one of the three basic human needs according to Self-Determination Theory (Gagne & Deci, 2005). The other two fundamental needs – for competence and relatedness – can similarly be satisfied by resources such as constructive feedback on performance, and social support, which “agrees with Hackman & Oldham, (1980) job characteristics theory that emphasizes the motivational potential of job resources at the task level, including autonomy, feedback, and task significance” (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Hosie, et al., (2007) found self-rated affective well-being and intrinsic job satisfaction predicted managers' performance across a range of dimensions. Kalleberg, et al., (2009) found job autonomy and participation in decision making reduced stress in a sample of Norwegian workers. when employees are provided with genuinely autonomous choice they experience “improved motivation, perseverance, performance, and production” (Patall et al., 2008). A recent meta-analysis of 41 studies showed clearly that “when individuals are allowed to affirm their sense of autonomy through choice they experience enhanced motivation, persistence, performance, and production” (Patall, et al., 2008), although this effect may be stronger in Western rather than Asian cultures (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). Thus, employers, in the West at least, who provide their staff with genuine choices regarding their work will benefit, while at the same time improving employees' well-being and eustress.

Our family environment is entangled with stress and strains where homemakers are directly affected by the same. Problem further intensifies in case of working women as they have to cope up with all pressures at work as well as at home. Pearlin & Schooler, (1978) reported that the concept

of stressors not only refers to major life events but also encompasses ongoing minor events like electricity failure, maid not turned up, unexpected guests and child's misbehavior. Stress is not uncontrollable. Without proper understanding of the different stressors that cause stress, the situation cannot be well managed. In India research work on family stress management had been low priority because of lack of awareness of importance of stress in our family life. Kapur, (1974) indicated that women who choose to combine marriage with career face almost a situation of which is not normal and they hardly know how to apportion time and resources between these two major responsibilities. This makes them experience great conflict, tension and strain. Job taken by women created more conflicting situations for them due to dual role played and inability to manage both sides. Similarly, Holahan & Gilbert, (1979) also reported that women who assumed home roles (e.g. wife, mother and a home maker) and non home roles (e.g. employee) frequently experienced divergence between competing role demands. Conflicts were considered likely when women perceived their home and career roles as highly desirable but mutually exclusive. Gutek, et al., (1981) found that the inter-role conflict is likely to increase as the demands of either the work role or family role increases. Similarly, inter-role conflict can increase as one's obligations to the family expand through marriage and the arrival of children. However, Barnett & Baruch, (1985) found that role conflict and levels of overload were significantly associated with occupying the role of mother but were not significantly associated with occupying the role of paid worker or wife. In opinion of Frone, (1992) combination of career and family roles are often associated with conflict, overload and stress. Alqahtani, (2012) further concludes that complete prevention of stress is neither possible nor desirable since life is lifeless without stress. The reason is clearly that stress is an important stimulus of human growth and creativity. When managed well, stressors can an opportunities for people to be fully aware of their own shortcomings and to change for improvement.

### **Objectives**

To examine various factors contributing to stress among women and to identify various stress management strategies adopted by them.

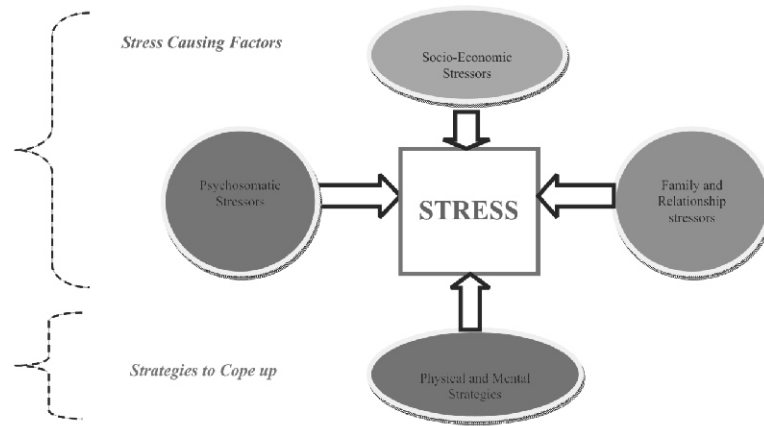
### **Methodology**

The present study was conducted in Salem city of Tamilnadu in January-2014. The study used Structured Questionnaire to get the response on diverse variables. The sample size consists of 100 respondents both working and nonworking homemakers who were chosen on the basis of Convenience Sampling Technique. The study used both primary and secondary sources of information. Rank Analysis and Mean Scores were used for testing and interpretation of data.

**Conceptual Model**

The research proposes a conceptual framework (see fig. 1) based on this a questionnaire was formulated, major stress causing factors observed are; Socio-Economic Factors (peer interference, absence of servant in home, unexpected guests, socialization, financial pressure, trouble with in-laws and lack of social support), Psychosomatic Stressors (low self-esteem, procrastination, anger, lack of insolence, unnecessary worries and distrustful attitude) and Family and

Relationship Stressors (uprising teens, marital disagreement, caring for ill family members, husbands job security, none to care children, inter generation problems and anxiety about children's future). Various Stress Management Strategies like; exercise, yoga, meditation, social support, psychiatric therapy, entertainment, fun, balanced diet, body massage, time management, picnics, outing with family etc. to cope up are also followed by women to relieve themselves from stress.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Model (Developed by Author)**

**Results and Discussions**

**(i) Profile of the Respondents**

Majority of the non-working women (47%) were in the age group of 30-45 years whereas majorities (54%) of the working women were in the age group of 30-50 years. Maximum number of women (59%) was educated up to graduation level. Maximum number of families (76%) was medium size with 3-5 members. The average family income was higher in the working categories of respondents than the non-working categories. Maximum number of women (67%) was having the day length between 16-18 hours. Most of the women (56%) were getting assistance from servant for doing household work especially working women. Most of the working women (94%) have full time jobs, which needed mental work. Working hours varied between 7-8

hours for most of the women.

**(ii) Socio-Economic Stressors**

Table 1 reveals the Rank analysis and Mean of sociological factors, rated on five point likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, affecting stress among women. Financial pressure felt by women is ranked 1<sup>st</sup> and has attained the highest mean (M=4.8) in the group, followed by troubles with in laws (rank 2<sup>nd</sup> and M=4.6), compulsory socialization (rank 3<sup>rd</sup> and M=4.2), peer interference (rank 4<sup>th</sup> and M=4.0), unexpected guests (rank 5<sup>th</sup> and M=3.9). the lowest rank and mean obviously was attained by lack of socialization factor (rank 7<sup>th</sup> and M=3.4). Overall it is observed that all the items were rated on the positive side (Grand Mean=4.1) of the scale contributing satisfactorily to the socio-economic stressors.

**Table 1 Sociological Stressors**

Factors	N= 100	
	Mean	Ranks
Peer interference	4.0	4
Absence of servant or domestic help in home	3.8	6
Unexpected guests	3.9	5
Compulsory socialization	4.2	3
Financial pressure	4.8	1
Troubles with in-laws	4.6	2
Lack of social support	3.4	7

Source: Primary Data, Grand Mean: 4.1



### (iii) Psychosomatic Stressors

Under psychosomatic stressors presented in table 2 low self-esteem has attained the highest rank and highest mean (rank 1<sup>st</sup> and M=4.8) in the group, followed by distrustful attitude (rank 2<sup>nd</sup> and M=4.6), temperament (rank 3<sup>rd</sup> and M=4.6),

procrastination (rank 4<sup>th</sup> and M=4.1), unnecessary worries (rank 5<sup>th</sup> and M=3.9), while as the carefulness was rated least (rank 7<sup>th</sup> and M=3.0) in the group. It is further observed that all the items were rated on the positive side (Grand Mean=4.0) of the scale contributing satisfactorily to the psychosomatic stressors.

**Table 2 Psychosomatic Stressors**

Factors	N= 100	
	Mean	Ranks
Distrustful Attitude	4.6	2
Carefulness	3.0	7
Low self esteem	4.8	1
Procrastination	4.1	4
Temperament / anger	4.5	3
Lack of insolence	3.2	6
Unnecessary worries	3.9	5

Source: Primary Data, Grand Mean: 4.0

### (iv) Family and Relationship Stressors

Family and relationship stressors presented in table 3 play an important role in stressing women. Among them anxiety about future of the children is most concern of the group and is thus rated as 1<sup>st</sup> with a highest mean (M=4.9), followed by husband's job insecurity (rank 2<sup>nd</sup> and M=4.7), uprising teens (rank 3<sup>rd</sup> and M=4.6), caring for ill family members (rank 4<sup>th</sup>

and M=4.3), children with special needs (rank 5<sup>th</sup> and M=4.1), marital disagreement (rank 6<sup>th</sup> and M=3.9), while as the lowest rank is attained by husbands unhealthy habits (rank 9<sup>th</sup> and M=2.8). The overall scores correspond to the positive side of the scale indicating a healthy contribution (Grand Mean=4.0) of various factors under family and relationship stressors.

**Table 3 Family and Relationship Stressors**

Factors	N= 100	
	Mean	Ranks
Marital disagreement	3.9	6
Uprising teens	4.6	3
Caring for ill family members	4.3	4
Children with special needs	4.1	5
Anxiety about future of children	4.9	1
Husband's job insecurity	4.7	2
None to care children in absence	3.4	8
Husband's unhealthy habit	2.8	9
Inter generation problems	3.8	7

Source: Primary Data, Grand Mean: 4.0

### (v) Mental and Physical Stress Management Strategies Adopted

Women under stress try to cope up and adopt some strategies for relieving themselves from stress and worries. Table 4 thus presents some of the main strategies commonly adopted by women. Among them meditation strategy is the most preferred on with 1<sup>st</sup> rank and highest mean (M=4.8), followed by balanced diet (rank 2<sup>nd</sup> and M=4.5), exercise, jogging etc. (rank 3<sup>rd</sup> and M=4.5), entertainment (rank 4<sup>th</sup> and M=4.4), time management (rank 5<sup>th</sup> and M=4.3), picnics and

outing with family (rank 6<sup>th</sup> and M=4.3), psychiatric therapy (rank 7<sup>th</sup> and M=4.1), while as the lowest ranked item was sleeping pills and tranquilizers (rank 11<sup>th</sup> and M=2.2) in the group, indicating that women are aware of harmful effects of using drugs to overcome stress. Effectiveness of these techniques is also reported by many research works like exercise and relaxation, music, balanced diet (Nelson and Nelson, 1981; King and Parham, 1981) are different physical stress management strategies which are effectively used by the women.

**Table 4 Mental and Physical Stress Management Strategies**

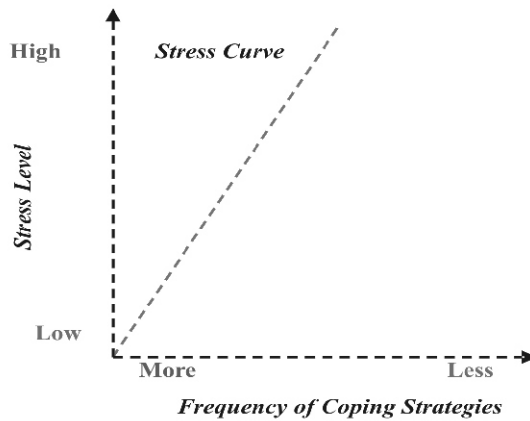
Strategies	N= 100	
	Mean	Ranks
Meditation	4.8	1
Breathing exercises and yoga	4.0	8
Exercises, jogging and walking	4.5	3
Social support	3.9	9
Psychiatric therapy	4.1	7
Entertainment and fun	4.4	4
Balanced diet	4.7	2
Body massage	3.7	10
Time Management	4.3	5
Picnics and outings with family	4.2	6
Sleeping pills and tranquilizers	2.2	11

Source: Primary Data, Gran Mean: 4.0

**Stress Curve**

Based on the observations and findings of the present study, the research indicated that stress cannot be totally ignored, as everybody recognize some stress, but can be managed upto some extent. The stress can be of high or low level and it is upto the individual to manage it. The study further reveals that women who use stress coping strategies like;

meditation, exercise, entertainment and fun, yoga, balanced diet etc. can manage stress very well and feel much relieved. The stress curve in fig. 2 tends towards high level while coping strategies tend from more to less. So this clearly indicates that stress can be better managed by diverting oneself towards some extracurricular activities, which are commonly called stress management techniques.



**Figure 2 Developed by Author**

**Suggestions And Conclusion**

Economic conditions of inflation, desire to maintain high standard of living, or develop “one’s identity” are contributing to the economic push of women into the work force. Thus, financial burden is stated as main stressors among women. But as women increasingly gain occupational mobility, they are not only exposed to the same physical risk of work environment as men but also exposed to the pressures created by multiple role demands and conflicting expectations. By fulfilling their economic needs, employment has no doubt made women independent with an

identifiable social status but it has also made them to juggle into two main domains of life- work and family. They have stepped into work place but the role responsibilities of women still remain the same. Multi-tasking is the exhortation these days for women. An individual requires special skillfulness to perform multiple tasks simultaneously. One way to minimize stress while multi-tasking is to plan, prioritize, and perform. Males should also be accountable in supporting, helping and sharing their work, at least when they are at home. It is also important to broaden the horizons of one’s mind right from one’s youth so that one can overcome the possessiveness excessive

attachment, too many & choosy expectations from family members, which are usually responsible for disagreement & resentment in today's families. One should be flexible about this point that dependence to some extent is many times usual and hence should not be taken as sympathy. This in turn involves efforts to acquire physical, instinctual, emotional & intellectual well being.

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