

A Study on Family and Psychosocial Health Status of Middle-Aged Working Women of Varanasi City

M Singh, G Singh

Citation

M Singh, G Singh. *A Study on Family and Psychosocial Health Status of Middle-Aged Working Women of Varanasi City*. The Internet Journal of Third World Medicine. 2005 Volume 3 Number 2.

Abstract

Women face different problems at different age group. Gender differences led women to bear dual role responsibility, which starts affecting health status in middle age with the onset of physical decline. Working women's problems are of three types viz., environmental, social and psychological. In each of them the problems emerge due to the stained situations at home and work place. In turn they are due to two factors, one is the inner conflict due to dual commitment and concern, and the other is the practical difficulty of combing the dual commitment. The aim of the present work was to assess the psychosocial and family status of middle aged (45-55 yrs) women working as school teacher. Total number of subjects selected for study was 50 (n=50). An interview schedule and Psycho Social Stress Scale questionnaire were simultaneously administered to the selected subjects. Results indicate that women's psychosocial health status may likely to get affected during middle age due to psychological changes occurring in this phase primarily because of biological changes and changes in the familial environment. Programmed interventions like, meditation, relaxation and other sensitization programs, aiming at lifestyle changes will change their attitudes, behaviours, cognitions, quality of life, thereby maintaining their overall status.

INTRODUCTION

Middle-age problems are termed as mid-life crisis and middle age blues. Mid-life crisis has traditionally been studied and defined in terms of men's experiences and is sometimes generalized to women as well as it is defined for women in relation to the physiological experience of menopause. But mid-life crisis is experienced differently by women not only in relation to menopause and not entirely within the same framework as men. There are many physical and emotional symptoms that appear during menopausal period due to changes in the imbalance of internal hormonal milieu and are self-limiting.¹ Symptoms vary from woman to woman. During 40–60 years of age, physical changes clearly appear like graying hair, eyesight weak, fat gain, skin dryness, lack of strength etc. In this period social changes also take place. Changes in family set-up and responsibility often more negative than positive, directly affect the psychosocial status of women. A study on working women, family environment and mental health indicated that there were significant differences in the family environment and mental health of working and non-working women.² Keeping in view the significance, importance and utility, the present study considers working lady school teachers who are in middle age group and assesses the psychosocial and

familial status.

Problems of elderly women are often more discussed than problems of middle aged women. However, the problems whether it is physical, social or psychological took birth in middle age which may emerge in old age. Essential care and some preventive steps if not taken in middle age may result in serious problems with the onset of old age. The present work has been done to focus on the problems of working class middle-aged women like emotional, physical, familial, social and work place environment etc., which may affect their overall health status.

The aim of the present work was to assess the psychosocial and family status of middle aged (45–55 yrs) women working as school teacher.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE

For the present study 15 government recognized girl's schools of Varanasi city were selected and lady teachers in the age group 45–55 years (mean \pm sd = 49.42 3.46) were selected randomly from each school. Total number of subjects selected was 50 (n=50).

TOOLS

An interview schedule and Psycho Social Stress Scale, questionnaire were simultaneously administered to the selected subjects.

1. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

An interview schedule was prepared to collect detail information from the subjects related with the objectives of the present study. Schedule had five categories. First category had questions related to socio-economic status and general health status. Second category had questions on mental health and feeling during middle age. Questions in third category were related with work place environment. Fourth category had questions of family/social atmosphere, relationship, support, tension, coping with tension etc.

2. PSYCHO SOCIAL STRESS SCALE

The psycho-social stress scale was designed to assess the extent of individual's feelings of the basic components of psychological stress (such as pressure, tension, anxiety, conflict, frustration etc.) resulted from perceived stress situations (such as adversities, hardships, threats, afflictions, failures, constraints, excessive demands, conflicting role etc) in various spheres of their social life. The questionnaire consisted of 40 items. In addition to the questionnaire consisting of the routine or chronic situations of psychological stress, a short measure of the psycho-social stress arising from 'crucial life events' taken place in respondents life in last one year was also prepared in order to cover the broader area of the psychological stress.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collection of data was done during the year 2001-2002. The observed data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software.

RESULTS

The analysis of data collected on the sampled 50 middle-aged lady school teachers showed some interesting findings.

Table-1 shows the physical change reported by subjects. 38% women have reported fat gain and 22% eyesight weak as the physical change occurred in their middle age. Tiredness has been reported by 32% women. These are the major physical change appearing in middle age affecting their day-to-day activity.

Figure 1

Table 1: Physical changes reported by teachers in middle age of their life

Physical Change	No. of Subjects	% of Subjects
Fat Gain	19	38%
Eye sight weak	11	22%
Tiredness	16	32%
Other changes	4	8%
Total	50	100%

When the subjects were asked about main reason of their mental problem, 36% reported family (responsibilities, day-to-day tension, adjustment etc.) and 14% told children (education, employment, demands, marriage etc.) behind their mental problems while, aging (effect, fear, loneliness, different types of physical problems etc.) was the reason in 26% of these middle aged women (Table–2).

Figure 2

Table 2: Reasons for mental problems of working middle aged women

Main Reasons of Mental Problems	No. of Subjects	% of Subjects
Children	7	14%
Family	18	36%
Financial	5	10%
Aging	13	26%
No Problem	7	14%
Total	50	100%

When subject are asked about their feeling in middle age, 14% reported depressive feeling, 18% fear about aging, 10% anxious feeling, 6% frustration and 6% reported feeling of loneliness. Nearly 26% women had no negative feeling whereas, 74% had some kind of negative feeling about middle age. It can be seen that 86% women had reported good or average family environment It seems that they have

given general modest opinion about their family atmosphere. As regards change in family status, 44% had reported positive change, 30% negative change and 26% had reported no change in their family status (Table-3).

According to women under study 84% have mental tension at their work place while 16% feel no mental tension. 66% of women admitted work family conflict. It has been observed that out of total women, 56% had work family conflict and mental tension at work place while, 10% subjects who had work family conflict did not have any mental tension (Table-4). Further, it is evident from this table that out of 42 subjects reporting mental tension at work place 14 have no work family conflict. A reason behind this may be they have better family support.

Husband's behaviour in middle age period is shown in Table-5. Nearly 46% of these teachers had reported no change in their husband's behaviour in middle age of life whereas, 30% reported negative change in the behaviour and attitude of their husband. Similarly, 36% of these teachers had reported positive change in their children's behaviour (Table-6) but 52% teachers were not satisfied with children's attitude and reported negative change in behaviour of their children. These are the factors, which may develop negativity.

Figure 3

Table 3: Feeling about middle age as reported by school teachers

Middle age feeling	No of Subjects	% of Subjects
No negative feeling	13	26%
Depressive	7	14%
Frustrated	3	6%
Loneliness	3	6%
Fear about aging	9	18%
Anxiety	5	10%
Other	10	20%
Total	50	100%

Figure 4

Table 4: Relationship between work family conflict and type of tension at work place

Type of tension at work place	Work family conflict				Total	
	Yes		No		No.	%
Mental Tension	28	56%	14	28%	42	84%
No Tension	5	10%	3	6%	8	16%
Total	33	66%	17	34%	50	100%

Figure 5

Table 5: Husband's behaviour during middle age

Husband's behaviour	No. of Subjects	% of Subjects
No Change	23	46%
Negative Change	15	30%
Not Applicable	12	24%
Total	50	100%

Figure 6

Table 6: Children's behaviour during middle age

Children's behaviour	No. of Subjects	% of Subjects
Positive Change	18	36%
Negative Change	26	52%
Not Applicable	6	12%
Total	50	100%

Table-7 presents the data on physical problems reported by subjects. When asked about their physical problems during middle age, 56% reported either joint pain or back pain. 10% high blood pressure and 12% reported headache. Remaining 22% women were suffering from Asthma, Constipation, Diabetes etc. The difference between groups of post and during menopausal women as regards physical problems was observed not statistically significant.

Score of psychosocial Stress Scale showed moderate to high level of stress in 54% subjects, whereas 18% had low scores. 28% women were in between low to moderate level of stress (Table-8). The difference between mean scores of post-

menopausal group and during-menopausal group was found not statistically significant ($t = 1.15, p = 0.257$).

Figure 7

Table 7: Physical problems at post and during menopausal phase

Physical Problems	Post Menopausal Group		During Menopausal Group		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Joint Pain	10	40	9	36	19	38
Back Pain	4	16	5	20	9	18
Headache	3	12	3	12	6	12
High Blood Pressure	3	12	2	8	5	10
Others	5	20	6	24	11	22
Total	25	100	25	100	50	100

Figure 8

Table 8: Psycho-Social Stress Scores of working middle aged women

Psycho-Social Stress Scores	Group-1: Post Menopausal group	Group-2: During Menopausal group	Total	
			No.	%
Low 0-19	2	7	9	18
Between Low 20-30 to Moderate	9	5	14	28
Moderate 31-37	1	5	6	12
High 38-40	3	2	5	10
Very high 41 & Above	10	6	16	32
Total	25	25	50	100
Mean ± SD	35.68 ± 14.49	30.84 ± 15.32	t = 1.15 p = 0.257	

DISCUSSION

Woman mostly faces gender discrimination since her childhood. Lack of expected response, low importance in decision making and less recognition of their work by family and society may be due to our gender biased socialization process. A common perception is that women who are earning are empowered, however this study reveals that they can not spend their own money in their own way. Mostly they are not free to take their own decision. Many of teachers under study were more qualified than their husband still sometimes they are not given due importance in taking decisions. Capacity, capability and caliber of women are often underestimated. Lack of motivation, encouragement, recognition of their dual work and personal care by family may create frustration and depression in these working middle aged women. It was observed in the study that women in the nuclear families though independent, were not any happier than those in the joint families, their sense of

loneliness and hopelessness were also very great. It is interesting to note in the present work that subjects belonging to middle-class gave polished and diluted answers. Initially they gave socially desirable answers. Nearly half of the subjects reported their family environment as good, but at certain stages they reported family related problems as their main problem. When asked about changes subjects noticed in middle age, nearly three fourth reported different types of negative feelings like depressive, frustrated, loneliness, anxious, fear about aging etc., whereas one fourth had no negative feeling in their ongoing middle age of life. Change in physical appearance with sings of aging and other changes like obesity, joint pain, back pain, high blood pressure etc. are some of the reasons for their negative feelings. These affect their quality of work and performance that in turn induce guilt and stress. The presence of social support has been identified as a key variable in moderating the effects of threatening life events, which push the individual toward mental distress. In present study many of the middle aged school teachers reported that they were not able now to perform their work with same efficiency as earlier which creates anxiety and irritation in them which, sometimes results in unnecessary hot conversation with husband and children.

There is a need to pay proper attention on changes occurring in women during 40–60 years of age. Preferably working woman requires more care due to her dual role responsibility. It becomes slightly difficult for her to manage all her activities with same efficiency as earlier, which may cause feeling of guilt, irritation, stress etc. Physical relaxation, emotional support and essential care are needed for healthy living. They should also think about some suitable modification in their life style and coping strategy. There is also a need for further comprehensive study on various aspects of middle-aged women specially working women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors are thankful to the Coordinator, Centre for Women's Studies and Development, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India for providing necessary facilities for the work.

CORRESPONDENCE TO

Dr. Girish Singh PhD 6, Ganga Bagh Colony, Lanka, Varanasi - 221005, INDIA. Phone: 91-542-2367304 e-mail: drgirishsingh@yahoo.com

References

1. Osborne, M. Depression at the menopause. *British Journal of Hospital Medicine*, 1984; 32: 126-129.
2. Bhati, H. and Gunthey, R. Working women: Family environment and mental health. *Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 1999; 26(2): 246-249.
3. Srivastava, A.K. and Pestonjee, D.M. ICMR Psycho Social Stress Scale. Indian Council of Medical Research, 1995; New Delhi.
4. Singh, M. and Kaushik, S. S. A comparison of relaxation, meditation and cognitive therapy for enhancing stress-coping skills of depression at risk middle aged women. *Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 2000; 27 (1): 89-96.

Author Information

Manisha Singh, PhD (Psychology)

Former Project Fellow, Centre for Women's Studies and Development, Banaras Hindu University

Girish Singh, PhD (Statistics)

Biostatistics Unit, Department of Basic Principles, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University