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Research Article

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON WHY MEN AND WOMEN DEAL WITH STRESS DIFFERENTLY

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ABSTRACT

In today's competitive and changing environment every company expects its employees to act for achieving goals so that it attains success in its venture. Such higher commitments may lead to stress.

Albert Einstein said,

“Out Of Clutter, find simplicity.

From discord, find harmony.

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.”

Stress can be defined as a person-environment relationship (Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1966). It is a process, a sequence of events that will lead to a particular end. Stress is the result of imbalance between the physical and psychological demands encountered and the response capability of the individuals, in case failure to meet the demands has important implications for the individuals (McGrath 1970). Stress is a strong predictor of various personal and work related outcomes.

It is evident from history that Women are considered to be the caretakers of others. In the recent study Doctors observed a irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) in human beings out of which 80% of them are women (July 13 2011, Times of India). This is due to the fact that they often spend less time nurturing their own emotional and physical needs. Conflict between the demands and behaviors expected from the women in different roles is expressed in the form of role stress that negatively influences the well being of women and their performances in different working areas.

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INTRODUCTION

Stress on human beings, is like a rubber band. They stretch to meet the environment around them, the demands of life-style, and the pressures that they put on themselves. If pulled too far, stress manifests itself in real conditions mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Like a rubber band breaks when it is stretched too far, human beings have a breaking point too. Stress appears to be the number one killer.

Several studies have accepted that work stress on women is much higher than men. According to [Ivancevich and Matteson \(1985\)](#) role pressures/stress occurs when an employee's expectations or demands conflict with expectation and demands of the organization. In the study, [Hart \(2007\)](#) listed seven leading causes of stress in today's society: finance, work, family, personal concerns, personal health and safety, personal relationships and death.

Females may have higher standards for what is considered too caring or nurturing, given their stronger tendency to prioritize others' needs over their own (e.g., see [Cyranowski, Frank, Young, & Shear, 2000](#)). Some women feel that their expectations about their careers and job discretions are not met.

This may produce feelings of unfairness and inequity. Further it can lead to diminishing morale and productivity ([Sumner and Werner 2001](#) and [Sumner and Niederman 2002](#)).

It is felt that women will be more sensitive to overload because they are perceived by themselves as well as by others of having the primary responsibility for child rearing and housework ([Ahuja, 2002](#)). Such role conflict leads to exhaustion while working in a variety of occupations ([Schwab et al., 1986](#); and [Singh et al., 1994](#)). [Bacharach et al., \(1991\)](#) have demonstrated a direct and significant link between work family conflict and overload leading to work exhaustion.

Women reported higher levels of stress and work exhaustion, relative to men ([Gallivan and Moore 2002](#)). [Moore \(2000\)](#) reported that men valued earnings, promotion and responsibility more highly than did women. Women in contrast were more likely to be highly rate good supervisors and co-workers as well as helping others ([Konrad et al., 2000](#)). The lack of mentoring also impedes women progress in organization ([Ragins, 1989.](#), and [Warihay, 1980](#)).

A recent survey by global research firm Nielsen covered 6,500 women across 21 developed and developing countries. In which the study revealed that women in India are the most

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stressed out. Of the respondents in India, 87% said they felt stressed most of the time. They are followed by women in Mexico (74%), Russia (69%), Spain (66%), France (65%) and Italy (64%). In the U.S., the number is at 53%. (July 12, 2011, Knowledge@Wharton) In another study by Hankin, Mermelstein, & Roesch, 2007; Shih, Eberhart, Hammen, & Brennan, 2006 noted that females experience higher levels of stressful life events, especially interpersonal stressors.

Rudolph & Hammen, 1999; Shih et al., 2006 in their study observed that females experience higher levels of dependent interpersonal stressors than males. While women have an active role in constructing their environments, their environments also can respond to them differentially based on their gender or characteristics and behaviors, resulting in higher levels of interpersonal stressful events. This speculation is in line with evidence that women's workplace behaviors are interpreted more negatively than those same behaviors in men (Heilman & Chen, 2005). The next important study was made by Josephine H. Shih, Nicole K. Eberhart (2010) where behavior of too caring was more strongly associated with stress generation in young women as compared to young men.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample Profile

The present study was conducted in different organizations in India in Noida district of Uttar Pradesh where a sample of 90 females and 90 males (based on age, education, experience and background) were selected using non-probability incidental sampling, that, is the persons who were present on the days the investigator visited the organizations and were willing to cooperate, were administered questionnaires. All the executives were then personally contacted and a rapport was established after giving them a brief outline of the aim of the study.

Table 1 Sample Profile

Category	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Experience	Education	Background
Male	90					
Female	90					
Married		115				
Single		65				
Age upto 30 yrs			40			
30-45 yrs			85			
above 45			55			
Experience upto 2yrs				47		
2-5 years				39		
5-7 years				51		
More than 7				43		
Graduation					100	
Post Graduation					80	
Rural						27
Urban						153
Total	180	180	180	180	180	180

In order to get their honest responses, they were informed that their identity would not be disclosed and that their responses would be kept confidential and used strictly for research purposes. The sample profile can be seen in Table 1.

Moreover, where the personal visit was not approachable, an anonymous cross-sectional questionnaire was distributed by either e-mail or directly to all employees. The questionnaire that was used for the study has two parts and the details are presented in Appendix A. Part A of the questionnaire contains

personal information about the respondent. Part B of the questionnaire contains independent variables. Data collection was spread over a period of one month. Of the 240, who agreed to respond, 180 actually sent the filled in questionnaires, the response rate thus being 75% as shown in Table 2.

Measures Used

A multifaceted methodology, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques was used.

Personal Data Schedule: This was used to obtain background and personal information about the respondents, including his/her name (optional), age, gender, marital status, total work experience, tenure in the present organization, work experience prior to joining the present organization, department and designation.

Independent variable used in the study:

Interpersonal skills/abilities (IS): It has been measured through statements addressing issues like I am good at work, I have completed work at prescribed time period, I am satisfied with my work, I am satisfied with challenges, provided by work.

Freedom at work place (FW): It is measured through statements such as I enjoy working here, I have supporting superiors, I could select the way of working, I am encouraged for initiatives, I am not unnecessarily worried if I make a mistake.

Personal factors (P): It is measured through statements such as I have co-operation of my family members, I have co-operation from my colleagues. Sometimes stress is family-induced like economic difficulties, lack of basic amenities at home, death or separation from spouse, alcoholic husband, suspicious partner, lack of time to care for family members, conflict within families etc.

Table 2 Response Rate from Respondents

Type Of Respondents	Total no. Of Questionnaires distributed	Total No. Of Usable Collected data	Respondent rate
Male	120	90	75%
Female	120	90	75%
Total	240	180	

Relatedness (Re): It is measured through related with company goals, new ideas are welcomed by management, sensitiveness

of superiors towards our feelings, trust among co-workers or colleagues, proud to be working in organization.

Dependent variable

Stress: Stress of an individual depends upon above independent variables which algebraically can be shown as under:

$$\text{Stress} = f(\text{IS}, \text{FW}, \text{P}, \text{Re})$$

Hypothesis of the Study

H₀ = Stress level of Female is not higher than Males with respect to Interpersonal skills/abilities (IS)

H₁ = Stress level of Female is higher than Males with respect to Interpersonal skills/abilities (IS)

H₀ = Stress level of Female is not higher than Males with respect to Freedom at work place (FW)

H₂ = Stress level of Female is higher than Males with respect to Freedom at work place (FW)

H₀ = Stress level of Female is not higher than Males with respect to Personal factors (P)

H₃ = Stress level of Female is higher than Males with respect to Personal factors (P)

H₀ = Stress level of Female is not higher than Males with respect to Relatedness (Re)

H₃ = Stress level of Female is higher than Males with respect to Relatedness (Re)

Data Analysis

After the survey Z test was carried out on the data collected from the questionnaire. The data was analyzed on the basis of the four variables taken in the study. Table 3 shows that 52% of male respondents and 33% of female respondents strongly agreed that they possess Interpersonal Skills and abilities. Mean Values and Standard Deviation of Males is higher than females as shown by the data below.

Table 3 Interpersonal Skills & Abilities

	Males				Females				Z test
	Frequency	%	Mean	SD	Frequency	%	Mean	SD	
Negligible	4	4.44			5	5.556			
Low Exist	4	4.44			10	11.11			
Exist	5	10			20	22.22			
Highly Exist	30	33.3	4.24	0.446	25	27.78	3.7222	0.376	8.48
Strong Exist	47	52.2			30	33.33			
	90	100			90	100			

This indicates that interpersonal skills are much higher in male respondents than females, which is the main cause of high stress level in females. The results of the Z-test at 5% significant level shows that Stress level of Female is higher than Males with respect to Interpersonal skills/abilities (Z (1.96) = 8.48, z > .05).

Table 4 shows that 60% of male respondents and 35% of female respondents strongly agreed that there exist freedom of work at their working place. Freedom of work here means, that respondents have autonomy in taking routine decisions thus working in their own styles. Mean Values and Standard Deviation of Males is higher than females as shown by the data below.

Table 4 Freedom at Work

	Males				Females				Z test
	Frequency	%	Mean	SD	Frequency	%	Mean	SD	
Negligible	1	1.11			5	5.556			
Low Exist	5	5.56			10	11.11			
Exist	9	10			25	27.78			
Highly Exist	21	23.3	4.36	0.464	18	20	3.6889	0.373	10.6
Strong Exist	54	60			32	35.56			
	90	100			90	100			

This reveals that Freedom at Work are much higher in male respondents than females, indicating that male respondents take their decisions independently while on the other side females had dependency in taking their decisions. The results of the Z-test at 5% significant level shows that Stress level of Female is higher than Males with respect to Freedom at Work (Z (1.96) = 10.6, z > .05).

Table 5 shows that 38% of male respondents and only 7% of female respondents strongly agreed that they receive full cooperation from their family members and colleagues. Cooperation reduces the stress level but as seen from the data females receive fewer co-operations from their spouse or family members, which increase their stress. Mean Values and Standard Deviation of Males is higher than females as shown by the data below.

Table 5 Personal Factors

	Males				Females				Z test
	Frequency	%	Mean	SD	Frequency	%	Mean	SD	
Negligible	3	3.33			15	16.67			
Low Exist	7	7.78			19	21.11			
Exist	18	10			37	41.11			
Highly Exist	27	30	3.93	0.402	12	13.33	2.7444	0.341	21.4
Strong Exist	35	38.9			7	7.778			
	90	100			90	100			

The results of the Z-test at 5% significant level (Z (1.96) = 21.4, z > .05) shows that Stress level of Female is higher than Males with respect to Personal Factors.

Table 6 shows that 42% of male respondents and only 36% of female respondents strongly agreed that they identify themselves with the organization. Male respondents felt that easily associate themselves with the organization goals, their colleagues and their work. Mean Values and Standard Deviation of Males is higher than females as shown by the data below.

The above data reveals that the mean and standard deviation of males are higher than females. The results of the Z-test at 5% significant level (Z (1.96) = 6.32, z > .05) shows that Stress level of Female is higher than Males with respect to Relatedness.

Table 6 Relatedness

	Males				Females				Z test
	Frequency	%	Mean	SD	Frequency	%	Mean	SD	
Negligible	1	1.11			6	6.667			
Low Exist	3	3.33			10	11.11			
Exist	20	10			20	22.22			
Highly Exist	28	31.1	4.1	0.425	21	23.33	3.7222	0.376	6.32
Strong Exist	38	42.2			33	36.67			
	90	100			90	100			

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This paper examines the differences in stress level between males and females. Though the study was restricted to only 180 respondents, yet the findings are of the both theoretical and practical significance. After analyzing the data on the basis of four variables Interpersonal skills/abilities, Freedom at Work, Personal factors and Relatedness used in our study it can be concluded that most of the women experience maximum stress due to lack of Interpersonal skills, no autonomy and higher dependency while taking decisions, lack of personal support and their ability to prioritize their organization goals.

On the basis of the above findings the stress level on Women is much higher then that on Male respondents. To control the stress level which has gone beyond the ignorable level, appropriate actions and interventions are necessary to improve the performance of women. The suggestions are confidence building exercises can be there, relaxation in working hours to balance their working life and personal life, organizational goals should be reviewed in such a manner that they are able to meet the employees goals as well, yoga classes or refreshment facility can be there and so on.

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