

“IMPACT OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS ON HEALTH CONDITIONS OF WORKING WOMEN”

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Abstract

This concern has increased in recent years as more environmental hazards are identified and as more women enter the paid workforce. Much of women's work remains unrecognized, uncounted and unpaid: work in the home, in agriculture, food production and the marketing of home-made products, for example. Within the paid labour force, women are disproportionately concentrated in the informal sector, beyond the scope of industrial regulations, trade unions, insurance or even data collection. Women may undertake paid work at home, or combine part or full time paid work with household work and the care of children, the sick and the elderly. They are likely to move in and out of the paid labour force during different life stages; within the paid labour force they may have a variety of different occupations in succession.

The tasks which men and women undertake vary from culture to culture, and at different times in different places. While most cultures assign particular tasks to women, and in some women's roles are more regulated and their economic activities restricted, there are in general very few activities which can universally be described as women's work. Occupational health risks are seldom confined to one sex alone. The risks are only likely to be fully understood, and confronted, in the context of a gender specific analysis of occupational health. Research into women's and men's occupational health also requires a recognition of the extent of intra-sex variations and careful controls for biological and social characteristics which may affect health outcomes. Poor nutrition, for example, may be a more important factor in some types of occupational health impairment than simply being female.

Conditions which may lead to permanent chronic ill-health in women are low social and economic status combined with poor environmental conditions which often include outdoor work.

Studies on psychosocial adverse and economic factors in the workplace are completed by two more recent articles stating a number of facts. Their focus is not exclusively on women, but of a more general nature. However, mobbing and bullying of faculty by other faculty are types of workplace violence that, while very common, are rarely discussed or reported. This article raises awareness of the problem, profiles victims, describes stages, and suggests tactics for addressing the issue

Key Words : Occupational Health, Environmental, Agriculture, Food Production, Unrecognized, Household work

Introduction: -

The tasks which men and women undertake vary from culture to culture, and at different times in different places. While most cultures assign particular tasks to women, and in some women's roles are more regulated and their economic activities restricted, there are in general very few activities which can universally be described as women's work. Occupational health risks are seldom confined to one sex alone. The risks are only likely to be fully understood, and confronted, in the context of a gender specific analysis of occupational health. The effects of potential occupational hazards on women's reproductive health have been, probably, the major focus of concern in the health of women workers. This concern has increased in recent years as more environmental hazards are identified and as more women enter the paid workforce. A range of occupational reproductive hazards has been documented but a large number of possible risks still require further examination.

Conditions which may lead to permanent chronic ill-health in women are low social and economic status combined with poor environmental conditions which often include outdoor work. Studies on psychosocial adverse and economic factors in the workplace are completed by two more recent articles stating a number of facts. Their focus is not exclusively on women, but of a more general nature.

Hazard Awareness :- Stress at work

- a) raising awareness of the issue of violence in workplaces among employees, unions, employers, governments, human resource and industrial relations experts as well as the general public.

- b) providing a forum to discuss successful policies and solutions adopted in various organizations and jurisdictions.
- c) presenting various forms of assistance to victims, witnesses and perpetrators of workplace violence.
- d) providing an agenda for further research and prevention.

It is vital to know the risk factors associated with violence at work in order to identify the appropriate preventive strategies that should be implemented to counter this phenomenon, Psychological violence is defined in the report by the Quebec inter-ministerial committee on psychological harassment at work as behavior shown through words, acts or repeated gestures which are non-desired and which go against a person's psychological integrity or physical dignity, or is of a nature which compromises a right, or brings about unfavorable working conditions, a layoff or forced resignation.

Individual and organizational factors may represent an increased risk of psychological harassment at work. There are various psychological profiles of aggressors. They are sometimes defined as technocrats, narcissistic, paranoid and obsessive, egocentric and without any sense of morality, empathy or respect for others. They are intelligent and charming, mainly toward those who accept their manipulation. "The difficult economic context generates and creates these personalities in strategic positions, because they're cold and calculating".

Several work situations lend themselves to psychological harassment. "Strategic harassment" is characterized by a deliberate strategy on the part of a hierarchical superior, aiming to make life difficult for the victim and encourage undesirables to quit. This strategy can be found in situations where the incompetence of the victim is difficult to demonstrate. Other organizational factors that lend themselves to situations of violence include denial of violence, non-management of conflicts, incompetence or mismanagement, tolerance of incivility or management practices that create feelings of injustice.

There is a clear link between stress and workplace violence, and situations in which corporations and institutions face cutbacks and there is more work for employees and fewer resources will lead to less-than-courteous work environments, As we face a growing recession and further cutbacks, the survival of the fittest may prevail. "In order to survive you need to stand out

and show your value, and survival can sometimes mean you have to be tougher-or meaner.” This kind of environment and culture can lead to workplace abuses: “Organizations in survival mode don’t have time to deal with complaints, particularly complaints about bad treatment. These are the real risk factors related to economy that will present great challenges this year and next, while we’re in a recession,”

Stress at Work

Stress is a common phenomenon of everyday life. All of us experience stress to some degree in one or another form throughout our lives. Stress are pathological and lead to development of wide variety of symptoms & disorders. Prolonged exposures to stress leads to wide variety of physiological changes that may effect our health & functioning.

Stress is the general term applied to the pressures people feel in life. The presence of stress at work is almost inevitable in many jobs. Individual difference account for a wide range of reactions to stress: a task viewed as challenging by one person may produce high levels of anxiety in another. When pressure begins to build up, it can cause adverse strain on a person’s emotions, thought process, behavior, and physical condition. When stress becomes excessive employer develop various symptoms of stress that can harm their job performance and health, and even threaten their ability to cope with the environment.

THE ROLE OF STRESS IN WORKING WOMEN:-

The lacking of following systems are also cause for the working women.

- a) Lacking of congenial working environment.
- b) Existence of skilled staff.
- c) Fair treatment from superiors.
- d) Psychological or mental stressors.
- e) Environmental stressors.
- f) Physical stressors.
- g) Diseases.
- h) Excessive speaking or talking.
- i) Hypertension.

- j) Coronary Heart Disease.
- k) Frustration.

The working women in reaction to stress can be categorized under three heads

1. **Physical:-** Undue fatigue, peptic ulcer, high blood pressure, asthma, coronary diseases come under the physical reaction to stress.
2. **Psychological:-** The psychological reactions to stressful work conditions & works lacking quality & satisfaction are undue boredom, unpleasant feeling, interpersonal conflict, irritability impatience & inability. Bereavement i.e. (Death of a loved one), Criminal victimization, divorce separation & Unemployment.
3. **Environmental:-** Like Excessive cold, Excessive Heat , Excessive Noise, Excessive Humidity, Pollution (Smoke, Dust harmful, Chemicals) in the Air & Water , Improper Lighting ,Over crowding etc. All these things make us stressed & activate the stress mechanism.

MANAGING STRESS

1. Resist working long hours or accepting overtime.
2. Volunteer for flextime or other alternative work schedules.
3. identify the people who causes stress avoid them.
4. Maintain a healthy diet & eat regularly.
5. Set reasonable goals for yourself.
6. Step back from stress &decide whether in need to fight every battle.
7. Consult with a trusted friend before becoming involved in new activities.
8. Find or create opportunities to laugh.

SOCIAL REMEDIES

1. Support from Family & other Family members.
2. Support from Husband.

SPIRITUAL REMEDIES:-

Meditation, Yogasanas & Stretching Exercises, Aerobic Exercise, Massage, Acupressure, Hydrotherapy, Yoga Nidra, Breathing, Laughter, Diet, Nutrition & Elimination Of Toxins, Dancing & Shaking OF the Body, Rocking, Swinging, Music, Soothing touch of Nature.

Understanding Workplace Violence: The Risk Factors.

Violence is an occupational health and safety hazard; however, it is not uncommon for its root causes and consequences to be concealed, Workplace violence prevention programs must focus on the risk factors that exist within organizations, rather than centering the problem on the workers-the victims.

It is absolutely essential that employers implement a formal workplace violence prevention and management program. Such a program should consist of five elements: clear policies and guidelines governing workplace behaviour; an incident management team; a reporting and response mechanism; training; and other employment and legal practices. Collectively, these elements contribute to a program that ensures that an organization can identify problems early, when chances for effective intervention are greatest.

“Ultimately a workplace violence prevention and management program provides awareness or education, preparedness and empowerment,” Speer concluded. “It acts as an incredible tool for helping companies bring a measure of control and structure to all forms of misconduct affecting workplace safety.” Increased awareness of the frequency of violence in the workplace combined with an appreciation of the costs of not preventing it is propelling managers to develop policies on workplace violence,

An understanding of violent behaviour is essential to understanding workplace violence, An important element to this is an understanding that human beings are basically aggressive. “We belong to the animal kingdom and we have animal instincts. Our behaviours are often driven by survival instincts.” It is important to look at labour life and relations within an organization, train workers on workplace tolerance, as well as integrating community and social prevention initiatives, he concluded.

Workplace violence prevention programs must recognize the damaging effects of cumulative violence :-

1. Determine the specific risks of workplace violence within the organization by conducting a detailed risk assessment.
2. Develop specific measures to eliminate or minimize risks. Using the principles of basic industrial hygiene practice, prevention can be achieved through administrative practices

(such as policy development), workplace design (such as office lay-out), and specific work practices (such as cash-handling procedures).

3. Develop the resources and means to provide victim support services, including formal or informal counselling, legal advice.
4. Conduct follow-ups on any incidents that occur.
5. Train and educate employees on the workplace violence prevention policy and procedures.
6. Conduct a program review annually, or more often if there is a significant change in the workplace.

Education can help neutralize violence, he said. In the event of violence, various bodies must act to avoid the disability of the victims. Also helpful are epidemiological surveillance, crisis intervention, immediate access to the victim, encouraging complaints, including health repercussions, avoiding “sequels” and reducing damage (including secondary consequences.) He called for providing alternatives so victims of violence do not lose their means of survival.

What are the Symptoms of Depression?

Depression is a medical condition that should be diagnosed and treated by a trained healthcare professional, such as a primary care provider, psychiatrist, psychologist, or a social worker. Occupational health nurses, wellness coordinators, employers, supervisors and co-workers can be the first to recognize signs of depression in a fellow employee.

- Frequent feelings of sadness that last most of the day
- Decreased interest in most things that were once enjoyed
- Loss of self-esteem or feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- Sleep problems, such as sleeping too much or having trouble sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Irritability or restlessness
- Decreased energy
- Possible thoughts of death or suicide

Effects Depression :-

Women are twice as likely to become depressed as men. About 10-25% of all women will be depressed during their lives. Men have a lower risk for depression than women, but when they are depressed they are more likely to go undiagnosed and less likely to seek help. Men may experience the typical symptoms of depression, but they may also feel more angry and irritable.¹⁹ They may also be more likely to try and relieve their condition with alcohol or drug abuse. Depression increases the risk for suicide and men who have suicidal thoughts are more likely to die of suicide than women with suicidal thoughts. However, suicidal thoughts in all individuals should be taken very seriously and the person who has those thoughts should be evaluated by a mental health professional.

Social effects of shiftwork and women's health :-

Work that is scheduled outside “normal” daylight hours (i.e. 9 am to 5 pm) is called “Shiftwork”. Shiftwork schedules can vary from one workplace to another. Workers may rotate through shifts or remain on a single shift (i.e. permanent nights). Shiftwork allows for continuous services and production, 24 hours per day. Examples of such around-the-clock work include health care, customs and immigration, electrical utilities, and transportation – to name a few. Many manufacturing and seasonal workplaces also work 24 hours a day to maximize efficiency and productivity.

Night shifts can also be tiring. Mental and physical effects of night work have been shown to affect a worker's concentration, alertness, motivation, and memory. This can slow a worker's reaction time and increase the risk of accident. Unfortunately, night work cannot be avoided in some occupations. The body's various Circadian Rhythms are “reset” every 24 hours by environmental cues, such as light and darkness. For example, body temperature increases with daylight and decreases at night.

One study found the risk of breast cancer to be 60 percent higher in women who worked the night shift. Irregular menstrual cycles and menstrual pains were reported from women in a number of industries who worked night shifts. Higher risk of miscarriage, lower rates of pregnancies and deliveries, spontaneous abortion, delayed fetal development, increased risk of pre-term delivery and low birth weight have also been observed in some studies.

- Shift workers tend to have a poorer diet and reduced access to wholesome foods
- Increased snacking

- Increase in ulcers, indigestion, and heartburn
- Frequent stomach aches
- Constipation, diarrhea, loss of appetite

Solutions:-

- Provide exercise facilities on site
- Provide a 24-hour cafeteria where night workers can obtain a hot, nutritious meal
- Cut back on highly salted foods
- Reduce foods high in fat
- Limit caffeine and alcohol consumption
- Schedule regular meals
- Try to avoid fast food and vending machines by bringing a bagged meal to work
- Try to meet Canada food guide nutrition requirements
- Try to incorporate regular
- exercise into your schedule

Stress :-

- May result from lack of socializing with family and friends
- Hard to plan for family responsibilities and take part in regular of-job activities
- Rotation makes it hard to form routines
- Leads to anxiety, high blood pressure and heart disease
- Decreases job satisfaction and motivation

Solutions

- Plans shifts in advance
- Keep schedules flexible by allowing workers to trade shifts
- Schedule time off over weekends
- Provide workshops and information sessions on stress management
- Make sure demands on workers are reasonable
- Maximize worker autonomy
- Use relaxation techniques such as deep and slow breathing

- Try to get adequate sleep and exercise
- Plan days off in advance if possible
- Try to prioritize tasks and tackle one at a time

Difficulty Maintaining Hobbies, Leisure Activities, Etc.

- Lack of time to spend with friends who do not work shifts
- Can't participate in sports groups or clubs because of varying shift schedule
- Don't have the energy or free time to participate in hobbies

Solutions

- Organize groups within workplace for various interests (eg. Toastmasters, support groups, etc.)
- Sponsor employee sports teams and leagues (eg. *Company hockey league*)

Sleep :-

- Shiftwork can lead to chronic fatigue and insomnia
- Shiftwork can lead to disruption of sleep patterns
- Sleep loss can lead to chronic fatigue, persistent anxiety or depression, substance abuse, and decreased alertness

Difficulty Meeting Parental Responsibilities :-

- Difficulty finding child care
- Not enough time to spend with children
- Children miss out on leisure activities like clubs and sports because parent's can't take them
- Trouble helping with homework, meeting teachers, chaperoning school trips, etc.

Solutions

- Provide an on site day care facility
- Offer 24 hour day care solutions
- Offer activities for employee's children such as sponsoring sports teams, etc.
- Provide transportation to events
- Use a calendar to schedule events and activities

- Plan activities around your time off

Tensions and Problems Within Marriage :-

- Not enough time to spend with spouse
- Tensions due to sexual problems, child care related problems
- Increase in arguments, and trouble with communication
- Higher divorce rates compared to day workers

Solutions

- Provide workshops on
- communication and conflict resolution
- Plan to have at least one meal together each day
- Keep in touch daily
- Set aside time for just you and your spouse (*no kids, tv, etc.*)
- Establish good communication skills

DIETARY AND EATING PATTERNS :-

- Afternoon workers should have their meal in the middle of the day instead of the middle of their work shift
- Night workers should eat lightly throughout the shift and have a moderate breakfast
- Relax during meals and allow time for digestion
- Drink lots of water
- Cut back on highly salted foods
- Reduce foods high in fat
- Maintain regular eating patterns with well balanced meals (avoid junk food & limit fat intake)
- Eat the usual balance of vegetables, fruit, lean meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, grains, and bread
- Avoid excessive use of antacids, tranquilizers and sleeping pills
- Minimize the intake of caffeine and alcohol
- Avoid fast food and vending machines

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES :-

- Schedule at least one daily meal with the family; this helps to keep communication channels open and promotes a good eating habit
- Socialize with other shift workers and their families; this helps to minimize the disruption that shift work can have on your social life
- Keep in touch with spouse and children daily
- Establish good communication skills
- Set time aside for just you and your spouse
- Carefully plan family activities; family ties are a
- precious commodity (plan days off in advance if possible)
- Practice stress reduction
- Use a calendar to schedule events
- Try to prioritize tasks and tackle one at a time

Conclusions:-

We can draw the conclusions that, the working women should herself give concentration in keeping good health, good habits, can accept her own short comings, self-respect, get satisfaction from simple, Everyday pleasures, Feel right about other people, Feel a sense of responsibility , Friends, Neighbors & others. They are sometimes defined as technocrats, narcissistic, paranoid and obsessive, egocentric and without any sense of morality, empathy or respect for others. Irregular menstrual cycles and menstrual pains were reported from women in a number of industries who worked night shifts. Higher risk of miscarriage, lower rates of pregnancies and deliveries, spontaneous abortion.

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