

Coping Strategies and Social Factors Affecting Mental Health: A Sociological Study on Working Women in Delhi NCR Region"

SADA

Ph.D. Scholar, University School of Humanities and Social Sciences, GGSIP University
Dwarka, New Delhi, India
Email - sadatanvir96@gmail.com

Abstract: *This paper explores the mental health of working women and their coping strategies in the context of sociological analysis. Working women face a range of challenges and stressors in their personal and professional lives that can impact their mental health. This study aims to understand the coping strategies employed by working women to manage these challenges and the social factors that influence their mental health. Using a qualitative research design, data was collected from 20 working women using the case-study method. The findings reveal that working women face several stressors such as work-life balance, discrimination, and gender inequality, which can negatively impact their mental health. Coping strategies employed by working women include seeking support from family and friends, engaging in physical exercise, pursuing hobbies and interests, and seeking professional help. Social factors such as workplace culture, gender roles and expectations, and social support networks significantly influence the mental health of working women. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy and practice to address the mental health needs of working women.*

Key Words: *Mental Health, Working Women, Stress, Coping Strategies, Social Factor, Work-life balance, Health, Sociology of mental health.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Working women face numerous challenges in their personal and professional lives that can impact their mental health. The struggle to balance work and family responsibilities, discrimination in the workplace, and gender inequality are just a few of the stressors that working women face on a daily basis. According to the World Health Organization, mental health disorders are the leading cause of disability among women worldwide (WHO, 2020). [1] Despite the high prevalence of mental health issues among working women, there is a lack of research on their coping strategies and the social factors that influence their mental health. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the coping strategies employed by working women and the social factors that influence their mental health. Working women face multiple challenges, including work-related stress, gender discrimination, harassment, and balancing work and family responsibilities. These challenges can lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, burnout, and other stress-related disorders.

The societal expectations and cultural norms associated with gender roles can also contribute to mental health problems among working women. Women are often expected to fulfil traditional gender roles, such as being a homemaker, caregivers, and nurturers, along with their professional duties. Such expectations can lead to feelings of guilt, anxiety, and inadequacy, resulting in mental health problems.

2. THEORETICAL MODELS :

Here are some theoretical models of sociology that can be applied to the topic of the mental health of working women and their coping strategies:

- **Role Strain Theory:** Role strain theory suggests that individuals may experience stress and negative mental health outcomes when they face conflicting demands and expectations from different roles they hold in society.

This theory can be applied to the workplace, where working women may face conflicting demands from their work and family roles. Role strain theory can help to understand how work-family conflict and other role conflicts impact the mental health outcomes of working women.

- **Social Support Theory:** Social support theory suggests that social relationships can provide resources that individuals can use to cope with stress and improve their mental health outcomes. This theory can be applied to the workplace, where social support from supervisors, colleagues, and family can be important for the mental health outcomes of working women. Social support theory can help to understand how social relationships impact coping strategies and mental health outcomes for working women.
- **Social Exchange Theory:** Social exchange theory suggests that individuals engage in social relationships based on the exchange of resources such as social support and recognition. This theory can be applied to the workplace, where working women may engage in social relationships with colleagues based on the exchange of resources such as recognition and autonomy. Social exchange theory can help to understand how social relationships impact workplace outcomes and mental health outcomes for working women.
- **Intersectionality Theory:** Intersectionality theory suggests that individuals experience oppression and privilege simultaneously based on multiple social identities such as race, gender, and class. This theory can be applied to the workplace, where working women may experience multiple forms of discrimination that can impact their mental health outcomes. Intersectionality theory can help to understand how multiple forms of discrimination intersect and impact mental health outcomes for working women.
- **Symbolic Interactionism:** Symbolic interactionism suggests that individuals construct meanings and interpret the social world through social interactions. This theory can be applied to the workplace, where working women may construct meanings about their roles and identities through social interactions with colleagues and supervisors. Symbolic interactionism can help to understand how social interactions and meanings impact mental health outcomes for working women.

These theoretical models of sociology can help researchers understand the social context and dynamics that impact working women's mental health outcomes and coping strategies.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

Recent studies have highlighted the mental health challenges faced by working women and the coping strategies that can be employed to alleviate these challenges.

- **International studies**

One study by Smith and colleagues (2021) found that working women who reported using problem-focused coping strategies, such as seeking social support and taking action to address the source of stress, had lower levels of depression and anxiety compared to those who used avoidant coping strategies, such as denial or substance use. The study also found that workplace support and flexible work arrangements were important factors in reducing stress and promoting mental health in working women. [2]

Dinh & Nguyen (2021) study aimed to investigate the relationship between coping strategies and mental health outcomes among women in the workplace in Vietnam. The authors surveyed 327 women and found that coping strategies such as seeking social support, problem-solving, and positive reappraisal were associated with better mental health outcomes. The study also found that factors such as job stress, work-family conflict, and discrimination were negatively associated with mental health outcomes. [3]

A systematic review by Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., (2020) examined the effectiveness of workplace interventions in promoting mental health among working women. The review found that interventions such as flexible work arrangements, employee assistance programs, and training programs on stress management and resilience were effective in improving mental health outcomes in working women.[4]

Ahmed et al. (2019) found that working women who reported higher levels of social support had better mental health outcomes. Specifically, they were less likely to experience depression, anxiety, and stress. The study found that social support had a significant positive impact on the mental health of working women. Specifically, the study highlighted

that working women who received higher levels of social support had lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. The study also highlighted the importance of family support and workplace support in improving the mental health of working women.[5]

➤ National studies

Srivastava et al., (2020) found that working women in India employed various coping strategies such as seeking social support, engaging in physical exercise, and practicing mindfulness to deal with work-related stress. The study also highlighted the role of sociological factors such as work-family conflict, gender discrimination, and job insecurity in affecting the mental health of working women. [6]

Sahni et al., (2020) explored the relationship between work-family conflict, coping strategies, and burnout among female managers in the hospitality industry in India. The study found that work-family conflict was positively associated with burnout while coping strategies such as seeking social support and engaging in leisure activities were negatively associated with burnout. [7]

Gupta & Bhatia, (2019) examined the impact of work-related stress on the mental health of female software professionals in India. The study found that high levels of work stress were associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression among female software professionals. The study also highlighted the importance of workplace support, job autonomy, and flexible work arrangements in mitigating the negative impact of work stress on mental health. [8]

Pandey & Nigam (2019) examined the coping strategies of female teachers in India to deal with work-related stress. The study found that female teachers employed various coping strategies such as seeking social support, engaging in physical exercise, and practicing relaxation techniques to manage work-related stress. The study also highlighted the role of workplace factors such as job demands, lack of support from superiors, and limited career advancement opportunities in contributing to work-related stress among female teachers.[9]

Kalia & Singh, (2018) focused on the relationship between work stress, social support, and coping strategies among working women in the healthcare sector. The study found that social support and positive coping strategies such as problem-solving and emotional regulation were negatively associated with work stress, while negative coping strategies such as avoidance and denial were positively associated with work stress. [10]

4. OBJECTIVES :

- to understand the coping strategies employed by working women to manage the challenges.
- to explore the social factors that influence their mental health.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the coping strategies employed by working women and the social factors that influence their mental health. Using a qualitative research design, data was collected from 20 working women using the case-study method. The inclusion criteria were women aged between 25 and 45 who were employed full-time. The in-depth interviews were conducted in person lasted between 50 and 60 minutes. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in the data. The study only focused on working women in the Delhi NCR region of India, and the findings may not be applicable to other regions or countries. The fieldwork was carried out for over two months and the study uses an exploratory research design and employs an interview method to focus on social influences and coping mechanisms. Delhi was chosen because no study analyzing this phenomenon was conducted.

During the fieldwork, some working women provided accounts where they felt they were being side-lined because of their gender. (For maintaining confidentiality names have been changed)

Sneha is a 27-year-old manager who works for a large company. She often feels stressed and overwhelmed due to a heavy workload and a lack of communication with her superiors. Additionally, her superiors often fail to communicate important information, leaving Sneha feeling unsupported and stressed. To cope with her stress, Sneha takes short breaks throughout the day and seeks mentorship from senior colleagues.

However, Sneha is also impacted by other factors such as workload and deadlines. She is frequently given unrealistic deadlines and is expected to manage multiple projects simultaneously. These factors significantly impact her mental health and contribute to her feelings of stress and burnout.

➤ **SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF SNEHA’S CASE**

In Sneha's case, her interactions with her superiors involve a social exchange of resources such as communication, feedback, and support (Blau, 1964).[11] The lack of communication and support from her superiors can be seen as a breakdown in this social exchange, leading to negative outcomes for Sneha's mental health.

Other theoretical models that can be applied in this case include the conflict theory, which emphasizes the role of power and inequality in shaping social interactions (Marx, 1867) [12], and the symbolic interactionism theory, which emphasizes the role of symbols and meanings in shaping social interactions (Blumer, 1969).[13]

Priya is a 41-year-old marketing specialist who works for a large corporation. She often feels stressed and anxious due to financial concerns and the pressure to perform in a male-dominated industry. To cope with her stress, Priya relies on the support of her family and friends and practices self-care through activities such as yoga and meditation.

However, Priya is also impacted by the gender discrimination she experiences at work. She has been passed over for promotions and raises in favor of less qualified male colleagues and has been subjected to sexist comments and attitudes. These social factors significantly impact her mental health and contribute to her feelings of stress and anxiety.

➤ **SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PRIYA’S CASE**

In her paper titled ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,’ Crenshaw primarily focused on the oppression faced by black women who experience social inequality in two ways: first, for being a woman and second, for being black (Crenshaw, 1989).[14]

Priya's case can be analyzed through the lens of Intersectional Feminism. This theory recognizes that women experience various forms of discrimination based on their gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and other social identities. In Priya's case, gender discrimination intersects with other factors such as her age, occupation, and financial concerns, which intensify her experiences of stress and anxiety.

Other sociological theories that can be applied to Priya's case include:

- **Social Exchange Theory** - This theory explains how individuals make decisions based on the costs and benefits of their actions. Priya's decision to rely on her family and friends for support and practice self-care through yoga and meditation is an example of her seeking benefits and minimizing the costs of her coping strategies.
- **Role Theory** - This theory explains how individuals act based on their social roles and expectations. Priya's experiences of gender discrimination can be attributed to her being a woman working in a male-dominated industry, which leads to unequal treatment and limited opportunities based on societal expectations and gender roles.

6. MAJOR FINDINGS :

The data consists of coping strategies and sociological factors that affect the mental health of 20 working women. The ages of the participants range from 26 to 45, with an average age of 33.5. The most commonly used coping strategies are mindfulness (25%), exercise (20%), and seeking social support (15%). The most prevalent sociological factors affecting mental health are high workload (15%), gender discrimination (10%), and lack of work-life balance (10%).

The table summarizing the themes that emerged from the data collected from the interviews with 20 working women:

Themes	Coping Strategies	Sociological Factors
Self-Care	Exercise, meditation, social support, sleep, hobbies	Workplace culture
Seeking Help	Therapy, support groups	Family-responsibilities, gender roles, discrimination

Positive Thinking	Positive self-talk, mindfulness techniques	Socio-economic status, societal norms, caregiving duties
Creative Outlets	Journaling, pursuing hobbies	Pressure to succeed
Time Management	Prioritization, delegation, scheduling	Workplace demands
Relaxation Techniques	Deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, meditation	Gender discrimination, role overload, lack of control
Social Support	Seeking help, talking to friends, family, and colleagues	Inadequate support

1.1

The researcher coded the data from each interview according to these themes, identifying quotes and examples that relate to each theme.

➤ Factors contributing to mental health challenges:

The study reveals that working women face a range of challenges that contribute to mental health issues, including job stress, workplace discrimination, and work-life imbalance. Job stress can result from high workloads, job insecurity, and long working hours. Workplace discrimination involves gender bias, ageism, and racism, and leads to feelings of isolation and low self-esteem. The work-life imbalance results from competing demands of work and family responsibilities and leads to exhaustion and burnout.

➤ Coping strategies adopted by working women:

The study also uncovers various coping strategies adopted by working women to overcome mental health challenges. These strategies include seeking support from family and friends, engaging in self-care practices such as meditation, yoga, or therapy, setting boundaries between work and personal life, and engaging in physical activity.

➤ Impact of organizational policies:

The study also suggests that organizational policies and workplace culture play a vital role in determining the mental health outcomes of working women. Supportive policies such as flexible working arrangements, parental leave, and mental health support programs can enhance the well-being of working women. In contrast, a toxic work culture that promotes overwork and discourages self-care may exacerbate mental health issues.

➤ Intersectional analysis:

The study highlights the intersectional nature of mental health challenges faced by working women, as different groups may experience mental health challenges in distinct ways. For instance, women as a minority group face unique challenges related to discrimination that can exacerbate mental health issues. Similarly, working-class women may struggle with financial insecurity and limited access to mental health resources.

Overall, the findings could have implications for workplace policies and practices that promote gender equality and mental health for all workers.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Some recommendations for addressing the mental health concerns of working women:

- Organizations should prioritize the implementation of supportive policies and programs such as flexible work arrangements, job autonomy, and social support systems to help women manage work-family conflict and work-related stress.
- Promoting positive coping strategies such as problem-solving, seeking social support, engaging in leisure activities, and practicing mindfulness can help working women manage stress and maintain good mental health.
- Addressing gender discrimination and providing equal opportunities for women in the workplace can help reduce the stress and burnout associated with a hostile work environment.
- Organizations should prioritize the provision of training and resources to managers and supervisors to help them recognize and address mental health concerns among their employees, especially working women.

- More research is needed to better understand the unique stressors faced by working women in different contexts and to develop tailored interventions to support their mental health.

8. CONCLUSION :

In conclusion, this research paper aims to analyze the mental health of working women and their coping strategies from a sociological perspective. The study examined the various factors that contribute to mental health issues among working women, including job stress, discrimination, and work-life imbalance. The researcher also explored the coping strategies adopted by working women to deal with their mental health challenges. The findings of this research will provide insight into the mental health challenges faced by working women and the coping strategies they adopt to overcome them. Coping strategies, social support, and workplace interventions can help women manage work-related stress and promote their mental health. It is important for governments to recognize the importance of mental health and develop policies that promote mental health in the workplace, particularly for women.

Some of the government policies that could promote mental health in women include the provision of mental health services and resources in the workplace, flexible work arrangements, and initiatives to reduce work-family conflict. Additionally, policies that promote gender equality and address issues such as the gender wage gap and sexual harassment can also contribute to better mental health outcomes for women. By prioritizing mental health in the workplace and implementing policies that support women's well-being, governments can contribute to a healthier and more productive workforce.

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