

Stress in Pakistani Working Women

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Abstract

The working women in Pakistan face a lot of problems. Her responsibilities are beyond her capabilities which often lead to stress. The present study is aimed at exploring the stress in working women in Pakistan. It discusses different factors that actually are the major cause of stress in Pakistani working women. To dig out the realities, both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods are used. Questionnaires were distributed among 35 working women. The targeted population was teachers, bankers and doctors. In addition, 18 interviews were arranged. The study pointed out different factors that are responsible for stress among working women in Pakistan. Furthermore, it highlighted ways to decrease level of stress among them.

Keywords: Stress, working woman, stress relating factors.

Introduction:

Stress is a state of psychological arousal that results when external demands exceed person's capabilities. Generally, more women than men are the victims of stress. The possible reason of stress among working women might be the dual demanding role of women at workplace and at home. Sociologists describe women as struggling to achieve the male standard at work, while trying to maintain the perfect wife and mother standards at home.

Women work throughout the world. Nair and Malhotra while discussing Working Women in their book Working Women- A Psychological Perspective_(2007) explains that women of lower class is actually working since long for wages in factories and in areas under construction. It's only the women of upper class and middle class who have always been confined to their homes. But now with the passage of time since more liberty and rights have been given to women so the numbers of working women in different areas have increased now. Irrespective of the profession women have to play more than one role.

Working women have a whole new set of problems involving both family and professional lives. Since, the working women go beyond the boundary line of their homes, they seem to be deviating from their traditional roles of wives. Such things may affect both- the role of woman and the interpersonal relations with their husbands. Women have to play their role as a wife, a mother and as an earner. While for man, if he is working in a profession the family always try to provide him with comfort and support. Au contraire, for working women it means two sets of overlapping responsibilities. Therefore, the role of family caretaker, in addition to their professional role seems to be one of the major sources of stress that working have to face.

Kahn et al. (1964) was among the first ones to draw our attention to the organizational stress in general and the role stress in particular. Role as the position occupied by a person and as defined by the expectations of significant persons, including role occupant, indicate that there are inherent problems in performance of a role and therefore, stress is inevitable (Pareek, 1976).

Nair and Malhotra (2007), in their book not only discuss women and their multiple roles but they also discuss the empirical evidences in Eastern and Western context. They explains that as over the past half century the labor force and career opportunities has increased, researchers attention shifted towards the effects of fulfilling these roles on women's health.

Prior to the industrial revolution in the United States, both men and women were engaged in the production of goods throughout the agricultural era. Although women focused primarily on the production of domestic items, work and family responsibilities were interwoven for both men and women (Hattery, 2001). At the turn of the 20th century the industrial revolution brought about a distinction between paid and unpaid work as women focused on the private sphere of unpaid labor in the home, and men focused on the public sphere of paid work. Then due to the depleted work-force, women's participation in paid labor increased dramatically during World War II. Later in 1970's and 1980's, women's labor force participation increased again as economic growth decreased and social acceptance of women working outside home increased. Today employment is of great importance, indeed a central prerequisite, for meeting the socially defined needs of people in western society (Nordenmark and Strandh 1999).

Eastern society has been extremely complex and its social and economic structures are significantly different from those in western industrial societies. They are largely traditional especially with respect to women's status and roles. In words of American Alice 'Elizabeth Bumiller', "*it is a bitter truth and a choiceless reality that Indian women have not yet come out of shackles of 'womanhood attire' imposed successfully on them by men.*" But today, the spread of education by and large, has led to a great number of women in different

working areas. Unlike the Western society, where responsibilities are shared by both male and female members at home, women in Eastern society are expected to be a full time worker and a full time housewife at the same time. Thus women in this manner have multiple roles to perform and while fulfilling these roles she has to face different conflicts which consequently results in stress.

Getzels and Guba (1954) found that out of three roles of wife, mother and employee, a woman occupying roles of wife and employee will experience more conflict than a woman occupying role of wife and mother because of the greater incompatibility between the roles. Moreover, the conflict of woman will be all the more intense if her employer, her husband as well as family members held unreasonable expectations from her. Kapur (1974) indicated that women who choose to combine marriage with career face a critical situation and they hardly know how to apportion time and resources between these two major responsibilities. This makes them experience great conflict, tension and strain.

The tension and stress thus results in health problems. Woods (1978) found that in the absence of support from significant others, women's involvement in multiple roles had a deleterious effect on their mental health. Married women with children in home have been found to have higher psychiatric symptom levels and worse health than those without children (Kessler and McCrae, 1982; Gove, 1984).

Tripathi and Bhattacharjee elaborate in their article the condition of working women in India and also explain the stress that they have to go through. They explain that in today's scenario both husband and wife have to work to create a balance in their work life as well as at home with their children. But it is still difficult for women as she has to play multiple roles. She does not only have to play the role of cook, caretaker, tutor etc at home besides she also needs to cater the demands in her work area. This can leave working women stressed and anxious and the conditions can be excruciating if the family is not supportive. Moreover in their paper they discuss different reasons due to which working women feel more stressed. They find out that even when both parents are working, the responsibility of care for sick children usually falls on the mother. Stress loads are hence high for working mothers.

Beatty (1996) discusses in her article that with the increase of participation of women in workforce the stress rate among women also increases and this stress consequently resulted in heart diseases and high blood pressure. Studies revealed that women over 40 years of age who were highly committed to their jobs were found to have higher blood pressure than those who were less career committed. Furthermore it is also argued that working of women in male dominated fields such as management makes them more vulnerable to stress because of the unique pressures, conflicts, prejudices and isolation they encounter.

She further discusses in her article that the stress become more intense for the woman with children. Moreover, Light (1984) studied the relationship between employed women's anxiety, depression and hostility levels and their perceived career and family role commitments. She reported that women who placed career roles over family roles scored significantly higher on anxiety than those for whom family roles were more important. It is, indeed then career committed women with children who are more at risk.

The problem of Pakistani working women is a relatively unexplored area as far as Pakistan is concerned. Iffat Hussain (2008) has worked on the problems faced by employed women in the city of Karachi. She interviewed 240 women and took 50 case studies. She categorized women into three grades i.e. domestic, clerical and management level.

The present study attempts to identify the stress related problems in working women in Pakistan. The population includes doctors, teachers and bankers which is not the target of any research before. It not only tries to identify the problems but also endeavors to propose solution to the problems of stress in Pakistani working women.

The following research questions guides the study.

Research Questions:

1. What are the problems faced by Pakistani working women?
2. What are the factors contributing to stress in Pakistani working women?
3. How to go about resolving these problems?

Methodology

The research paper aims to find the stress relating problems faced by working women in Pakistan. Quantitative as well as qualitative method is used in the study. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from 35 working women in three different fields which include teachers, bankers and doctors. In addition, 18 interviews were also arranged. The paper has triangulated the data gathered from questionnaires and interviews.

Results and Discussion

The following discussion deals with the analysis of questionnaires. The results of questionnaires are demonstrated in the following table.

| Sr.no | Questions | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|-------|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 10. | I am able to meet all the demands of my job. | 49% | 43% | 9% | 0% | 0% |
| 11. | There is a constant pressure on employees to learn new techniques all the time. | 29% | 32% | 14% | 23% | 3% |
| 12. | My boss, colleagues and juniors support me. | 46% | 32% | 12% | 11% | 0% |
| 13. | My family members support me. | 71% | 26% | 0% | 0% | 3% |
| 14. | Because of work my family is affected. | 26% | 37% | 17% | 6% | 14% |
| 15. | Because of family my work is affected. | 3% | 26% | 3% | 46% | 23% |
| 16. | Due to a lot of work stress I have health problems. | 6% | 46% | 3% | 26% | 20% |
| 17. | I have a diagnosed disease due to a lot of tension. | 6% | 26% | 9% | 20% | 40% |
| 18. | I experience excessive work load. | 23% | 37% | 11% | 26% | 3% |
| 19. | My job demands for late sittings. | 26% | 23% | 17% | 29% | 6% |
| 20. | I have to work in longer sessions. | 31% | 31% | 9% | 29% | 0% |

According to the above collected data most of the women agreed that they able to meet the demands of their job and also most of them have the support of their families and boss, colleagues etc. As per results the first major factor that becomes the cause stress in working women in Pakistan is that because of work their families are affected. In Pakistani society family is the very integral and important part of every single person. It is just like the center to which a person is connected and that center holds the person. So in any case if this center gets disturb or affected that definitely cause tension in the life of the person. Hence working women in Pakistan are largely affected from the condition of stress because the rope through which they are connected to the center got loosened because of their work.

Moreover, we see that most of them experienced excessive work load and they also have to sit in longer sessions in their work places. Certainly this is another major factor of stress among working women in Pakistan. As due to a lot of work at work place they become unable to fulfill their responsibilities at home and consequently they are stressed out.

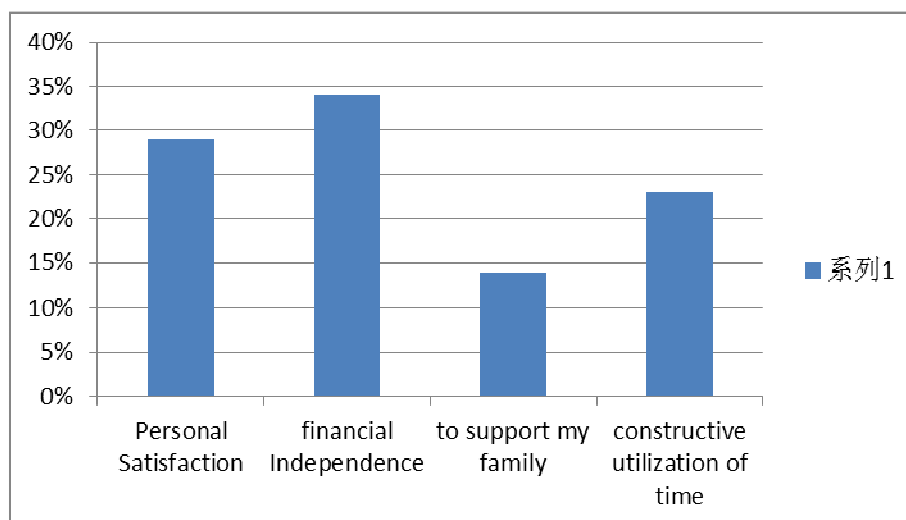
Likewise, most of the women agreed that due to a lot stress they have health problems but right in the next question they disagreed that they have any diagnosed health problem. So here comes the contradiction in their statements. This contradiction might be due to the fact that most of the women in Pakistani society always feel reluctant to talk about their issues or in other way personal issues.

The following discussion includes the other part of the questionnaire and its analysis.

Question no 21:

The factor that motivated you to work.

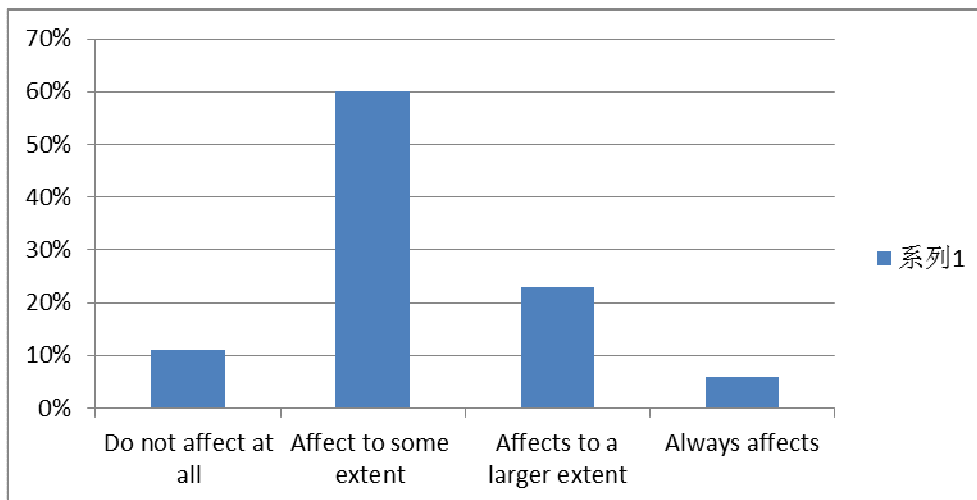
Graph 1.



Question no 22:

The negative attitude of supervisors affects in balancing work and family commitments.

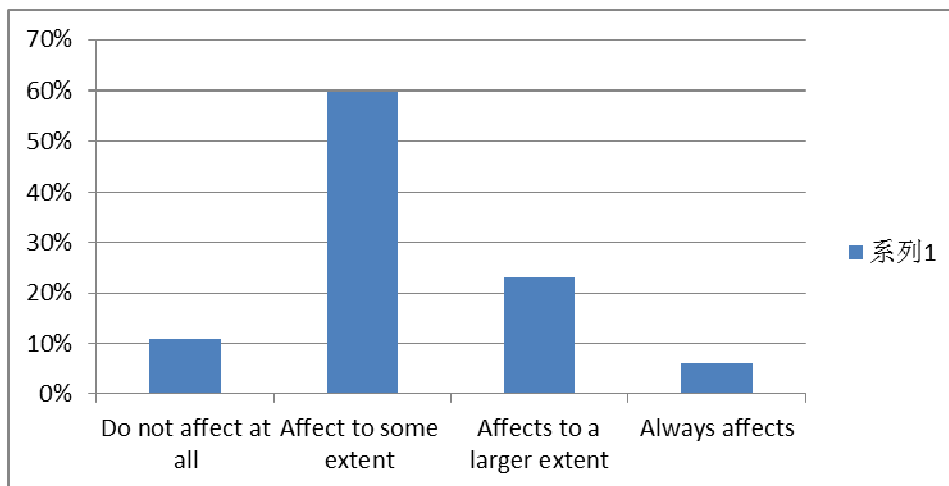
Graph 2:



Question no 23:

The negative attitude of colleagues affects me in balancing work and family commitments.

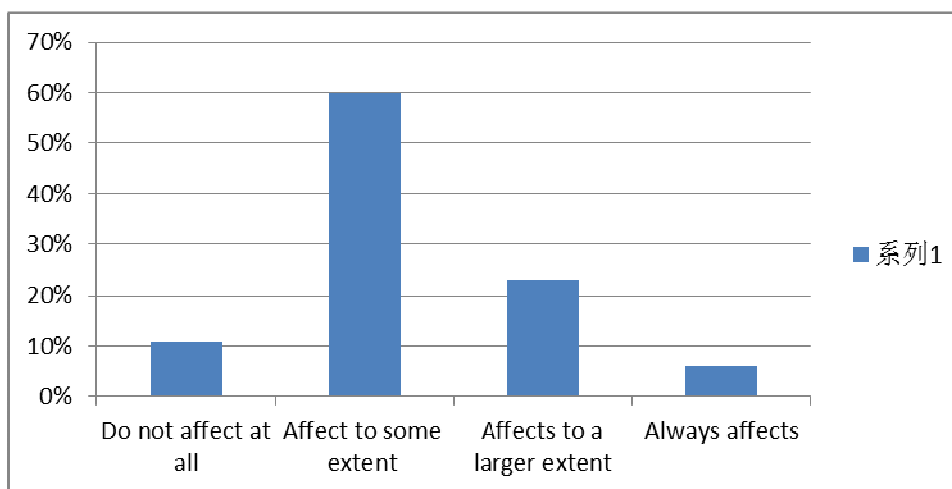
Graph 3



Question no 24:

The negative attitude of spouse/family affects me in balancing work and family commitments.

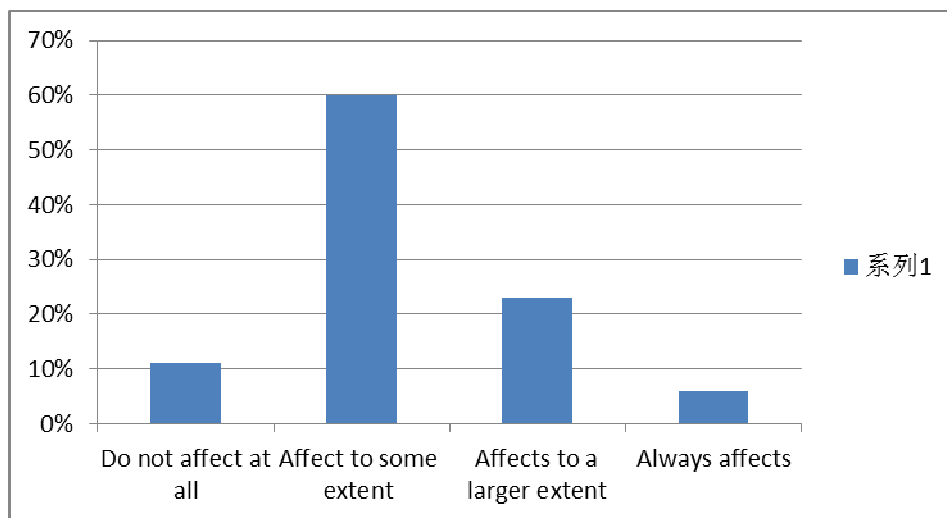
Graph 4



Question no 25:

Excessive household work affects me in balancing work and family commitments.

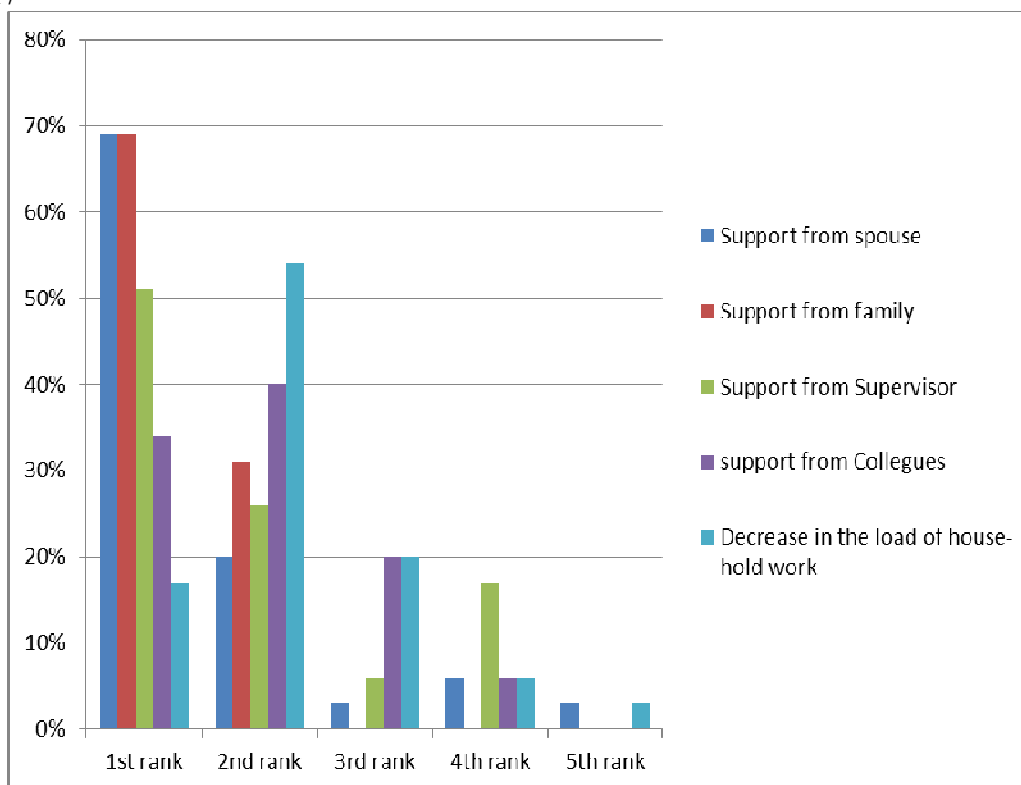
Graph 5



Question no 26:

Rank the following factors from 1 to 5 that will help you balance your work and family commitments, with 1 is the highest rate.

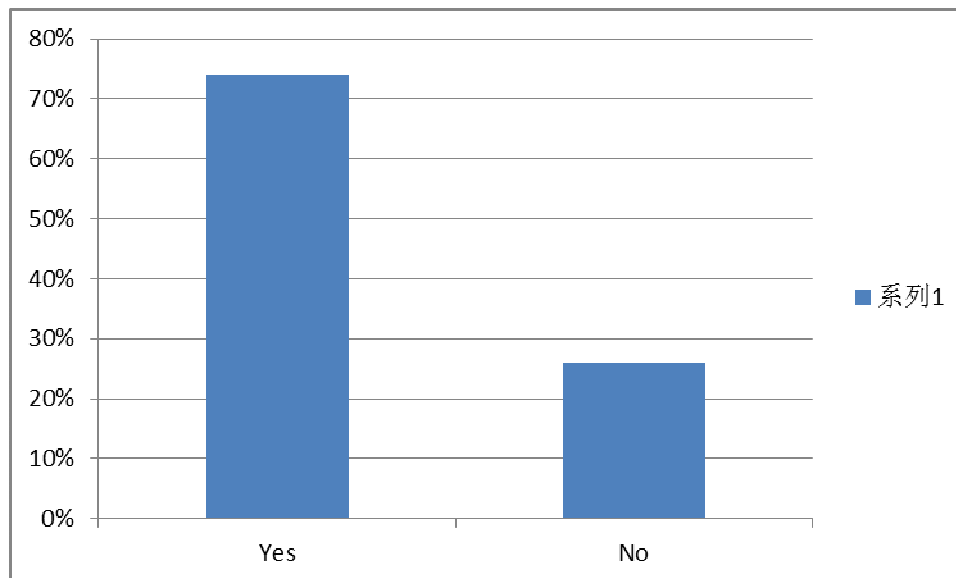
Graph 17



Question no 27:

Do you engage yourself in your own stress relieving and entertainment program?

Graph 6



According to the above collected data it is clearly depicted that working women affected by the negative attitude of supervisors, colleagues, their families and household work. And women are stressed out due to these negative attitudes.

And majority of working women in survey clearly said that for them the support of others is very important and the absence of it then results in the condition of stress among them.

Analysis of Interviews

The following discussion deals with the analysis of interviews conducted with different teachers, doctors and bankers. After doing survey and detailed analysis of interviews, it was found that the very important factor of stress in every working woman in Pakistan is the support from family. If family is unsupportive it is very difficult to work efficiently at work place and also at home. Keeping in mind the scenario of Pakistani society, this point cannot be neglected as family is the most important and integral part of every person in Pakistan. Secondly, attitude of others matter a lot. Great number of Pakistani woman has to go through this problem of negative attitude of others that ultimately results in stress. Moreover, another factor is the demand of extra time at work place. Most of the women have this issue of late sittings and according to them when they have to give extra time at work place they cannot give full and proper attention to their families that consequently results in stress among them. In the same manner problems arises when family is not ready to compromise at any level and they demand full time and attention from women which is not possible for her to give them so this results in utter tension and stress among working women. Likewise, the very important factor of stress among working women in Pakistan is that their social life get squeezed due to excessive work load and responsibilities, and along with social life their home and children also get totally neglected. Similarly, one more important factor of stress among working women in Pakistan is the security of children especially this problem is faced by the woman of nuclear family system. And then public dealing and excessive work load is another very important issue that causes stress.

The problems according to survey that every working woman has to face in Pakistan includes first of all insecurity. Secondly, dealing with men at work place. Since Pakistani society is a male dominated society so to cope with men is very difficult for every working woman. In this case they have to face the problems like sexual harassment and the problem become intense when women cannot talk about them because these are conservative taboos in Pakistani society. Moreover, the problem of time management is with every working woman. The problem arises when neither the family nor the work place is ready to compromise and when they demand full time and attention from women that become so very difficult for them and ultimately causes tension. Unavailability of day care facility at work places is another very important issue among working women in Pakistan. Along with these problems another major problem is the responsibilities are not equally divided among men and women. Particularly talking about Pakistani society, it is considered an understood and obvious thing that the responsibilities of home and children have to be fulfilled by women even if she is a working lady. However when men are working outside they are provided with more care and attention. And the survey also proves this point that the responsibilities are never equally divided.

When in the survey women are asked about the consequences of stress on their lives they come up with a lot of things that includes health problems in a large number. And among health problems blood pressure and depression is the most common problem. Apart from these two issues one more important issue is of obesity. Most of the working women are of the opinion that at work places due to constant sittings and with no physical exercises they put on weight and that is actually the root cause of many other diseases. Like very large number of women in Pakistan suffer from muscular pains and joints' problems. Likewise diabetes and back ache are other major results of stress. In the same manner as per results of survey some more issues through which women have to go through because of stress are frustration and anxiety. And then some women end up with drug abuse and other psychological problems.

Triangulation

One more thing that could be observed in overall survey is that the answers are more responsible in interviews; however in questionnaires they seem reluctant to express themselves in a true manner. For example, while taking about health problems that arises due to stress, in questionnaires most of working women said that they do not have any diagnosed disease; however in interviews they come up with many health problems.

At the end, women suggested many ways to reduce stress. Most of them suggested that some activities like sports or some small parties should be arranged along with work to reduce work load and tension. Furthermore, they recommended different interesting courses for working women and different entertainment programs could also be helpful to avoid monotonous routine. Moreover, working women should be provided with a very comfortable environment so that they can work in a more proficient way. And then most importantly they should be provided with proper securities regarding their job etc.

Conclusion

In a nutshell it can be concluded that there is no doubt in the fact that working women in Pakistan are facing a lot of problems due to which they suffer from stress. In the stress relating issues we can rate the negative attitude of surrounding people at the highest rank. Likewise another great challenge that every working has to face is to create a balance between family and her workplace. If woman cannot create a balance between these two areas, it results in stress among them and this condition of stress then heads to abominable health conditions of women.

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