Problems and Challenges Faced by Urban Working Women in Thoothukudi

Ms. P. Anuradha
Assistant Professor (SSC)
Department of Economics
St. Mary's College (Autonomous)
Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu

Abstract

The main objective of the study was to understand the problems and issues faced by urban working women in India. The objectives also included identifying the key socio-economic attributes contributing to women's status, safety and security, and to study women's involvement in various activities/ organizations for improving of family, community and society. The results of the study showed that different age group of working women have different kinds of problems and challenges and different categories as married, single, divorcee, single parent, separated, have different issues at stake in the workplace. Some problems are definitely common, like mental and physical stress, lack of proper balance between employment and family care, unfair treatment in the workplace, stressful life and work place discrimination etc. The study was confined to the urban working women in white collared jobs in the city of Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, India.

Keywords: Physical Stress, Mental Stress, Discrimination, Self-Reluctant.

Introduction

In the history of human development, women have been as vital in the history making as men have been. In fact, higher status for women vis-à-vis employment and work performed by them in a society is a significant indicator of a nation's overall progress. Undoubtedly, without the active participation of women in national activities, the social, economic or political progress of a country will deteriorate and become stagnant. But ironically and tragically, women employees in general, are not taken very seriously by their superiors, colleagues, or society at large. It is having a career poses challenges for women due to their family responsibilities. Traditionally, Indian women had been home makers but in the recent decades, proper education and better awareness, in addition to the ever increasing cost of living has made them to go out and choose careers. In a patriarchal society like India it is still believed that a man is the primary bread

winner of his family. It is generally perceived that gender bias against working women starts right from the stage of recruitment. Most of the Indian men are not ready to accept that women are capable enough to work side by side with men in all the sectors, other than in a few limited ones like teaching, nursing and in clerical sectors. Moreover, their capabilities are generally underestimated as a result of which, Indian women have a tendency to opt for less demanding jobs even if they are highly qualified. Women have the responsibilities to effectively manage their multiple roles in domestic as well as professional lives. Also, men generally do not offer any help in the household work. This makes the life of working women extremely stressful.

Literature Review

Burke, Koyuncu and Fiksenbaumin in 2006 examined the relationship of the perceived presence of organizational practices designed to support women's career advancement and their work attitudes and satisfaction and their psychological well-being. Data were collected from 286 women in managerial and professional jobs working in a large Turkish bank, a 72 percent response rate. Another research study by Ali, investigated the challenges facing women in career development. She found that most of the women employees were dissatisfied with career development programmers and women were discriminated against in career development opportunities. The study recommended that organizations should strive to ensure that career development programmers were set to enhance career development amongst women employees. Furthermore, the top management should also be committed to the career development of women, and organizations should also introduce affirmative action to urgently address career development of women (Ali, 2011).

Need & Significance

Educated urban women are presumed to be more aware of the opportunities and challenges of the workplace or educated urban women can better understand their roles and limitations in the workplaces and are perceived to be bold enough to develop their own personalities, with or without encouragement from their families. An assessment of the problems and issues plaguing urban working women is therefore a necessity for better understanding of workplace dynamics related to women. It is during earlier days there were some man-made boundaries for women but now women play vital roles in different sectors. Women today are breaking that boundary and are playing the dual role of balancing domestic life as well as professional life, giving a boost to their societal status in the process. The major problems for working women arise out of the dual responsibilities of the working woman - domestic work as well as office work.

Objectives

- To gain knowledge about the problems and challenges faced by urban working women in the workplace
- To identify the key socio-economic pointers contributing to women's status, safety and security

Scope

The study is exploratory in nature and seeks to identify the problems and challenges faced by urban women in different professional sectors like public sector enterprises, banks, schools and colleges, hospitals, commercial organizations, etc. Furthermore, the study also aims also at finding out the organizational supports for women employees so that the women employees are able to give their best to their organization and are able to reach their fullest potential. The present study surveyed only urban women employees in white collar jobs who have been in their jobs for atleast six months.

Methodology

The samples are selected using convenient sampling. The study is based on primary data collected through questionnaire method from 100 working women Thoothukudi city to find out the possible solutions that could help them to overcome the problems that they face in the workplace. Also, mixed method approach involving face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaire technique including both close-ended and open-ended questions have been chosen for effective elicitation of data from the respondents. In addition to this, triangulation method has been adopted for establishing validity and reliability of the study.

Results & Interpretation

Table 1: Distribution of Time Taken for Women to Get Promoted as Compared to their Male Colleagues

Particulars	No. of respondents
Equal time	57
Longer	23
Earlier	20

Source: Primary Data

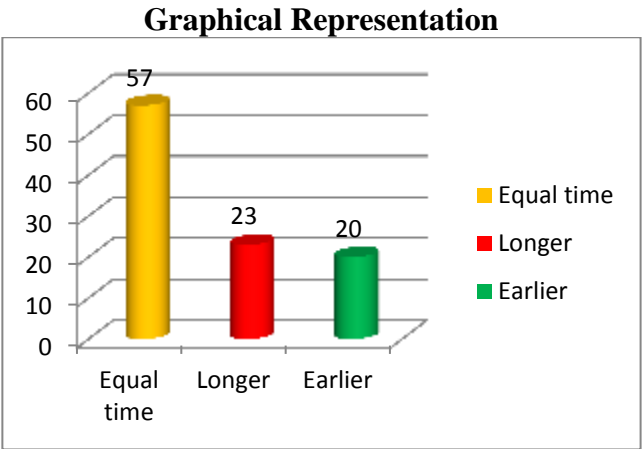**Graphical Representation**

Fig. 1

The table-1 and fig.1 reveals 57 percent of female employees were promoted at the same time irrespective of their gender, 20 percent women were promoted earlier than their male colleagues and 23 percent took longer than their male peers**.** The above data reflects that gender bias related to promotions do not prevail much in the working atmosphere.

Table 2: Distribution of Attitude of Boss towards Female Colleagues as Perceived by Women Employees

Particulars	No. of respondents
Co-operative	48
Neutral	25
Abusive	27

Source: Primary Data
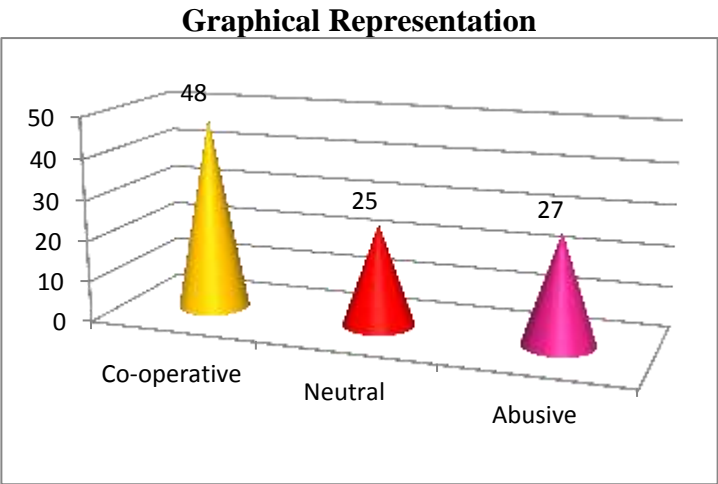
Graphical Representation

Fig. 2

Table 2 and Fig.2 shows 25 percent female agreed that their boss attitude towards them were neutral, 48 percent women said that their boss was co-operative with them and 27 percent women said their boss attitude towards them were abusive.

Table 3: Distribution of Perception of Prevalence of Sexual Harassment or Under-Estimation on the Basis of Gender

Particulars	No of Respondents
Yes	63
No	37

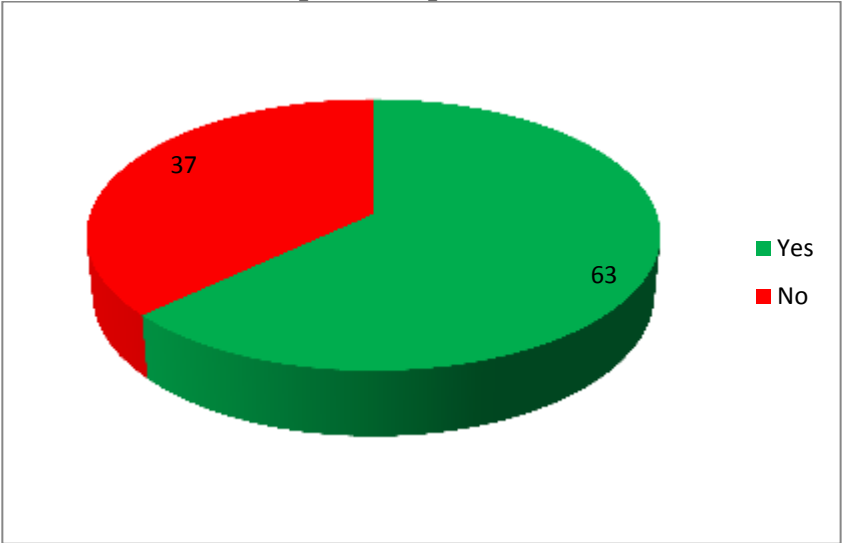*Source: Primary Data*

Graphical Representation

Fig. 3

Table 3 indicates 63 percent of females agreed that sometimes they felt hesitant to work with male colleagues and 37 percent said that they were not comfortable with male colleagues. The reason for such high percentage of women not feeling comfortable working with their male colleagues could be their lack of self-confidence, or the inherent distrust for men in our society, reinforced down the years by negative experiences and general awareness.

Table 4: Distribution of Experience of Sexual Abuse at Workplace

Particulars	No. of Respondents
Yes	29
No	71

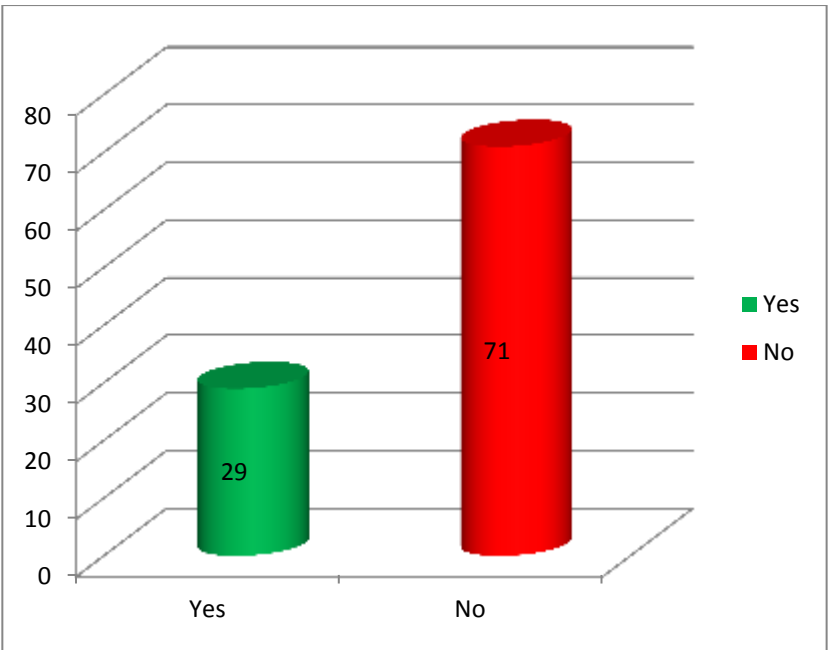*Source: Primary Data*

Graphical Representation

Fig. 4

According to the above table and figure 84 percent women said that they had not faced any kind of sexual abuse at their workplace, but a good 16 percent women agreed to have faced sexual abuse at workplace.

Table 5: Distribution of Women in General Feel that People Respect them in their Workplace

Particulars	No. of Respondents
Depression	13
Mental Pressure	24
Gender Discrimination	36
Sexual Harassment	13
Others	14

Source: Primary Data
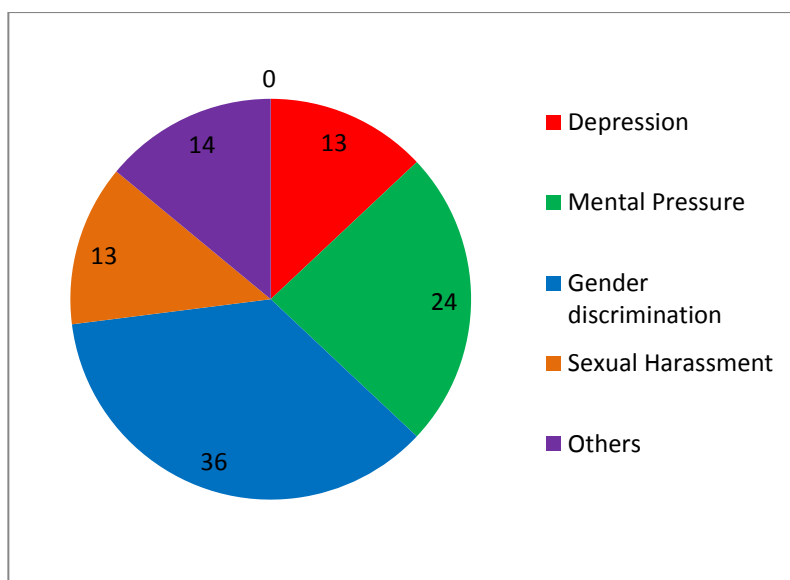
Graphical Representation

Fig. 5

Table 5 and fig 5 indicates that most important problems faced by working women are due to mental stress that includes jealousy, rivalry, gossip, character assassination etc. and other workplace problems like physical stress, lack of child-care support, rigid workplace timings, and insufficient salary as per qualifications etc.

Findings

a) 57 percent of female employees were promoted at the same time irrespective of their gender, 20 percent women were promoted earlier than their male colleagues and 23 percent took longer than their male peers**.**

b) 25 percent female agreed that their boss attitude towards them were neutral, 48 percent women said that their boss was co-operative with them and 27 percent women said their boss attitude towards them were abusive.

c) 63 percent of females agreed that sometimes they felt hesitant to work with male colleagues and 37 percent said that they were not comfortable with male colleagues.

d) 84 percent women said that they had not faced any kind of sexual abuse at their workplace, but a good 16 percent women agreed to have faced sexual abuse at workplace.

e) 36 percent of female employees are gender discrimination, 24 percent of the respondents are got mental pressure and 13 percent of the respondents are depressed and sexual harassment respectively.

Discussion

The questionnaire consisted of 16 close ended and 4 open ended questions to meet the objectives of the study. The items in the questionnaire included urban working women issues related key parameters like sexual and mental harassment, promotion issues, family care issues, discrimination based on gender, workplace discrimination and prejudices, safety and security issues, etc.

Limitations

1. The study area is confined to one small township. Hence, results of this study are applicable only to similar kind of situation and analysis.
2. The result may not be valid for over a longer period of time due to fast changing socio-economic and socio-cultural setting in this study area.
3. It is due to paucity of time and accessibility other resources involved in research, the present study is restricted to 100 samples.

Recommendations

a) Partners can be more sensitive to women's needs, and counter tradition by helping their wives perform daily tasks and take care of children.
b) Organisations should have an internal code to ensure security of women employees and take measures to ensure that they discharge their job in a secure atmosphere.
c) Governments should make it mandatory for companies to install Global Positioning System (GPS) in vehicles carrying women, in all industries which engage women in night shifts.
d) Providing self-defence training to women; installing safety devices and CCTVs at the work place; undertaking police verification of cab drivers, security guards etc.
e) Child care facilities and Child care leave for working women should be provided by every organization.
f) Flexible timing and Possibility to work from home are required for working women.

Conclusions

In a patriarchal society like India a particular boundary exists only for women, and if they try to cross that boundary then people start maligning them. The general perception is that if some women are doing things differently, beyond people's limited imagination, and out of sync with traditional thinking, like going out for jobs, wearing different type of fashionable clothes, talking freely with male members etc., immediately they are branded as loose women. India probably has still a long way to go to make our workplaces free from any prejudices, abuses and

harassments. Even then we can still try at solving some of the related issues and problems with some possible solutions that have been mentioned above so that women become stronger and are able to handle any adverse situations.

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