

## **STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE STRESS OF WORKING WOMEN**

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### **Abstract:**

Women have been working on the field and performed outstandingly despite having psychological, physical and responsibility differences with men. Their efforts have been so tremendous technically or administratively while having to balance between job and families' responsibilities. This has definitely lead to them to encounter many challenges and difficulties in forms of stress, pressure and exhaustion to adapt and maintain stability. This is called "Occupational Stress". Therefore, in this article, we will try to improve understanding of occupational stress, types of stress among working women, how work can cause stress, factors involved, impacts of work stress and offer solutions towards the problems.

**Keywords:** *Stresses - Occupational Stresses - Working women - Overcoming Strategies*

### **ملخص**

اقتحمت المرأة مجال العمل و برعت فيه رغم الفروق الموجودة بينها وبين الرجل من حيث تباين المسؤوليات و الفروق النفسية والجسدية بينهما، فقد عملت المرأة في مختلف المصالح الفنية والإدارية بجهد كبير، محاولة أثناء أدائها لمهامها إيجاد نوع من التوازن بين المسؤوليات العائلية والمهنية فتمثل لها ذلك تحديا كبيرا داخل وخارج العمل مما صعب عليها التأقلم وولّد لها حالة من عدم الاستقرار تمثل في شكل توترو ضغوط متراكمة نتيجة عدم التكيف مع التوترات والإرهاك وهذا ما يعبر عنه بالضغوط المهنية . لذا سنحاول خلال هذا المقال إبراز مفهوم وأنواع الضغوط لدى المرأة العاملة ودور العمل في إحداث مع التطرق لمصادره والآثار الناجمة عنه وأخيرا تقديم رؤية حول استراتيجيات مواجهتها.  
الكلمات المفتاحية: الضغوط- الضغوط المهنية – المرأة العاملة - استراتيجيات المواجهة

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## **1. Introduction:**

Changes that occur in modern society contribute profoundly in the modification of our social structure, which have prevailed and altered the role of women together with their social position. Women have gained important roles within the society as much as men due to their significant participation in the realm of profession that serves not only in raising their economic level and empowering their self-esteem, but also in promoting a country's development. In the midst of this phenomenon, women are facing challenges and huge responsibilities of carrying out double-job; home and work, which makes it hard for them to adapt in these two situations and possibly lead to psychological stress.

## **2. Definition of Stress:**

### **2.1 Occupational Stress in working women:**

Initially, it is important to understand the definition of occupational stress, and to start with; it is a result of the imbalance between two job requirements and resources available for them to deliver in both. (Rimhe, 2013, p. 65). It is a collection of stimulus coming from working environment which is shown in people's responses and behavior at work, or in their life psychologically and physically, or in their working performance, all as a result of the interaction between individuals and stressful working environment.

Another definition is the one suggested by Yusuf (2004) stating that "It's the challenging events that require officers and workers to adapt physiologically or mentally behavioral." Therefore it's considered a response to circumstances in the working environment (p. 17). Hence, occupational stress is the reaction to a stimulus in the working environment which stimulates conditioned imbalance among workers psychologically and physically or affect their work performance within the stressful workplace.

### **2.2 Reasons and impacts of stress on working women:**

Stress is already developed inside the woman herself and it is called 'Internal Stress', or it could come from external factors such as work, relationship with friends, disagreements with friends or life partner, divorce, death of loved one and experiencing sudden or shocking situation. All these are called 'External Stress'. Generally, whether the stress is internal, which results from emotional conditions, retention of psychological problems and speaking-up problem, or external, which is actually life events, it is a reaction to environmental changes.

Working woman is often exposed to continuous stresses from her daily life whether it is from family, social or material issues. She might be able to regain the balance immediately by putting an end to the stressful situations or by being strong and patient. The strength needed to endure stress is different from a woman to another, depending on their characters and qualities, and this is aligned with the strength of their biological and physical components.

Scholars and researchers are concerned about occupational stress factors that many working women suffer from in various sectors. Related studies discovered that stress mainly developed out of individual traits, certain life circumstances and human relationships, as well as management system of the their workplaces. Studies also found that women who work in health and education sectors are the most affected with stress, which confirm that the nature of jobs they are practicing has its effects on them.

**2.3 The unavoidable stresses for a working woman are caused by her conflicts with the working environment and with her friends, and these result from many factors, including the following:**

a. **The nature of occupation.** this includes variables such as work circumstances and workload, as established by (Frasen and Kalan) who say that work as a stressful factor would either has flexible, or qualitative nature.

b. **The role of Working Woman.** This associates with the woman herself, who does the work, and her role in the work organization. This factor becomes clear in some condition when the role or the intended goals lack clarity and precision.

c. **The Relationships at work.** There are a few types of relationship, for example the woman's relationship with their bosses and colleagues. According to research in this area, the official relationships among a group of workers are the key factor in the compatibility among individuals and groups.

d. **Work Development.** This factor comprises of two basic issues; the absence of job security and the contradiction of the woman's job with her reality and what is she supposed to be. This is illustrated in the rigidity of organization structure and its regulative climate, which also caused by lack of participation in decision making, no sense of affiliation, weak consultancy and communication.

e. **The woman's personality issues.** These include psychologically or economically or socially or family-related problems which affect the woman's performance and could cause her tension during work.

f. **The organizational aspect.** It is shown in absence, decline of productivity, alienation from colleagues, functional dissatisfaction and decrease in commitment. All these turmoil will affect the woman's domestic and work life to a certain degree. (Hamid Abdul Salam Zahran, no date, p. 102)

Moreover, there are also other factors contributing to occupational stress such as being too workaholic, unreasonable return, exerted effort and building up commitments of work and family (Stranks, 2003, p. 200), as well as lacking of essential skills and bad interpersonal relationship in work.

#### **2.4 Stresses related to the nature of work:**

Stresses exposed to working women come from changes in different situations for example economic, politic, culture and technology, thus it is impossible to ignore the external environment. It is probably the difficulties of the job that cause the instability among working women and this could also be because of insufficient skills to perform, weak time management and task mishandling due to lack of awareness in importance of time management, which result in increasing workloads that cause enormous stresses to women workers afterwards (An-Naas, 2003, p.. )

The ambiguity of a working woman's role, her inability to understand her job requirements, and her incapability to carry it out are due to the lack of professional development and experience, in addition to the performance of a lot of tasks which require a lot of speed and accuracy. (Abdul Baqi, 2001, p. 286-287)

#### **2.5 Stresses resulting from the work situations:**

Work situations affect the workers greatly no matter where they work, especially women, considering the physiological differences between them and men. Variables such as degree of heat, humidity and ventilation could also affect the women workers' performance directly in a way or another, because it could create a condition where adjustment and adaptability to the work mode are hard and thus reflected negatively to performance quality.

The working woman would come into contact with her colleagues and she could be affected in the short or the long run. Despite causes mentioned earlier, all the obstacles and difficulties working women are facing, they could be successful in their field by constantly striving harder than men, especially when they also have home commitment. Women always try to exceed expectations despite the stresses they are under, because they turn stresses into motivation that helps them in work (Franck, Labelle, 2001, p. 15)

Being under moderate pressure during work could be a challenge that would promote motivation and encouragement for women to work harder, and so here it becomes a positive healthy factor that helps women workers to be more creative and responsive to the challenges and keeps them performing to the top. Excessive and continuous stress could drop the level of performance, whereas high pressure could create overstrain and tense condition to workers, and perhaps causes diseases, psychologically and physically. (Ayasirah and Bani Ahmad, 2007, p. 129)

As for lower stress level, it lowers the performance by causing boredom and apathy in delivering tasks, which could come from work dissatisfaction among the workers. The level of impact of stress on women workers is different according to individual differences in personal structures. However, what is agreed upon is that working women are capable of restoring themselves psychologically and professionally by handling the stressful events, depending on their ability to handle and tolerate the stress, as well as their characters and qualities, which would result in smooth stress management, almost like it has no effect on them. (Dhiaf, 2014)

Hence the levels of stress working women are under could be a positive factor that brings passion, motivation and possibly challenge for better performance.

### **3. Impacts of Psychological Stress on Working Women:**

The impacts could be categorized as follows;

#### **3.1 Psychological Aspect:**

Some scholars affirm that a woman under stress suffers from lack of rest which causes emotional instability, sleeping disorder and self-ignorance which leads to frequent fighting, arguing or blaming others whether at home or workplace. In addition to her guilty feeling that leads to isolation and psychological depression.

#### **3.2 Physical Aspect:**

Continuous stress in women could outdo them and their abilities by causing abnormal chemical changes in their bodies, because the body need to be equipped for the situation or else it would produce excessive adrenaline into the blood thus causes hyperactivity and increase of non-stop body reaction which will result in blood system instability.

In addition, the cholesterol level will increase due to the increase of thyroid gland secretion that could lead to solidification of blood vessels and heart attack if happens repeatedly. Not to mention the possibility of digestive system disorders that come from ulcer, colon inflammation and other diseases, as well as respiratory system disorders and skin inflammations due to change of blood circulation. Therefore we found that woman suffers from lower back pain, headache, difficulty to wake up in the morning and loss of appetite. (Dhiaf, 2014).

#### **3.3 Behavioral Aspect:**

Stress affects behavior in several ways such as causing tendency to have traumas, addiction, frequent depressant consumption, emotional breakdown, overreacting and aggressive behavior.

#### **3.4 Mental Aspect:**

It could appear in different level of symptoms, for example: Inability to make right decision, loss of focus, short term attention, increase sensitivity towards criticism, occupational barriers, over-fatigue, blank, memory disorders, difficulties in following conversation and sensitive to loud voice.

### **3.5 Disciplinary Aspect:**

This is reflected in absenteeism, decline of productivity, alienation from colleagues, occupational dissatisfaction and deflation of commitment. (Khudar Abbas Barun: 1999, p. 66)

## **4. Stress Management Strategies for Working Women**

In order to prevent and control the impacts of stress on women in their daily life, below are mechanisms to manage psychological stress;

### **4.1 Exercise:**

Exercising is considered one of the most significant ways to minimize the risks of high blood pressure, reduce muscle pains, back pains, anxiety and depression, whether it is fast or slow, if done continuously in thirty minutes, it could stabilize the heartbeat and steady the breathing. Exercise could facilitate Androgen Hormone to be released into the brain, while it has the same effect as Opium, to relief pain and create a good sensation. It's proven that fitter the individual; the stronger she is to fight stress. (Dhiyf, 2014)

### **4.2 Relaxation:**

This aspect is associated with the effect of psychological stress on muscles where it cause muscle tension in certain conditions such as jittering and constriction of breath, and therefore increasing tense on muscles which is a sign of anxiety. Psychological stability can be regained and improved if muscle tension is reduced or eliminated. The following are some relaxation techniques for working women according to Dale Carnegie:

- Always work while you are in comfortable conditions, remember that if muscle tension continues, it could cause neck and shoulder pain.
- Monitor yourself four to five times a day, and know when you cannot function or having tension.
- At the end of work, evaluate yourself by answering these questions:
- To what level do you feel tired?
- Is the tiredness caused by the nature of the job or how you carry it out?

The benefits of relaxation are as follow:

- a. Provide appropriate muscle tension according to the job required.
- b. Making sure a total relaxation is achieved in sleep, towards a complete rest.
- c. Calming the nervous system.
- d. Getting rid of work fatigue.
- e. Good practice could reduce sensitivity to pain.
- f. Regulate breathing (Dale Carnegie. 1993. p. 82)

### **4.3 Meditation:**

Meditation is an intensive deep thinking and diving into something or idea, and it can be actualize by focusing on a particular thing and totally removing the distracting factors, whether externally such as sound and light, internally, physically or emotionally. Meditation is an approach to train the mind and emotion that comes in different forms and techniques, depending on the historical and cultural practices. The methodology is composed by Schools of Psychological Analysis, especially during Psycho-Analysis as part of psychosomatic training, which aims for therapeutic treatment.

Example of how to meditate:

- Imagine a beautiful scenery and keep it in mind.
- Close your eyes and don't think of anything else except for the beautiful scenery you brought about.
- Focus deeply on the scenery.
- Do it for 5 minutes then increase until you reach fifteen minutes.

Meditation could lower the autonomic nervous system to the lowest level and decreases brain neurons from alpha to beta till it reaches gamma or delta, thus reduce tension and depression, at the same time makes the individual active and energetic. (Farouk as-Sayyed Uthman, 2001, p. 145)

#### **4.4 Social Support:**

Ammar Kashrood emphasized that making friendship and social relationships in the institution will raise social support significantly when experiencing psychological stress, which will also help bearing and overcoming the stress at workplace or outside of it. The strongest evidence of the importance of social support as a psychological factor is its ability to ease life stress, and that goes along with our Prophet's advice on solidarity and compassion among family members and the community. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: ((The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever)). And He (ﷺ) also said: ((The believer to another believer is like (the bricks of) a building, each strengthens the other)). (Farouk as-As-Sayyed Uthman, 2001, p. 345)

#### **4.5 Psychotherapy:**

When it comes to inability to face and overcome the daily hardship, when anxiety is taking control, when the body is breaking down, it is crucial to find different psychological solutions. Therefore psychotherapy is one of the latest solutions to treat psychological stress today.

#### **4.6 Counseling**

Counseling services are among the many ways to help overcome stress or adapt with it. Counseling could be a catalyst element to enhance the ability of workers to perform mentally, physically and psychologically, whereas counselor could help women workers who are affected by stress to talk about their problems and hence get clear pictures of their problems so that they can be solved. (Abdul Rahman Isawi, 1995, p. 230)

### **5. Conclusion**

Stress affecting working women is a crucial concern among researchers due to its short and long term effects on performance. It had direct impact on the institution's performance in general and its achievement of objectives. In other hands, increased stress could lead to weak performance by hindering and interrupting workers from effectively delivering their tasks.

Thus, proper actions should be taken seriously and professionally by the managing offices towards this issue. This could be initiated through identifying the occupational stress levels the workers are suffering from, be them men or women. Then analyzing them delineating their potential sources and addressing them through sound use of stress management strategies that should be planned and standardized for the use of all management offices in Algeria.

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