

Comparative Study Between Stress and Social Support System Among Professionally Working Women

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Abstract- In Gujarat's fast-changing socio-economic and cultural environment, professionally employed women—especially corporate professionals and teachers—are exposed to a complicated interaction of stressors and supportive systems. This research examines the relationship between perceived stress and social support through standardized instruments: the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Social Support Questionnaire (Short Version). A statistically significant negative correlation value of -0.28 shows that greater perceived social support has been linked to lower stress levels in working women, marriage or not. The research explores the complex influence of cultural norms, emotional intelligence, gender roles, and work environments, examining how stress occurs and is dealt with in a collectivist culture. Appraisal, belonging, and concrete support were the key social support dimensions, with appraisal support being most effective in overcoming stress. The research brings out the ways through which family-friendliness, good organizational culture, and state-supported policies—particularly within the flourishing economy of Gujarat—build women's emotional hardness and work satisfaction. However, the research also shows recurring stressors like gender discrimination, double workload, stereotypes, and post-maternity discrimination. The study recognizes limitations to self-report biases, denial mechanisms, and the abbreviated questionnaire format but provides some insight into how empowerment, policy reforms, and paradigm shifts can alleviate psychological distress among working women.

Indexed Terms - Stress, Social Support, Women, Gujarat, Mental Health

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of stress is often perceived as external and internal factors of disruptions, although there have been studies identifying relationship between stress

and social support, the researcher focused on the significant or non-significant relationship between stress and social support among a particular sample, that is professionally working women.

The problem is gender sensitive and researcher decided to focus on women who are a regressive and suppressed group of society to find out whether social support is been provided or not and whether it impacts their stress level. Also whether variables like marital status, organizational environment, and cultural norms significantly impact this relationship. Understanding this interplay is essential for planning focused interventions and support systems that may promote emotional well-being and job satisfaction among women in the professional sector.

The theory of stress and social support in the context of working professional households has its roots in several scholarly disciplines, such as public health, psychology, and sociology. During the mid-20th century, stress, which was conceived as a psychological response, was extensively researched, particularly by scholars such as Hans Selye, who formulated the theory of the General Adaptation Syndrome. This theoretical framework explained the profound impact of stress on the body and the mind. With early research indicating that intense social networks are able to be a protective barrier for individuals from the adverse outcomes of stress, social support became an essential building block in the reduction of stress. Scholars such as Sheldon Cohen and others explored how instrumental, emotional, and informational support can enhance resilience under adversity.

The relationship between social support and occupational stress is especially significant in the setting of professional working households. Social support from friends, co-workers, and relatives is essential for good coping since the demands of concurrent career and familial obligations can create

unique stressors. This understanding has led to the development of interventions over time that aim to strengthen social support networks and raise working households' general well-being. The theoretical underpinnings of the relationship between stress and social support are firmly rooted in psychological and sociological research, namely in the fields of social psychology and health psychology.

Scholars like Sheldon Cohen and his colleagues have contributed to the understanding that social support serves as a stress-reduction strategy. They outlined several types of social assistance that can help people cope with pressures, including instrumental, emotional, and informational support.

The relationship between work-related stress and family responsibilities has become more and more important in the context of professional working households. Given the rise in dual-income homes, understanding how social support functions in these contexts is essential to improving mental health. According to empirical data, social support can be strengthened and increased resistance to stress can be fostered by family units through efficient communication and fair responsibility distribution.

Stress triggers the body's fight-or-flight response, which is a complicated physiological and psychological response to perceived dangers or difficulties. Because it affects both mental and physical health, this physiological reaction could lead to a host of health issues if the stressor persists. Social support is an important protective factor because it provides people with practical, emotional, and informational tools that can improve their ability to effectively manage stress. Strong social networks can lessen the strain of juggling work and family responsibilities in professional homes, which will eventually promote resilience and better health outcomes.

A crucial area of research in the disciplines of social psychology and health psychology is the interaction between psychological stress and social support.

Sheldon Cohen's contributions stand out in particular because he distinguished three types of social support: instrumental support (which includes practical help),

informational support (which involves giving counsel and direction), and emotional support (which involves showing empathy and concern). These many kinds of assistance play a crucial role in helping people deal with challenges more skilfully. According to the Stress-Buffering Hypothesis, social support helps people cope with stress by providing them with tools that strengthen their coping strategies.

The ongoing research on the connection between social support and stress emphasizes how important it is to create networks of support in both the personal and professional domains. This understanding can guide the creation of more potent stress-reduction and general health improvement plan.

Women who work professionally benefit greatly from social support in managing stress. This study looks at the effectiveness (how well it reduces stress) and availability (how easily accessible and enough support is) of various social support networks, such as friends, family, and the workplace.

1. Family Support Availability: The degree to which parents, husbands, kids, or other family members provide women with instrumental, financial, and emotional support.

Effectiveness: Because family members share domestic duties, offer emotional support, and encourage one another, women who have excellent family support frequently report feeling less stressed. However, because of hectic job schedules, unsupportive spouses, or family problems, some women might not have enough family support.

Availability: Comprises support from peers, managers, or HR policies like flexible work schedules, mental health initiatives, and work-life balance programs.

Effectiveness: A supportive and positive work environment minimizes work-related stress by promoting teamwork, encouragement, and open communication. In toxic work environments with unhelpful management, high rivalry, or sexism, women might experience stress due to a lack of workplace support.

Peer Support

Availability: The role of friends, social groups, and professional networks in offering guidance, emotional support, and company.

Effectiveness: Intensive peer support enables women to share their tension, ask for advice, and obtain reassurance from peers who have gone through similar experiences. Still, within highly competitive or socially isolating conditions, peer support can be restricted, raising stress levels.

2. To analyse the stress of job and the different type of social support

Work-related stress is caused by multiple workplace issues, including workload pressure, job security, conflict, and lack of control over activities. But all types of social support assist women in managing work-related stress to a great extent. Social support can be broadly categorized into three types—emotional, instrumental, and informational—and it is mediated through various mechanisms, viz., appraisal, belonging, and tangible support.

Emotional Support and Work-Related Stress

Emotional support covers messages of empathy, encouragement, and reassurance from family, friends, colleagues, or mentors. They reduce feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and frustration linked to work-related stress.

Relationship with Stress

Women whose emotional support network is strong have less stress because they know they are being heard, valued, and understood.

If there is no emotional support, the workplace stress can be magnified, resulting in burnout and dissatisfaction.

How Emotional Support Functions Through:

Appraisal Support: Positive feedback and endorsement by superiors or colleagues enable women to assess their strengths and enhance performance, minimizing stress.

Belonging Support: Feeling part of a group with colleagues or friends creates psychological safety and resilience in coping with job pressures.

Tangible Support: Although emotional support is abstract, behaviours like inquiring about someone's well-being or providing support during difficult times can be regarded as useful emotional assistance.

Instrumental Support and Work-Related Stress:

Instrumental support is defined as direct, practical aid, i.e., economic assistance, flexible work arrangements, household assistance, or child care, which helps alleviate work-related stress.

Correlation with Stress

Women with instrumental support find that they experience lower levels of stress because they can delegate or share the work.

Lack of instrumental support results in extra workload, strain on roles, and finding it hard to cope with work-home balance.

Instrumental Support Operating Through:

Tangible Support: It comprises economic assistance, home-based work arrangements, parental leave, and assistance with daily activities, all of which decrease stress associated with work directly.

Belonging Support: Assistance from family or colleagues in the performance of tasks gives a sense of security and camaraderie.

Appraisal Support: Positive feedback from supervisors in the form of flexible policies or adjustment of workloads makes women feel appreciated and less stressed.

Informational Support and Work-Related Stress

Informational support includes guidance, mentorship, career counselling, and access to information that enables people to navigate work-related problems.

Relationship with Stress

Women with access to mentorship, career counselling, or professional contacts report less stress because they are clearer about their career development.

Denial of informational support leads to ambiguity, which increases work-related stress and job dissatisfaction.

How Informational Support Functions Through:

Appraisal Support: Managers or mentors who give career guidance assist employees in identifying their skills and minimizing stress related to performance.

Belonging Support: Participation in professional networks and mentoring schemes generates feelings of belongingness, facilitating easy management of stress at work.

Tangible Support: Availability of training schemes, leadership development, or HR facilities directly enhances job efficiency, easing stress.

3. Exploring impact of marital support, family structure and work environment on stress

Stress and social support among professionally employed women are determined by several personal and professional considerations. This study considers the role of marital status, household structure, and work climate in determining stress levels and social support availability.

Effect of Marital Status on Stress and Social Support
Marital status (single, married, divorced, or widowed) significantly determines levels of stress as well as the availability of social support in the case of professionally employed women.

Married Women:

May feel greater stress in balancing work and family obligations, childcare, and domestic responsibilities.

Social support is determined by spousal participation; supportive partners reduce stress, but unsupportive spouses contribute to it.

In-laws, parents, and extended family members can offer instrumental support, decreasing stress levels.

Single Women:

Can feel work stress but enjoy greater freedom in controlling time and workload.

Social support relies on friends, co-workers, and professional contacts instead of family.

Lack of a family-cantered support system could enhance emotional distress in difficult situations.

Divorced or Widowed Women:

Tend to experience greater emotional and financial pressure because of managing household and job responsibilities alone.

Family, friend, or employer-based social support (e.g., childcare benefits) is of vital importance to manage stress.

Impact of Family Structure on Stress and Social Support

The structure of family—a woman's living in a nuclear family, joint family, or as a single parent—influences her level of stress and availability of social support.

Nuclear Family (Husband & Children):

Women in nuclear families can have increased stress due to less support in domestic chores and childcare work. Social support is usually based on the husband or contracted domestic assistance.

Joint Family (Extended Family Members Present):

Provides greater social support, since parents or in-laws can help with household chores and childcare.

Yet joint families also can bring additional stress if women experience family tensions, lack of control, or overburdening traditional role expectations.

Single-Parent Families:

Women having households to themselves usually experience greater money, emotional, and job stress. Less social support can complicate coping, leading to increased reliance on workplace flexibility or external social networks.

Influence of Work Environment on Stress and Social Support

Work environment has a significant influence on stress levels and social support among employees.

Supportive Work Environments:

Organizations with flexible work arrangements, supportive managers, and healthy co-worker relations can go a long way in mitigating stress.

Social support from co-workers and managers gives people a sense of belonging, which allows them to deal better with workplace issues.

High-Stress Work Environments:

Toxic work environments, long working hours, heavy workloads, and gender discrimination are factors that increase stress levels.

Insufficient workplace social support, including inflexible policies and unsupportive management, may make it more difficult for women to balance work and personal life.

Work-Life Balance Policies: Companies with maternity leave, childcare assistance, employee wellness programs, and mental health services enable working women to better cope with stress.

Research elaborations

From the findings the understanding of stress and its correlation to social support is clear, in Gujarat among professionally working women the stress levels are relatively low due to the high social support being provided to them.

Although being a researcher what is being found through nonverbal Cues and being able to study stress, there are different explanations of the results, the women has been noticed by researcher are highly family oriented as one lives in collectivistic culture, but this does not stop females to have growth or job opportunities, the developing economy also plays and important role in this as women are encouraged for their jobs and supported since earning is a major requirement, especially for middle class, which were most of the participants. The concept of jobs or business are in particular provided as it's a practical approach to life.

Although social support is variable through which stress is effected there are many different variables which can affect stress, a positive work environment effects the stress positively as one feels supported and seen, majorly the participants belonged to corporate world, where feeling of appraisal is important for one to manage and deal with stress anxiety and fatigue, high amount of stress can physically effect body with brain fog, fatigue, body pains elevated blood pressure, etc.

There are many stressors which affects functioning of individuals like high work load, form the jobs and also

the pressure to maintain the social moral idea of females to do house chores irrespective of their marital status, although the work load may vary because of it but still it remains a significant part. There can also be the conflict of ambiguity and conflicts which suggests the idea of desires and the reality and its constant compromise that one lives in another major issue with women is the lack of opportunity equally, in report by work India it was shown 5.3% drop in job postings for women in 2024 in blue collar workforce, women are more likely to ask about the childcare and family during hiring process which influence hiring process, in a research paper by aim premji university showed during covid-19 pandemic women were more likely to lose jobs in compared to men. The maternity benefit act of 2017 provided 26 weeks of pain leave the major issues faced by women is lack of hiring and the post – maternity break is the decrees in performance rating and promotion, and also negative impact on salaries which adds upon the stress factors. For single or divorced or widowed women certain serotypes of being female without male influences effects their stress levels and there are seen as liability and many a times are not allowed to rent home for themselves, if moved for work, another issues they faced are period leave many a times effect the hiring of women as it can lead to decrease in work force every month.

The issues with appraisal and belongingness also arrives as they are not accepted by their supervisors, or if plans a business aren't give opportunity as there are very prejudiced and stereotypical idea of women in power.

In personal life women face marital conflicts where they are expected to work and then manage household and take care of children, according to financial express 73% of women leave their jobs after childbirth due to lack of shared responsibility by husband, this is because of issues with imbalance of work life as they aren't provided with social support, social support as a human one might not ask for to the professionals they work for but surely expect their loved ones to, which if not provided the stress and anxiety increases, one doubts their self-esteem, their ability to handle things on their own, they even see themselves as failures, prolonged stress can also cause depression, this is been also said by Nisargopachar Kendra Gujarat. All these aspects leads to psychological distress,

loneliness, one may also feel disconnected to self as they might not know who they are what they want to do in life, these factors of stress leads to middle-life and existential crisis among women, as their entire life they care and think about others but when comes to them they might be clueless of their own choices.

Environment factors effecting stress, a safe and secure working environment for a female is a very necessary condition , according different stressor and eustress factors helping towards stress allvoice 37 % of female population still face sexual harassment in workplaces , the have been asked by supervisors for sexual favours for promotion , and also threatened them to suspend them from jobs ,these factors add to work stress, due to problems with equal wages females feel insecure and stressed about their own financial status , those who need to pay EMIS, loans etc., and the social stigmas attached to working females being irresponsible , have lack of sensibility towards family continues to effect stress levels of women.

The social support and its dimensions:

Theses all were stressor which included negative social support , the research was conducted based on the social support questionnaire which provided three dimensions of social support : appraisal , belonging and tangible, when calculated the scores there were not much significant difference yet the appraisal > belonging > tangible.

This can further be analysed as: The women (participants) had relatively low stress due to appraisal social support , meaning the social support where one is provided with affirmation and positive feedback , this boots self-esteem, helps in emotional regulation and decreases the confusion and isolation, appraisal social support as said corporate female workers need, apart from this school teachers or professors , women in teaching field also requires the sense of affirmation from their students to make sure they are doing their job well. Belonging social support means the providing sense of acceptance and to make one feel social comfortable, here also teaching professionals can be positively impacted through this as they feel they are going correct and they belong there, also the corporate workers where women are treated as liabilities as seen in numbers the sense of acceptance

and belongingness plays a vital role in their self-acceptance.

Tangible social support are physically been provided like bonus , house etc. the seats which are registered by government play as major role in reducing stress , there job opportunities helps women to think less about job related issues like hiring process , finding a house or getting promoted as government jobs provides these kinds of opportunities , apart from this females if provided tangible support from house without any stereotypes of “ wasting money “ on them also leads to less stress , as a sense of stability is been experienced.

The researcher also found certain ideas and concepts: mind-sets, women are generally high in emotional intelligence, this leads to conflicts and mixed mind-sets about growth and fixation, these ideas of fixation can be conditioned too, but this lead to women in a constant state of conflict in terms of their own ideologies towards their career and responsibility as daughter, sister, wife, mother. This causes stress and impact health, researches of bib have shown women are more prone to stress related issues and mental illness.

Culture played a major role in defining social support and stress and it also provided certain basis to study, Gujarat is culturally rich and traditional rooted society, hence the influence nature of stress and type of social support women receive, the double burden that is managing household and professional work always remains a major factor in stress and females are expected to do so, but the study provided opposite results due to the development of different sector, education, awareness and detaching the certain cultural roots, working women in any household, married or unmarried plays a major role in economic development of the house hold so, it asserts the stress factor, Gujarat is said to be IT hub and many major business which now contribute to India's GDP are in Gujarat, this chances the mind-set and idea of women working, as the major goal shifts towards, innovation and economic development, government also developed many schemes after realising that female education rate increased by 70%.

From Researcher's point of views there are certain limitations to the study , the questionnaire used was a shorten version , to decrees the participant error , to avoid participants from getting bored and randomly answering questions , 22 questions were kept , which might compromise to a bit to the study , secondly even after this , women as in terms of their nature and personality ,might not be very much aware of their issues of stress and work life balance , as they have been conditioned in a way to express less and understand more , which might have hindered their capacity to answer, apart from it there can be possibilities of denial as they aren't ready to accept that they might not have significant social support , for example first question of social support asked if they have someone to go out with , there were certain women researcher knew as they were connect in some or the other way , through this observation , the and many other studies on females and their suppressed emotions suggest , denials as defence mechanism to relieve themselves from the harsh reality.

Quantitative Approach: This component of the research will be based on the collection of quantitative data to quantify the levels of stress and social support by using organized questionnaires and standardized measures.

Independent variable: Social support system

Dependent variable: Stress

Sampling framework:

The target population consists of professionally working women across different sectors, a total of 100 {N=100}, women's sample were collected irrespective of their marital status, the age range was 28-50.

Social support

Score range

High	37-48
Medium	25-36
Low	12-24

Perceived stress scale:

High	28 above
Medium	14-27
Low	0-13

Research instrument:

Perceived stress scale:

A detailed test of personal stress may be ascertained by using an array of instruments that have been designed to assist in quantifying the levels of individual stress. The initial one among these is referred to as the Perceived Stress Scale. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a venerable stress rating tool. The instrument, though originally designed in 1983, is still one of the preferred methods for assisting us in appreciating how different circumstances impact our emotions and our subjective stress. The questions in this questionnaire inquire about your emotions and thoughts during the past month. In every instance, you will be asked to rate how often you thought or felt a particular way.

Social support questionnaire:

A 12-item social support perception measure. This scale is a shortened version of the original ISEL (40 items; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983). This survey contains three distinct subscales intended to measure three aspects of perceived social support. These aspects are:

- 1.) Appraisal Support
- 2.) Belonging Support
- 3.) Tangible Support

Each aspect is assessed by 4 items rated on a 4-point scale from "Definitely True" to "Definitely False"

Procedure:

The standardized scale of Perceived Stress Scale developed by Sheldon cohen and standardized scale and standardized shortened version of the original ISEL (40 items; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983) social support questionnaire was used in the present study for the convenience and outreach of the participants of the study. ☐ Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participation was voluntary and withdrawal is permitted at any time. Data further stored securely and used only for academic purposes. It was uploaded as What Sapp and emails and on other social networking sites, the help as rendered by friends, family and faculty members. Finally, the scoring was done in Microsoft excel. The study considered includes the dimension wise comparison of types of social support and stress levels in regards to them. The total score of individuals in both scales were calculated with the help of manual

The range was created to calculate highest to lowest comparison of stress and social support.

Findings and Results

Statistical analysis:

Table: 1 Correlation table social support and stress

SOCIAL SUPPORT		STRESS		CORRELATION
MEDIAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	MEDIAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	r
35.63	6.29	19.04	462	-0.28

Table: 2 Dimensions of social support:

	belonging	appraisal	tangible
total	1184	1229	1150
mean	299	314	288
standard deviation	14.8	25.5	21.2

Results

There is a significant relationship between stress and social support where there is an inverse correlation relationship between stress and social support, elaborating on that is the presence of social support effects positively on stress. variables are positively correlated as social support is a positive variable and stress is a negative variable.

CONCLUSION

The research highlights social support influences perceived stress among professionally working women in Gujarat, particularly in a culture that values family and collectivism. In spite of the societal demands which are proposed on women including career-oriented mind-set and taking family responsibility at the time, because of this perception women being high on emotional intelligence. The -0.28 correlation reiterates that when women are affirmed (appraisal), accepted (belonging), and provided with tangible support (practical aid), in both

professional and personal aspects which helps manage professional and personal stressors.

The study provides important understanding of women their attitude, the attitude towards them, roles in society they play and economic development that effects the idea of female workers and their social support, all these factors opens up a space for more research. This research also challenges institutions to create gender-sensitive, inclusive workplaces and ask society a very critical question on women, their responsibility not only structurally but also emotionally. Dealing with these layers of tension and nurturing sound social support structures is not only critical for the health and happiness of working women, but also for socio-economic development in the country.

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