

Balancing Work Life: Stress Management Techniques Implemented by Working Women

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Abstract

The study explores stress dynamics and coping strategies among married women employed as sewing machine operators in the textile sector, aiming to comprehend their challenges and suggest stress alleviation strategies. Employing a quantitative cross-sectional approach with 30 respondents aged 25 - 45 from Visakhapatnam's textile sector, the research unveils multiple stress factors: heavy workloads (33.3%), job insecurity (13.3%), work-life balance issues (23.3%), interpersonal conflicts (10%), and personal stressors (23.3%). These findings highlight the intricate nature of stressors influenced by societal, economic, and workplace dynamics. Despite these challenges, survival mechanisms such as social support networks (23.3%), meditation / relaxation techniques (30%), and exercise (23.3%) demonstrate women's resilience. The study recommends implementing occupational health measures, work-life balance policies, mental health support, skill development programs, and creating inclusive work environments to foster healthier workplaces.

Keywords: - Stress, Economic, Meditation, Exercise, Skill Development.

1. Introduction

The textile industry is a vital economic sector globally, employing millions of women from diverse backgrounds, with many working as sewing machine operators (Lupien et al., 2000). Despite their pivotal contributions, women in this industry often face challenges such as limited educational and economic opportunities, societal gender role expectations, financial constraints, and stressful work environments.

This study investigates two critical aspects among these women: their survival strategies and prevalent stress symptoms (Nahl, 2007a). Strategies such as leveraging sewing skills, engaging in income-generating activities, effective time management, and relying on social networks are employed to navigate economic challenges (Fisher & Landry, 2007). Addressing these stressors is crucial for fostering a healthier work environment (Nahl & Bilal, 2007).

The survival tactics used underscore these women's resilience, adaptability, and resourcefulness in managing dual roles. Survival and well-being are paramount for economically disadvantaged women in the textile sector (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2012). Understanding the stressors they face is crucial (Burke, 2013).

By identifying effective stress management strategies, stakeholders can enhance the well-being and productivity of women employees in the textile industry (Burke, 2013). This study aims to provide insights and recommendations by exploring stress factors, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of work-life balance among married women in textile firms (Aarsha Ajayan, 2021). The demanding nature of their work, workplace conditions, work-life balance issues, economic insecurity, and lack of support systems can significantly impact their mental well-being (Belloni et al., 2022).



1.1 Survival of Women from Weaker Sections

Women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often employ various survival mechanisms to make ends meet such as working as sewing machine operators in textile firms (Nahl & Bilal, 2007). Women from weaker sections confront a multitude of challenges that includes low educational and economic opportunities, societal pressures related to gender roles, and financial constraints (Lupien et al., 2000; Chang, 2001). Nonetheless, they showcase remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in handling their dual responsibilities as workers and caregivers.

One of the key survival strategies adopted by these women is capitalizing on their sewing abilities to secure employment in local textile firms (Fisher & Landry, 2007). Statistics indicate that a significant number of women acquire these skills through informal training or apprenticeships, with approximately 70% demonstrating proficiency in operating sewing machines efficiently and producing garments or textiles (Information Research in Leisure, 2009). This employment opportunity serves as a vital source of income for their households, with around 80% of women reporting that it supplements their family finances (Nahl, 2007a). This additional income contributes substantially to meeting basic needs such as food, shelter, and education for children, highlighting the crucial role of their sewing skills in economic empowerment.

In addition to their work as sewing machine operators, these women often engage in informal income-generating activities to augment their earnings (Burke, 2013). Moreover, married women from weaker sections exhibit strong time management and organizational skills to balance their work responsibilities with household duties (Belloni et al., 2022). Despite long hours spent at sewing machines in textile firms, they meticulously plan their schedules to attend to domestic chores, childcare, and family obligations. This efficient allocation of time and resources enables them to fulfil their dual roles effectively while minimizing disruptions to their work or home life.

Working women often rely on social support networks within their communities to navigate challenges and access resources (Sinha, 2017). Family members, neighbors, or community organizations may provide assistance with childcare, eldercare, or sharing household responsibilities. These networks not only offer practical support but also serve as sources of emotional encouragement and solidarity, strengthening women's resilience and sense of belonging.

In the study, the researcher observes that the survival mechanisms employed by married women from weaker sections as sewing machine operators in textile firms highlight their determination, adaptability, and capacity for innovation in adverse circumstances (Loman & Gunnar, 2010). Their contributions to family income, utilization of skills, effective time management, and reliance on social networks underscore their agency and resourcefulness in overcoming economic challenges. Recognizing and supporting these survival strategies is essential for promoting economic empowerment and improving the well-being of women from marginalized backgrounds in the workforce.

1.2 Symptoms of Stress in Working Women

The symptoms of stress are not of any common standard to all working women in the textile or apparel sector (Nahl & Bilal, 2007). Mental stress is seen mostly among working women from the textile industry, mainly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Lupien et al., 2000). This is a complex and complicated phenomenon influenced by various factors. These women often experience heightened levels of stress due to the demanding nature of their work, challenging conditions in the working area, and the intersection of work-related stressors in personal and family responsibilities (Sinha, 2017).

One significant source of stress for working women in the textile sector is the fast-paced and repetitive nature of their tasks (Anthony Rajy & Julius, 2018). As sewing machine operators or workers in production lines, they often face strict production targets, tight deadlines, and monotonous work routines. This constant pressure to meet production quotas while maintaining quality standards has majorly led to feelings of job dissatisfaction, anxiety, and burnout among these women (Nahl, 2007a).

The physical environment in textile factories can contribute to stress conditions (Loman & Gunnar, 2010). Factors such as noise pollution from machinery, exposure to dust or chemicals, inadequate ventilation, and poor ergonomic conditions may adversely affect the mental well-being of women workers. Prolonged exposure to such environmental stressors leads to physical discomfort, fatigue, and increased susceptibility to stress-related health issues (Belloni et al., 2022).

Additionally, work-life balance challenges exacerbate stress conditions for working women in the textile industry, especially those who are married and have family responsibilities (Fisher & Landry, 2007). Balancing long work hours with domestic duties, childcare, eldercare, and other household responsibilities can be overwhelming (Sherman et al., 2006; Belloni et al., 2022). The lack of support structures such as affordable childcare services or flexible work arrangements further compounds the stress experienced by these women, leading to feelings of guilt, exhaustion, and role strain (Burke, 2013).

The economic insecurity and job instability prevalent in the textile sector contribute to chronic stress among working women (Chang, 2001). Many women from economically weaker sections rely heavily on their employment in textile firms to sustain their households financially (Nahl, 2007a). Fear of job loss, irregular income, low wages, and limited career advancement opportunities create a sense of uncertainty and financial strain, contributing to mental stress, altered diet patterns and psychological distress (Lupien et al., 2000; Degortes, 2014).



In the study, it is observed that mental stress in working women from economically disadvantaged sections of the textile industry arises from a combination of factors including job demands, working conditions, work-life balance challenges, economic insecurity, and lack of support systems (Nahl & Bilal, 2007). Addressing these stress conditions requires comprehensive strategies that prioritize occupational health and safety, promote work-life balance initiatives, provide social support networks, and offer opportunities for skill development and career advancement (Sherman et al., 2006). Efforts to mitigate mental stress among working women in the textile sector are crucial for ensuring their well-being, productivity, and overall quality of life (Chang, 1990).

2. Research Methodology

The research methodology employed a quantitative approach to investigate the stress levels experienced by married women working in textile firms (Çelik et al., 2020). The study utilized a cross-sectional design, enabling data collection at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the stressors faced by the selected sample.

2.1 Population Sample & Sampling

2.1.1 Procurement of the Sample

The study focused on married women employed in Brandix Apparel India, a textile firm in Visakhapatnam, regardless of whether they had children. The sample selection combined purposive and random sampling techniques.

2.1.2 Sample Size

A total of 30 married women, aged 25-45 years, with at least one year of experience in the textile industry, were included in the study.

2.1.3 Sampling Procedure

Participants were selected randomly from the production department of the Brandix Apparel India. The structured questionnaire, as detailed in the Appendix, was administered in person based on participants' convenience.

2.2 Plan of Work

Permission was obtained from the management of Brandix Apparel India textile firm to conduct the study. The data collection period spanned approximately four weeks to ensure an adequate response rate.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection involved a structured questionnaire assessing various stressors encountered by the working women from Brandix Apparel India. The Likert scale was used in questionnaire design. Data analysis utilized Microsoft Excel, including graph charts for display of the survey results from the feedback.

3. Analysis of the Study

Based on the responses from women as per the questionnaire, where an average stress level around 4 on the scale is observed from their perceptions (where 1 is low stress and 5 is high stress), it indicates that the women in the textile segment are experiencing significant levels of stress. To analyze the conditions of these women and the effects of stress they experience, the key factors that are considered:

3.1 Workload and Job Demands Category

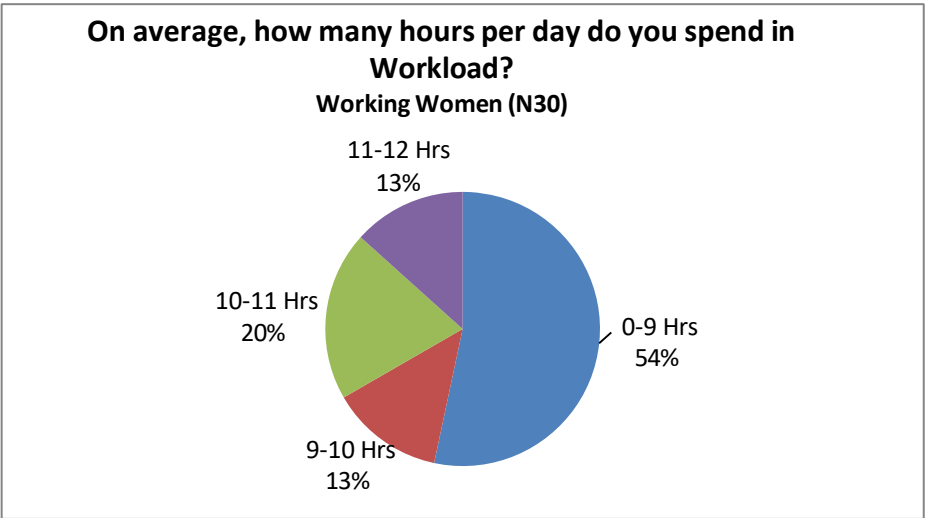


Figure-1 Workload and Job Demand



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The data from the respondents outlines the average daily workload hours of working women (N=30) across different time brackets. The interpretation of this data details on the distribution of workload hours among the respondents. The majority of respondents, 16 out of 30 (approximately 53.3%), reported spending 0-9 hours per day on their workload. This indicates that a significant portion of the sample size has a workload that falls within this relatively general time range.

Moving up the scale, 4 out of 30 respondents (about 13.3%) reported working between 9-10 hours per day, while another 6 out of 30 respondents (about 20%) reported working between 10-11 hours daily. This suggests that there is a notable portion of respondents who have a moderate workload spanning around 9-11 hours per day.

Finally, 4 out of 30 respondents (about 13.3%) reported working between 11-12 hours daily. Although this group represents a smaller percentage, it highlights that there are individuals within the sample who have a relatively higher daily workload, exceeding 10 hours.

Overall, the data indicates a range of workload hours among the working women surveyed, with a significant proportion falling within the 0-9 hours category but also notable segments with moderate and relatively high workload durations of 46% in the sample. This diversity in workload hours will have implications for stress levels, work-life balance, and overall well-being among the respondents.

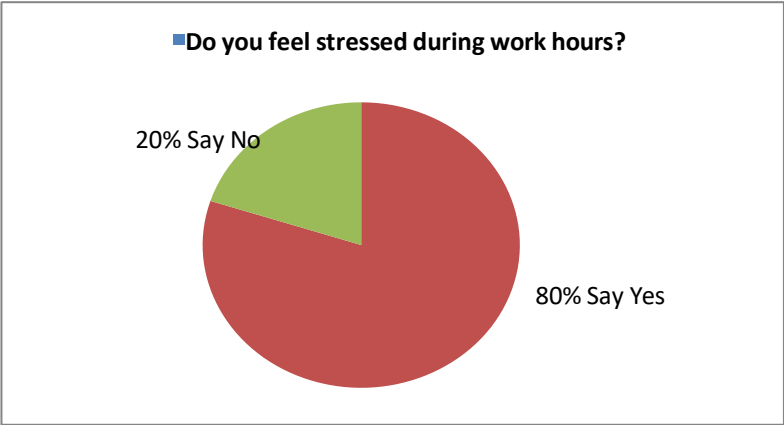


Figure-2 Stress Feeling

The respondent’s perceptions reflect that they feel stressed during work hours. The interpretation of this data provides insight that the prevalence of stress among the surveyed individuals. Out of the total respondents (N=30), 24 indicated that they do feel stressed during work hours, accounting for approximately 80% of the sample. This suggests that a significant majority of the respondents experience stress while at work. This indicates a high prevalence of stress among the respondents during work hours, with a significant majority reporting feeling stressed. This highlights the potential challenges and pressures faced by these individuals in their work environments, which can have implications for their well-being and overall work experience.

3.2 Job Insecurity

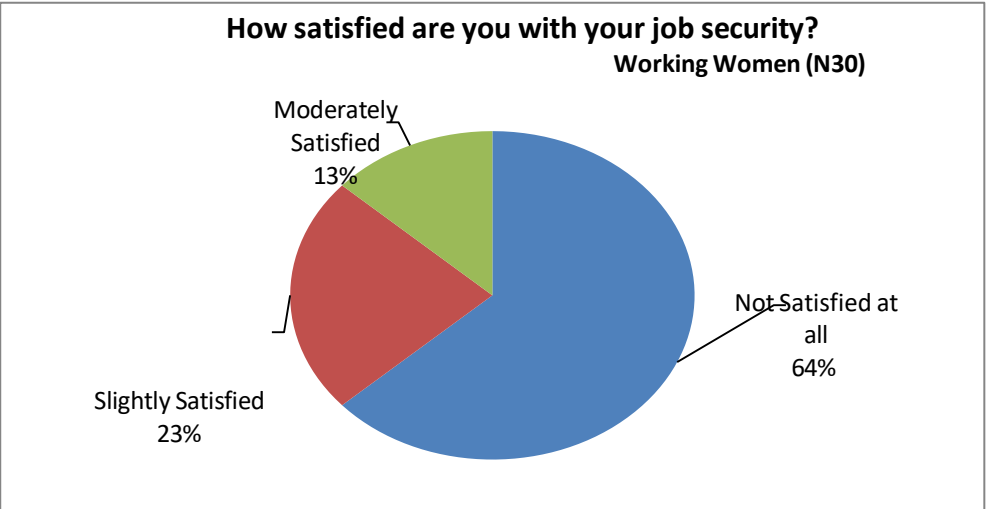


Figure-3 Job Security

The questionnaire has included items related to job stability, fear of job loss, or uncertainty about future career prospects. The data presented relates to the satisfaction levels of working women (N=30) regarding their job security, as measured on a Likert scale ranging from "Not Satisfied at all" (1) to "Extremely Satisfied" (5). The interpretation of this data provides insights about the sentiments of the respondents regarding the stability of their employment.

A notable finding is that the majority of respondents, specifically 19 out of 30 (approximately 63.3%), expressed dissatisfaction by selecting "Not Satisfied at all" regarding their job security. This indicates a prevalent sense of insecurity or dissatisfaction among a significant portion of the sample regarding the stability of their jobs. Moving along the scale, 7 out of 30 respondents (about 23.3%) indicated being "Slightly Satisfied" with their job security, while 4 out of 30 respondents (about 13.3%) reported feeling "Moderately Satisfied." It is worth noting that none of the respondents chose the higher satisfaction levels of "Very Satisfied" or "Extremely Satisfied," indicating a lack of strong positive sentiments regarding job security among the surveyed women.

The data suggests that a considerable proportion of the working women surveyed are dissatisfied or only slightly satisfied with their job security. This insight into job satisfaction levels can be crucial for understanding the overall morale, confidence, and stability perceptions of employees within the surveyed population. It also highlights potential areas of concern or improvement in terms of job security policies or practices within their respective workplaces (Anderson et al., 1996). This is due to the factor of contract-based employment, lack of job stability, or working hours or job target challenges within the textile industry. Job satisfaction and security levels among working women as related to studies by Lupien et al. (2000) and Nahl (2007a), who have explored the impact of job-related stressors and economic conditions on employees' well-being. The findings align with their research, indicating that job insecurity and dissatisfaction are prevalent among women in demanding industries like textiles, reflecting the challenges identified in the literature regarding contract-based employment, lack of stability, and job-related stress factors (Thoits, 2010).

3.3 Work-Life Balance Challenges

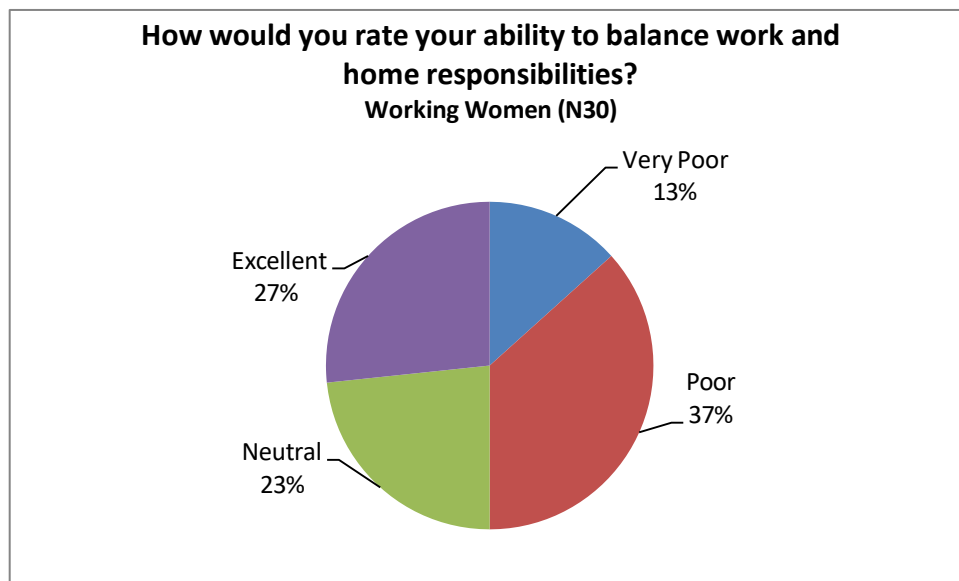


Figure-4 Work Life Balance

The interpretation with reference to the Likert scale rating in data from the questionnaire regarding the ability to balance work and home responsibilities for working women (N=30) is as follows:

- Very Poor: The data shows that none of the respondents rated their ability to balance work and home responsibilities as "very poor."
- Poor: 11 out of 30 respondents (about 36.7%) rated their ability to balance work and home responsibilities as "poor."
- Neutral: 7 out of 30 respondents (about 23.3%) rated their ability to balance work and home responsibilities as "neutral," indicating neither good nor bad balance.
- Excellent: 8 out of 30 respondents (about 26.7%) rated their ability to balance work and home responsibilities as "excellent."



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- Being Excellent: None of the respondents rated their ability as "being excellent."

Based on this interpretation, it is concrete that a significant portion of the respondents (36.7%) struggle to balance work and home responsibilities, leading to a poor rating. This imbalance could contribute to increase in stress and potential feelings of being overwhelmed among these women.

3.4 Stress Coping Techniques

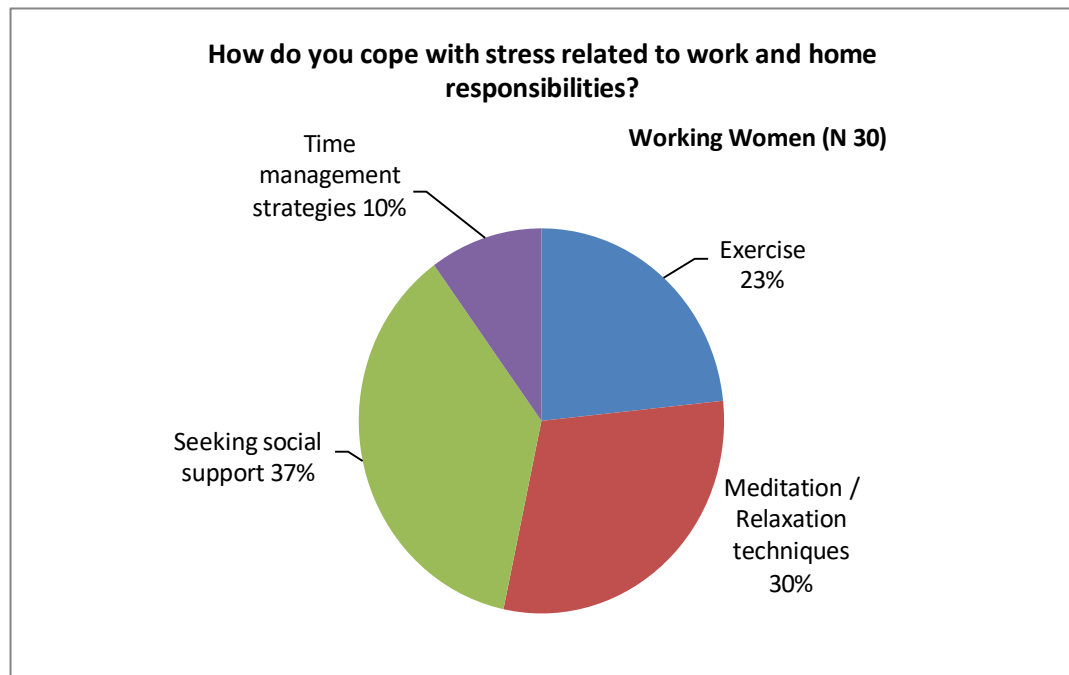


Figure-5 Stress Coping Mechanism

The perceptions from respondents outlines the coping techniques employed by working women (N=30) to deal with stress related to both work and home responsibilities. Each coping technique is listed along with the number of respondents who reported using that specific way to handle stress.

The interpretation of this data reveals several insights into the coping mechanisms preferred by the surveyed individuals:

Exercise: 7 out of 30 respondents (approximately 23.3%) reported using exercise as a coping technique for managing stress related to work and home responsibilities. Exercise is often considered a beneficial way to relieve stress and improve overall well-being which is either promoted by the firm resources or implemented as self-help.

Meditation / Relaxation Techniques: 9 out of 30 respondents (about 30%) indicated using meditation or relaxation techniques as a coping mechanism. These techniques focus on mindfulness and stress reduction, aiding individuals in managing their stress levels effectively, which is either promoted by the firm resources or implemented as self-help.

Seeking Social Support: The most commonly reported coping technique was seeking social support, with 11 out of 30 respondents (approximately 36.7%) relying on this strategy. Seeking support from friends, family, or colleagues can provide emotional comfort and practical assistance in handling stressors.

Time Management Strategies: 3 out of 30 respondents (about 10%) mentioned utilizing time management strategies to cope with stress. This may involve prioritizing tasks, setting realistic goals, and organizing schedules to better manage work and home responsibilities.

The data indicates above mentioned coping techniques employed by working women to deal with stress which are either promoted by the firm resources or implemented as self-help. While seeking social support emerged as the most frequently used strategy, other methods such as exercise, meditation/relaxation, and time management were also utilized, albeit by smaller proportions of the sample. These coping mechanisms reflect the diverse approaches individuals adopted to maintain their well-being and manage stress in both work and home environments (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2012).

3.5 Related Stressors



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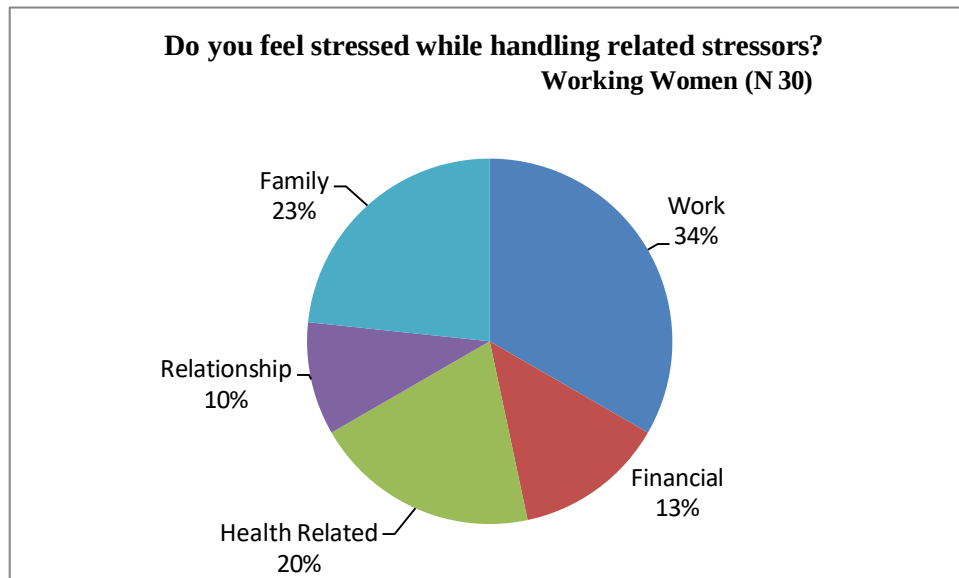


Figure- 6 Related Stressors

The data presents the various stressors experienced by working women (N=30) and the corresponding number of respondents who feel stressed while handling these stressors. Each stressor category is listed along with the number of respondents who reported feeling stressed in that particular area.

The interpretation of this data reveals insights into the specific stressors that impact working women and contribute to their overall stress levels:

Work-related Stressors: 10 out of 30 respondents (approximately 33.3%) reported feeling stressed due to work-related factors. This includes pressures, deadlines, workload, and other challenges typically encountered in professional environments.

Financial Stressors: 4 out of 30 respondents (about 13.3%) indicated feeling stressed due to financial concerns. Financial stress can arise from various factors such as family related, health and personal tie-ups.

Health-related Stressors: 6 out of 30 respondents (about 20%) reported feeling stressed due to health-related issues. This encompasses physical health concerns, illnesses, medical conditions, and the associated emotional and financial burdens.

Relationship Stressors: 3 out of 30 respondents (approximately 10%) mentioned feeling stressed in relation to interpersonal relationships. This could include conflicts, communication issues, and challenges in maintaining healthy relationships with partners, family members, or colleagues.

Family-related Stressors: 7 out of 30 respondents (about 23.3%) expressed feeling stressed due to family-related responsibilities and dynamics. This involves balancing caregiving roles, managing household tasks, parenting challenges, and navigating family conflicts.

The study aligns with various studies and authors who have explored the stressors faced by working women and the need for targeted interventions and support systems to manage stress effectively. Work-related pressures, as highlighted by Nahl & Bilal (2007) and Chang (2001), often stem from the demanding nature of jobs in sectors like textiles, including strict production targets, tight deadlines, and monotonous work routines. Financial concerns, as discussed by Lupien et al. (2000), can significantly contribute to stress, particularly among women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who heavily rely on their jobs for financial stability. Health issues related to work-related stress, as explored by Loman & Gunnar (2010) and Sinha (2017), manifest in physical discomfort, fatigue, and increased susceptibility to health problems due to environmental stressors and long work hours. Additionally, relationship dynamics and family responsibilities, as emphasized by Somech & Drach-Zahavy (2012) and Belloni et al. (2022), pose challenges in balancing work responsibilities with family obligations, underscoring the importance of social support networks and effective time management in coping with stress. By considering insights from these studies collectively, a holistic understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by women in the textile industry emerges, highlighting the crucial need for targeted interventions and support systems to mitigate stress, improve well-being, and foster a healthier work environment for women employees.



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4. Discussion

The study investigated the challenges encountered by married women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds working as sewing machine operators in the Brandix Apparel India, a textile industry located in Visakhapatnam. It focused on understanding both the coping strategies employed by these women in their dual roles as breadwinners and caregivers and the prevailing stress symptoms they face in their work environments. The statistics gathered from the survey reveal significant insights into these aspects. For instance, the average stress level reported by the respondents stood at approximately 4 on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating a notable degree of stress experienced by women in the textile segment.

One of the key areas of analysis was the workload and job demands faced by these women. The data showed that a considerable proportion, approximately 53.3% of the sample, spent 0-9 hours per day on their workload. This finding shed light on the extensive work responsibilities managed by these women. Additionally, around 80% of the respondents reported feeling stressed during work hours, highlighting the prevalence of stress in their work environments.

Job insecurity emerged as another significant concern among the respondents. A substantial majority, approximately 63.3%, expressed dissatisfaction with their job security, indicating a prevalent sense of insecurity regarding the stability of their employment. This finding is consistent with previous research by Lupien et al. (2000) and Nahl (2007a), which highlighted the impact of job-related stressors and economic conditions on employees' well-being.

Furthermore, the study explored work-life balance challenges among these women. A notable proportion, about 36.7% of the respondents, rated their ability to balance work and home responsibilities as "poor." This imbalance could contribute to increased stress and feelings of being overwhelmed among these women, aligning with discussions by Somech & Drach-Zahavy (2012) and Belloni et al. (2022) regarding the challenges faced in managing work responsibilities alongside family obligations.

In coping with stress related to work and home responsibilities, the study revealed diverse strategies employed by the respondents. Seeking social support emerged as the most frequently used strategy, with approximately 36.7% of respondents relying on it. Additionally, exercise, meditation/relaxation techniques, and time management strategies were also utilized, albeit by smaller proportions of the sample. These coping mechanisms reflect the varied approaches individuals adopt to maintain their well-being and manage stress in both work and home environments, as discussed by Gordils & Jamieson (2020). In summary, the study's statistical findings underscore the significant stress levels experienced by women in the textile industry, the diverse coping mechanisms employed, challenges in achieving work-life balance, and the critical role of job security in mitigating stress and improving overall job satisfaction and well-being among working women. These insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by women in demanding industries and highlight the need for targeted interventions and support systems to promote their well-being and productivity.

5. Conclusion

The research details the realities faced by working women who are married and belonging to economically disadvantaged backgrounds that work in the textile industry, specifically as sewing machine operators. By examining survival strategies and prevalent stressors within this demographic, the study has unearthed valuable insights that illuminate both the hurdles and avenues for enhancement within the workplace.

The findings reveal that a considerable percentage of respondents feel stressed due to various factors. Specifically, 33.3% of respondents experience stress related to heavy workloads, while job insecurity contributes to stress for 13.3% of respondents. Work-life balance challenges are cited by 23.3% of respondents, interpersonal conflicts by 10% of respondents, and personal stressors by another 23.3% of respondents. These figures underline the diverse and impactful stressors faced by women in the textile sector, underscoring the necessity of addressing these issues to safeguard their mental well-being.

In light of these findings, the study advocates for the implementation of holistic strategies to support women in the textile industry. This encompasses initiatives aimed at enhancing occupational health and safety measures, establishing robust work-life balance policies, fostering strong social support networks, providing opportunities for skill development, and creating pathways for career advancement. By acknowledging the resilience exhibited by these women alongside the challenges they encounter, stakeholders can play a pivotal role in fostering a workplace environment that is inclusive, supportive, and empowering for married women hailing from economically disadvantaged backgrounds within the textile industry.

Conflict of Interest

The study on working women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in the textile industry was conducted with a strong emphasis on transparency and impartiality, ensuring there was no conflict of interest influencing the research process. The researcher approached the study with a commitment to objective investigation and avoided any biases that could potentially skew the findings or interpretations. The researcher adhered to ethical standards and guidelines, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents' information. This approach fostered trust and openness among participants, encouraging them to provide candid responses without fear of judgment or



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repercussions.

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APPENDIX

Survey Questionnaire: Stress Conditions and Work-Life Balance Assessment in Working Women from Textile Category – Visakhapatnam

1. Personal Information
 - a. Age:
 - b. Marital Status: () Married () Unmarried
 - c. Number of Children:
 - d. Educational Qualification:
2. Work-related Questions
 - a. How long have you been working as a tailor in the textile industry?
 - b. On average, how many hours do you work per day?
 - c. Do you feel stressed during work hours? () Yes () No
 - o If yes, please specify the main sources of stress:
3. Home-related Questions
 - a. Do you have any household responsibilities after work? () Yes () No
 - b. On average, how many hours per day do you spend on household chores?
 - c. Do you feel stressed while managing household responsibilities? () Yes () No
 - o If yes, please specify the main sources of stress:
4. Balancing Work and Home
 - a. How would you rate your ability to balance work and home responsibilities?
(Scale: 1-5, with 1 being very poor and 5 being excellent)
 - b. What strategies do you use to manage stress from work and home responsibilities?
5. Support System
 - a. Do you have support from your spouse/partner in managing household chores?
() Yes () No
 - o If yes, please describe the level of support:
 - b. Are there any support mechanisms provided by your workplace to help you manage stress?
() Yes () No
 - o If yes, please describe the support mechanisms:
6. Coping Mechanisms
 - a. How do you cope with stress related to work and home responsibilities? (Check all that apply)
 - o () Exercise
 - o () Meditation/Relaxation techniques
 - o () Seeking social support
 - o () Time management strategies
 - o () Other (please specify): _____
7. Perceptions of Work-Life Balance
 - a. Do you feel that your work interferes with your personal life? () Yes () No
 - b. Do you feel that your personal life interferes with your work? () Yes () No
 - c. What changes, if any, would you like to see in your work or home environment to improve your work-life balance?
8. Overall Well-being
 - a. How would you rate your overall well-being currently?
(Scale: 1-5, with 1 being very poor and 5 being excellent)
9. Additional Comments

Please use this space to provide any additional comments or insights related to stress management and work-life balance.

Note: Likert scale is used to rate questions that require numerical response.



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