



## Workplace challenges that women face and women's health in work place

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### Abstract

Women are now marrying later in life, staying in school longer, delaying childbirth, and having fewer children than in previous years. More women are choosing to continue working while also balancing the traditional parenting responsibilities. Women face different workplace health challenges than men. This is partly because men and women tend to have different kinds of jobs. Women generally have more work-related cases of carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, respiratory diseases, infectious and parasitic diseases, and anxiety and stress disorders. Social, economic, and cultural factors also put women at risk for injury and illness. Like all workers in insecure jobs, women may fear that bringing up a safety issue could result in job loss or more difficult work situations. They may also be less likely to report a work-related injury. They face issues in balancing work, home, and family. Sexist treatment and gender discrimination in the workplace can affect a woman's physical and mental health. Sexual harassment can lead to anxiety, depression, lower self-esteem, alienation, insomnia, nausea and headaches.

Balancing work and family tasks can put additional stress on women, who in many families still take primary responsibility for childcare and eldercare. When family and work demands collide, the resulting stress can lead to physical health problems such as poor appetite, lack of sleep, increase in blood pressure, fatigue, and increased susceptibility to infection. It can also result in mental health problems such as burnout and depression. This paper explores workplace challenges that women face and Women's health in work place and recommends strategies to address them.

**Keywords:** health, work, depression, stress, women

### 1. Introduction

Women in working life have received considerable attention in the last few years. The voice of women in the media is loud and clear and it is certainly not easy any more to disregard issues of equality. Nevertheless at the work places little has happened. Segregation both vertically and horizontally, is nearly as common as before, and woman have little influence over factors that govern their working lives. This appears to influence the health of woman, as manifested both at the workplace and in their private life.

Many women manage multiple roles parent, spouse, caregiver, employee yet recognition of the impact on their own and their families' health and economic well-being is sometimes overlooked.

The percentage of women in the workforce has risen from 43.3% in 1970 to 58.6% in 2010. Over the same period, the percentage of men in the workforce fell from 79.7% to 71.2%. Mothers who work outside the home are often in the difficult position of balancing family health responsibilities with employment obligations. This balancing act becomes even more challenging for low-income women who are often the sole breadwinners with primary responsibility for managing the health of their children and other relatives.

It is a sad reality that women, over half of the population of the United States, are regularly denied health insurance because of pregnancy or pre-existing conditions such as breast cancer. (Women's news)

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination. As a result, when it occurs on the job it violates the laws against sex discrimination in the workplace, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Sexual harassment is very

widespread and affects women in every workplace setting and at every level of employment. Surveys indicate that almost half of all working women have experienced some form of harassment on the job, a proportion that has not changed since the issue gained visibility in the early 1980s.

Sexual harassment often has a serious and negative impact on women's physical and emotional health, and the more severe the harassment, the more severe the reaction. The reactions frequently reported by women include anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, weight loss or gain, loss of appetite, and headaches. Researchers have also found that there is a link between sexual harassment and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Identifying issues and problems in the health of women remains a challenge. This paper workplace challenges that women face and Women's health in work place.

### 2. Review of Literature

Study done by Ryu, Kirak <sup>[1]</sup>, "State Policies and Gender Earnings Inequality: A Multilevel Analysis of 50 U.S. States Based on U.S. Census 2000 Data" the findings of the study are pay gap for women workers in states with large public social-service sectors is larger than that for those in states with small public social-service sectors. Women working in progressive state institutional environments are "more likely to be employed in managerial occupations and less likely to be channelled into female-typed occupations." "State governments usually provide jobs for social services such as

<sup>1</sup> Ryu, Kirak. *The Sociological Quarterly*, Spring 2010, Vol. 51, No. 2. doi: 10.1111/j.1533-8525.2010.01170.x.

health, welfare and education, and these positions attract more female employees than male employees. However, the consequences of these employment patterns are not beneficial for female employees in that occupations in these sectors pay less than do other sectors of the labor market.”

Whether or not more women are hired in managerial positions does not appear dependent on environments where earnings are more equal generally. In other words, the “net odds of females employed in managerial occupations is not significantly associated with the gender gap in earnings”. Study done by Bianchi, Suzanne M <sup>[2]</sup>, “Family change and Time Allocation in American Families”. “As market work increased, mothers’ time in childcare activities declined from 10 to 8.5 hours per week between 1965 and 1975, but then increased. After 1985, primary childcare time of mothers rose to almost 12.6 hours per week by 2000 and has fluctuated around 14 hours per week during the 2003 to 2008 period.”

In addition, “fathers have increased the time they spend on childcare over the past two or three decades. For fathers, more childcare hours were added to long work hours, especially for married fathers who average more than 40 hours of paid work per week (regardless of the age of their children).” Evidence supports the theory that, currently, middle class parents engage in intensive parenting. This means that now, more than ever, parents are involved in several extracurricular activities with their children. Despite the higher weekly average of child-care time, parents still report having “too little time with their children,” and even for unemployed mothers, 18% report not having enough time with their children.

Study done by Smith, Ryan A <sup>[3]</sup>, “Money, Benefits and Power: A test of the Glass Ceiling and Glass Escalator Hypothesis”. According to the study the advantage for white males is not only in wages and promotions but also in employee benefits: “White men are more likely than any other group to have sick leave, individual health insurance, family health insurance and retirement plans.”

### 3. Problems faced by the women in workplace

#### 3.1 Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment at the workplace is one of the most widespread problems that women face. Sexual harassment is an unwelcome sexual behavior, be it verbal or physical, and has a profound impact on women. Sexual harassment doesn’t necessarily mean touching the private parts of any woman, it ranges from offensive comments, showing obscene pictures or videos, threats to sexual assault to unwanted sexual favour.

In return of promotion, salary hike there are a few employers who try to take sexual advantage or favors from female workers. When it comes to female workers in low-wage jobs, the negative consequences of sexual harassment is the worse.

Apart from this any other unnecessary verbal activities or gestures like remarks about appearance, gender-based insulting comments, whistling, and cracking adult jokes come under sexual harassment. This type of harassment

even sometimes leads to molestation and rape in the workplace.

#### 3.2 Pay inequity

It is one of the most major issues that women employees have to face at their workplace. Most of the time despite of being more proficient and qualified than fellow male employees, women workers are paid less than males for the same amount of work.

Women are almost half of the workforce still they earn less than men workers in almost every single occupation.

During the last couple of decades, women have shown tremendous courage by opting jobs that were previously done exclusively by men. In spite of this commendable effort, there has been a little progress in the gender integration of work.

Women are still considered to be worthy to get low pay and their effort and hard work are undermined in front of male co-workers. Even sometimes along with pay inequity, they face discrimination in respect of recruitment, salary hike, position up-gradation and many more.

#### 3.3 Lesser women in the workforce

This is a persistent work problem in a number of developed nations of the world and also has become a matter of concern for the analysts. Studies have shown that in most of the multi-national companies the ratio between men and female employees are uneven.

Women are highly discriminated and men always get an upper-edge compared to women during recruitment. In spite of having all the required qualification, talent and expertise, women find it difficult to get selected for a position as several concepts like women are emotional, they are physically and mentally weak, can’t give sufficient time, maternity issues and several other things come in the way.

#### 3.4 Chilly workplace environment and lack of family support

Increasing work pressure combined with chilly workplace environment seems to be another main factor that troubles women at workplace. The importance of working in a supportive and healthy office atmosphere with a group of understanding colleagues can’t be overstated. A personally fulfilling job and a handsome salary can’t even make a woman employee satisfied if she has to spend her day at workplace with a group of unsupportive men colleagues. This isolated feeling can lead to boredom and stress, gradually losing her efficiency and confidence.

Apart from this, lack of family support for household responsibilities is another major reason that leads to stress and conflicts for female workers who are trying to balance both job and family.

#### 3.5 Poor security

Poor security at the workplace is another pivotal concern that women have to deal with. Women working in night shifts fall victim of several crimes due to inadequate security arrangement by the higher management. Incidents of driver or another male employee assaulting a woman worker in office transport has been reported every second day. Due to lack of proper security arrangements by the company, women specially working in night shifts have become victims of rapes and sexual abuses.

<sup>2</sup> Bianchi, Suzanne M. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, November 2011, Vol. 638, No.1. doi: 10.1177/0002716211413731.

<sup>3</sup> *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, January 2012, Vol. 639, No. 1. doi: 10.1177/0002716211422038

### 3.6 The absence of role model at workplace

We learn by following the footsteps of others. Even at workplace young professionals look up to senior counterparts to learn the tricks and trades of business. In this male-dominated society women employees often don't find a female role model to follow, so they have to seek help from male colleagues for guidance. But the nuances in the communication style of men to a woman and lack of mentorship hinder the growth of women at workplace.

### 3.7 Pregnancy discrimination

Pregnancy discrimination happens at the workplace when an employer discriminates a female worker on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or related conditions. Pregnancy discrimination can comprise any kind of negative employment actions taken owing to an employee's pregnancy or other related medical conditions, including firing or demoting a woman worker, restriction to work, treating a pregnant worker in a different way than other temporarily disabled workers etc.

Though as per the law pregnancy and other related medical conditions related to it are considered as temporary disability, most of the employers deny giving benefits and same treatments to the women workers that they give to other employees with temporary disabilities.

### 3.8 Insufficient maternity leaves

Insufficient maternity leave is another problem that troubles working women at the workplace. After a certain period of time the female worker has to join work regardless of the health and safety issues and condition of the baby and the employee herself, otherwise, she will be without pay.

This not only hampers their performance at the office, but is also takes a toll to their personal lives. In some private organizations, employers can even fire the female employee due to extended maternity leaves.

### 3.9 Gender biasness

Men are usually given an unfair advantage compared to the female employee, no matter the degree and qualification she has. In this male dominating society, guys are considered more intelligent, efficient and hardworking than girls. It is a common notion of everyone that women are weaker and taking care of family, kids is their main responsibility. This gender discrimination in the workplace can lead to job dissatisfaction and stress in working women.

Due to this, a woman also lacks motivation and commitments towards her job. Be it home or workplace, women are given lesser opportunity everywhere than men.

## 4. Challenges that are still troubling woman at workplace

Steps and corrective measures are being taken up by management and employers to provide female employers with a better workplace by eliminating gender discrimination and biases from offices.

The number of working women is increasing day by day but still there are certain women issues and barriers that they have to come across and tackle at the workplace.

### 4.1 Harassment

Women are still considered as an easy target by their fellow male colleagues. Women are much vulnerable so higher management and even colleagues harass them by cracking

obscene jokes, passing derogatory comment or trying to touch their private parts etc. In such cases, most of the women remain silent and try to ignore them in fear of losing a job.

Even some of them prefer to quit job as they believe lodging a complaint against the culprits will not help them anyway. In most of the cases, the higher authority or management doesn't support the victim. Laws are there to protect working women against sexual harassment but only if complaints are lodged.

### 4.2 Negative attitudes of male co-workers

In most of the cases, working women feel humiliated with the attitude and derogatory remarks passed by their male colleagues. It is believed by most of the men that women are hired only to add glamour and color to the office environment. This kind of unhealthy work atmosphere, lack of support from colleagues and higher authority leads to job dissatisfaction and less productivity for women. Higher management should take some steps to create a healthy and conducive work environment for ladies.

### 4.3 Lower pay-scale

Women are paid less because management has a preset notion that she will leave the job after having children or marriage. While harassment, bullying etc. are vivid acts in offices, the lower pay scale is something that kills the confidence of a female employee from inside. It is a silent crime and no one can complain about it. Women should be vocal about their right, remaining silent means that you are also supporting this shameful act. Employers should ensure that equal wages are paid to women employees without gender discrimination.

### 4.4 Safety and Security

Women employees are not safe in the office, not even in transports. Incidents of rape and sexual assault in office cab are making headlines every day on newspapers. Women have been the victims of sexual harassments by the male colleagues or driver. This needs to be stopped and for this, the higher authority must take necessary steps.

## 5. Objectives of the study

- To study the issues and challenges faced by women's in workplace.
- To study health related problems faced by Women's.
- To study the sexual harassment problems in work place.

## 6. Methodology

### 6.1 Type of Data

Data was collected from a structured questionnaire and other published sources and there was an interview schedule and personal discussion with the Women's at work place in Bangalore City Only.

### 6.2 Data Collection

The Data used for the study include both types of data secondary as well as primary

**Primary Data** – Questionnaire

**Secondary Data** - Websites, Articles.

### 6.3 Sampling plan

**a) Sampling Unit:** Women employees at work place in the city of Bangalore.

b) **Sample Size:** 100 respondents

c) **Location:** Bangalore

**7. Analysis**

Respondents were given a list of factors /criterion on a five point scale as follows:

Rating	5	4	3	2	1
	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral/Not sure	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied

The percentage of women in the workforce has risen from 43.3% in 1970 to 58.6% in 2010. Over the same period, the percentage of men in the workforce fell from 79.7% to 71.2%.

**Table 1:** Issues and challenges faced by women

S. No.	Factors	Mean
1.	Perceptions Regarding Shared Decision Making	3.8
2.	Perceptions Regarding Policies of the Organizations	3.7
3.	Maternity Leave Given By the Companies	3.5
4.	Job insecurity	3.2
5.	Leadership roles shared by the Organizations	3.2
6.	Balancing Work and Family (too little time with their children)	3
7.	Perceptions Regarding Administrative Support	3
8.	Perceptions Regarding Overall Support System To Women’s at Work Place	3
9.	Flexibility in Work Place	2.8
10.	Job Stress	2.7
11.	Pay Inequality (Unequal Earnings)	2.7
12.	Gender Inequality	2.6
13.	Return To Work after Child’s Birth	2.6

**Table 2:** To study health related problems faced by Women

S. No.	Factors	Mean
1.	Insurance Covered by the Employer	4
2.	Family health Insurance Provided by the employer	3.2
3.	Women’s have Health Problems (Physical and mental Problems)	2.7
4.	Job related Deaths	1

**Table 3:** To study the sexual harassment problems in work place

S. No.	Factors	Mean
1	Sexual harassment problems in work place	3.2

**8. Discussion**

1. Pay gap for women workers is larger than men’s in Work place. There is always gender inequality in work place. Men’s are generally paid more than Women’s.
2. As work increased, mothers’ time in childcare activities declined from 10 to 8.5 hours per week between 1965 and 1975, but then increased. After 1985, primary childcare time of mothers rose to almost 12.6 hours per week by 2000 and has fluctuated around 14 hours per week during the 2003 to 2008 period.” In addition, “fathers have increased the time they spend on childcare over the past two or three decades. Evidence supports the theory that, currently, middle class parents engage in intensive parenting. This means that now, more than ever, parents are involved in several extracurricular activities with their children. Despite the higher weekly average of child-care time, parents still report having “too little time with their children.” The study shows that

3. 60% report not having enough time with their children.
3. More than 70% of women with children worked in 2010/2011 as per the studies. Study done by <sup>[4]</sup> Grice, M.M.; McGovern, P.M.; Alexander, B.H.; Ukestad, L.; Hellerstedt in the study, 53% of the women returned to work; by six months, almost all the women were back at work (all in the survey sample had worked in the year preceding childbirth.). The study shows that 52% of the Women’s returned to Job after Child’s birth and Women experienced job spill over into the home more frequently than home spill over into work.
4. There was “a positive relationship between health and total hours worked, with each additional hour of work being associated with a slight increase in both mental and physical health.” There is also a Positive relationship between work flexibility and job spill over, with more flexible work arrangements, increases the amount of time a woman is able to spend with her child. Longer periods of work leave for childbirth were associated with a longer duration of breastfeeding. Women suffered 2,506 (or 8 percent) of the 31,567 job-related fatalities reported from 1992 to 1996. During the same time period, women accounted for slightly less than 50 percent of the workforce.
5. Even after controlling for changes in society over time, and for differences between as well as within societies, the data suggest that “greater sexism predicts decreases in gender equality over time.” Separating and tracking the effects of men’s and women’s expressions of mainstream sexist ideologies shows that “sexism may be a consensual legitimizing myth endorsed by both high-status and low-status groups in the creation of gender hierarchy.” The researchers found that “sexism is more prevalent in countries that are less developed and have more gender inequality.” Overall, the “results presented here suggest that sexism not only legitimizes gender inequality, but actively makes it worse.” This means that while employment decisions, pay inequity and violence against women are all important factors in the creation of gender inequality.
6. Women who do get pregnant face a financial disadvantage in addition to many other possibly negative factors like putting their career on hold. While there are a host of pregnancy discrimination legalities in favor of women, the fact remains that getting pregnant is like getting punished when it comes to work. As per Maternity Act of 1961, Women’s do get maternity leave of 6 months in case of Government Jobs and whereas Private organizations has 3 months maternity leave period. Companies should incorporate flexible work options for women’s after child’s birth and flexible working hours should be given to women’s in work places.
7. The successes of super-women like Oprah and Hillary Clinton are examples of outstanding female leadership and achievement. And while the legacies that these accomplished women have built shouldn’t be disregarded, it also shouldn’t be taken as a sign of complete victory for women. The truth is, the everyday working woman lacks role models for leadership in corporate culture, as executive positions for

<sup>4</sup> W. *Womens Health Issues*, January-February 2011, Vol. 21, No. 1. doi: 10.1016/j.whi.2010.08.003.

women are still hard to come by. And it's no wonder, when only 64% of the leadership roles are shared by the women at Work Place.

8. Unfortunately, sexual harassment is a very real and persistent problem, one that's harder to identify than you'd think. No matter how far we've come in terms of gender equality, there are still women who face this kind of behaviour every day. Even though sexual harassment is forbidden under the Civil Rights Act, women often fail to reveal their situation or aren't able to provide sufficient proof. And all too often, such claims don't even make it out of corporate bureaucracy. Did you know that only about 5% to 15% of women report their harassment problems? According to a 2009 study by the University of Minnesota, women in positions of authority are more likely to be victims of sexual harassment. The researchers discovered that women in supervisory positions were 137% more likely to be harassed than women not in these positions. Sexual harassment often has a serious and negative impact on women's physical and emotional health, and the more severe the harassment, the more severe the reaction. The reactions frequently reported by women include anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, weight loss or gain, loss of appetite, and headaches. Researchers have also found that there is a link between sexual harassment and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Harassment can also cause substantial financial harm for victims. Victims often try to avoid the harassing behaviour by taking sick leave or leave without pay from work, or even quitting or transferring to new jobs. Employers also suffer significant financial losses from the job turnover, use of sick leave, and losses to individual and workgroup productivity that result from harassment.

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