

# Psycho-Social Issues of Middle Aged Working Women in Cochin City Based on Stress

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**Abstract – Stress is body's way of response to inappropriate levels of pressure, any threat or demand probably in the areas of physical, chemical, financial, emotional or social levels. When the stress becomes overwhelming it can lead to mental and physical problems. Women of the middle age suffer the most due to change in hormonal levels, work pressure from home and office, lack of self-care and negligence of the same. Stress level is always seen higher in working women because of the added responsibilities given to her. The ability to overcome stress reduces with age. Stress over a period of time will throw a person off-balance and it has been linked to many health problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure and weakened immune function. Statistics prove that city life has stress as a package of life status. The significance of this study is to identify the psycho-social issues related to stress in middle-aged working women at the city level, the related illness and diseases that could be acquired as a result of the stress and its importance to create an awareness of stress-busters. Psycho-social interventions have proven useful for treating stress related disorders.**

**Keywords: Psycho-Social, Stress, Middle Aged**

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## INTRODUCTION

Women face different problems at different age groups. Gender differences led women to bear dual role responsibility, which starts affecting health status in middle age with the onset of physical decline. Working women's problems are of three types viz., environmental, social and psychological. In each of them the problems emerge due to the stained situations at home and work place. In turn they are due to two factors, one is the inner conflict due to dual commitment and concern, and the other is the practical difficulty of combining the dual commitment.

Middle-age problems are termed as mid-life crisis and middle age blues. Mid-life crisis has traditionally been studied and defined in terms of men's experiences and is sometimes generalized to women as well as it is defined for women in relation to the physiological experience of menopause. But mid-life crisis is experienced differently by women not only in relation to menopause and not entirely within the same framework as men. There are many physical and emotional symptoms that appear during menopausal period due to changes in the imbalance of internal hormones. Symptoms vary from woman to woman.

During 40–60 years of age, physical changes clearly appear like gray hair, weak eyesight, fat gain, skin dryness, lack of strength etc. In this period social

changes also take place. Changes in family set-up and responsibility often more negative than positive, directly affect the psycho-social status of women. A study on working women, family environment and mental health indicated that there were significant differences in the family environment and mental health of working and non-working women.

Problems of elderly women are often more discussed than problems of middle aged women. However, the problems whether it is physical, social or psychological took birth in middle age, may emerge in old age. Essential care and some preventive steps if not taken in middle age may result in serious problems with the onset of old age. The present work has been done to focus on the problems of middle-aged women like emotional, physical, familial, social and work place environment etc., which may affect their overall health status.

## OBJECTIVE OF STUDY:

This research is aimed to assess the number of middle aged women in Cochin city undergoing different psychosomatic issues related to stress. Specifically, this research was conducted to identify the underlying causes and levels that stress affect the human body and to identify the salient features of stress and hence determine the respondents' perception and response to the different levels of it.

And based on this regards identify its implication and help women to face stress with a positive attitude and enhance their life.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To explore the influence of Stress in middle aged women.
- To understand the levels at which Stress affect the psycho- social areas.
- To explore the influence of the after-effects of Stress in daily life.
- To learn about responses and hence create an awareness and help women enhance their life.

## RESEARCH DESIGN & PROCEDURE

For the proposed study stratified random sampling was used and the age group is between 35 and 50. A sample of 110 respondents was selected from the universe of the study.

Women laid up for paralysis or accidents, those with an unsound mind, those who are undergoing treatment for serious ailments or terminal illness are not included in this study. Interview, survey, counseling and questionnaire will be the primary source of data and books, previous research reports, periodicals and internet sites are the secondary data for this research. Assessment is made based on stress rating scale.

## PARTICIPANTS

The participants include random working women sample of age groups 35-50 from areas of all major professions like doctors, teachers, counselors, cosmetologists, IT professionals, lawyers, nurses and entrepreneurs.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Higher psychological and physical demands and high self-perceived work stress in all the areas of major professions has taken a toll on the physical, emotional and social life of majority of the working women. Depressive disorders account for close to 41.9% of the disability from psychiatric disorders among women compared to 29.3% among men. Leading depression and brain syndromes in older adults are seen mostly in women. The prevalent rate of violence against women ranges from 16% to 50% according to the WHO. Pressures created by their multiple roles, gender discrimination, over work and domestic violence combine and account for the overall increase in the number of women affected by depression. There is a positive relation between several factors and depression, such as loss,

inferiority and humiliation or entrapment that can predict the occurrence of depression. Statistics show over 20% of those attending primary health care in developing countries suffer from anxiety or depressive disorders as most of them are not recognized and are not treated. Communication between health workers and women patients in many countries are authoritarian, making a woman disclosure of psychological and emotional distress difficult and stigmatized. Gender biases over treat or under treat women.

According to a study published in the journal Psychoneuroendocrinology, women are susceptible to stress hormones as they age. The study found that the impact of cortisol levels is nearly three times stronger for women than for men. According a report from the University of California at San Francisco, extra cortisol over the years can damage the hippocampus, the area related to memories. Several studies have found that high cortisol levels leads to poor memory and "senior moments". A five year study of nearly 800 priests and nuns published in the Journal Neurology highlighted the impact of emotional stress over a period of time, increasing the risk of Alzheimer's disease. A major number of working women use antidepressants and sleeping pills as a stress buster.

A Study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that stress can add years to the age of the individual immune system cells. The telomeres on the end of chromosomes get shorter during the process of aging and stress speeds up the process of aging. Researchers checked both the telomeres and the stress levels of 58 healthy women. On an average the immune system cells of highly stressed women had extra 10 years. Though the exact theory was not explained the conclusion was that stress hormones could be a reason of shortening telomeres and hence cutting the life span of cells. A major number of working women of this universe of study looked older than their biological age.

Stress reduces concentration and ability to focus on a particular task be it at home or at professional level. Stress can negatively affect the entire cardiovascular system and lead to high blood pressure, stroke and heart attack. One of the complicated physical reactions to stress is a weakened immune system. Some studies have suggested a link between stress and the development of breast and ovarian cancer. In a study, researchers found that the risk of breast cancer was increased by 62% in women had experienced more than one highly stressful event. Most common diseases in the sample were PCOD, sleep disorders, high blood pressure, stomach acidity, back pain and migraine headaches.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are different levels of stress. The initial response is fight or flight response which in return creates a fear and tension and the repetition of this adds on to the stress hormones released in the body. The accelerated heart beat and high blood pressure caused due to stress leads to indigestion insomnia and many other psychosomatic disorders. The different psychosomatic disorders and related issues are created as a result of the imbalance created within the body. This study is to explore the effects of stress and the resultant psycho-social issues that it creates in middle aged working women. Working women is the chosen group for study because they are on the upper hand of facing more hindrance in creating a balance within the body and in the surrounding than the non-working women.

Skinner and Pocock (2008) investigated the relationship between work overload, work schedule control, work hours and their fit with preferences and work life conflict among full-time employees (N = 887). It was found that the "strong association with work-life conflict was demonstrated by work overload, followed by work schedule control, work hours and work hours fit. Time-based work life policies, procedures and interventions were found necessary, but not sufficient, for addressing work-life conflict. They called for effective management of work overload to support work-life relationship."

Ahmad and Aminah (2007) examined the work – family conflict experienced by 239 married female production operators in dual career families, the social support they received and the coping strategies used to manage the conflict. "The women experienced more work interference with family than family interference with work. The intensity of work interference with family was significantly higher in the earlier life cycle stage than the later stage. About two – thirds of the women indicated that they intended to leave their job upon having another child mainly due to the rising cost of child care services. They received the least social support from their supervisors compared to other sources, and tended to cope with conflict using reactive role behavior and personal role redefinition strategies.

Gunavathy and Suganya (2007) in their study among married women employees of BPO companies traced the causes, consequences of work-life imbalance and interventions for work-life balance. More than two-third of the respondents stated the experienced work life imbalance primarily on account of work interfere with personal life. The causes for work life imbalance were classified as organizational and personal factors. The organizational factors included work related factors, time related factors and relationship related factors. The personal factors included lack of family

support, marital conflicts and frequent change in sleeping patterns. According to the study, "the three main consequences of work life imbalance were stress and burn out, ill health and poor work performance. The respondents also experienced guilt of not being able to spend time with family, anxiety about poor performance, displacement of negative emotions on family members and co-workers."

## CONCLUSION

The sheer increase in the rates of women attending counseling centers and increased consumption of medication for anxiety and depression has invoked the necessity of creating an awareness to the general public the need of controlling emotions and creating a balance within the mind and body. The relationship between psycho-social stressors and diseases is affected by the nature and persistence of stressors as well as the individuals vulnerability which includes the genetics and constitutional factors and psycho-social resources and the way they cope with them. Since the middle aged women need lots of support and emotional stability, hence the selected group is in this criteria. The tensions and stress levels differ in different areas especially urban and cities. Statistics prove that city life has stress as a part of life. Hence the selected location is Cochin city, the most popular city of the south. Psycho-social interventions and creating awareness among women have been proved effective in reducing the after-effects of stress.

Researchers say that people with positive attitudes may deal with stress better and have a stronger will to live. As reported by the American Psychological Association, social support can prevent stress and stress related diseases. An article published in the American Journal of Health Promotion notes that social support can slow down the flow of stress hormones in seniors and thereby can improve longevity of life. Exercise and life style has been proven stress busters. Exercise can actually block the effects of aging on cortisol levels. The American Psychological Association reports that reducing stress in later years can help prevent disabilities and trips to hospitals. Creating an awareness and consciousness on one's health, hidden aggregations caused as a result of stress, the timely interference of stress busters and stress management techniques such as yoga, meditation and other social activities definitely helps curtail the effects of stress and the related psycho-social issues.

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