

## **“Problems of Working Women at Work Place”**

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### **Abstract:**

*‘You can tell the condition of the nation by looking at the status of its women’*

**Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru.**

20<sup>th</sup> Century saw many changes in the status of women. Even in developed countries. While granting equality of rights to men and women in the Politics, Indian society implicitly accepts a sharp distinction between men’s spheres and women’s spheres and between masculine roles and feminine roles. Realization of true parity between the sexes granted by the Constitution will be possible only when conceptions and attitudes of the people are brought at par with it. Women have played just as important a role in the shaping of human history as men have. Higher status for women in terms of employment and work performed in society is, in reality, a key measure of a country’s overall growth. There are numerous reasons and issues that have compelled Indian women to work.

**Key Words:** Labor, Male Collogues, Middle Class, Urban Areas, Working Woman,

## **Introduction:**

Women are primarily associated with home. As homemakers' women are expected to look after domestic chores in the house. By and large manual work for one's own house is to be done by women, as they are considered derogatory for men. They many perform them only under special circumstances, for instance, men may cook when women are disabled by illness or confinement. For community feast cooking by men from within the group is a common feature at the lower socio income levels. Thus, suitability of women for these tasks appears to be a myth. In the middle class (which constitutes an extremely amorphous category) the spheres of men and women are more sharply defined. Ordinarily, all the work that women do is viewed collectively as being an important component of feminine roles and it is not forgotten, that they are being performed by those, who have certain identity in the context of the family, i.e. as mother, as wife, as sister, as daughter and so on. These are the unpaid family workers who may not be returned in the census under the category of workers. Most of the work that women do in the domestic setup is semi-skilled. It is only in unfortunate circumstances that women of middle classes, who have no other qualification and skills, may be forced to do these jobs as a means of earning livelihood; crafts like knitting, tailoring and like these are in some cases adopted by women to make some personal earnings, sometimes without the knowledge of husbands. Ideas of personal and family prestige are strong at this level; people take pride in the fact that their women do not go out of homes to work for others.

This traditional concept of women's role is gradually changed when as girls have started taking up white-collar jobs.

Woman's contribution to productive activities or actual earnings of the family varies at different socio-economic levels and in different regions.

There are two facets to a basic-needs strategy for women in developing countries. One is to enable them to contribute more effectively to the satisfaction of their families' basic needs, within the framework of their traditional responsibilities. The other, which is a fundamental need of the women themselves, is to ease their work burden while furthering their economic independence and their more equitable integration into the community, beyond the narrow circle of the family.

The shifting of the work setting from home to the factory after the industrial revolution has changed the concept of work drastically. Earlier the whole family worked as one production unit and pursued a craft, which has socially ranked and integrated with the social structure. Thus, the basis for identification was family occupation and not individual position in the skill hierarchy of the organization. The work of women at home which produced only use value and which was not remunerated in tangible terms and which was tied to the day-to-day house-hold chores had come to be regarded as non-work and participation of women is grossly under reported, more so in underdeveloped countries with dual economics than in advanced Western countries.

Along with the emergence of an organizational culture there is also a change in the occupational hierarchy with some occupations attaining an identity of 'professions' – elite occupations.' In this chapter I argue about working women.

Professionalization is basically a process of increased control and power. In the process of women, who are less powerful in the overall social organization, are

relegated to positions, which are devoid of power and control, if not through deliberate discrimination at least by the existential exigencies of working women.

Let us very briefly consider the elements of a profession. They are occupations based on systemic pursuit of knowledge and skills. Unlike the other occupation they are distinguishable by their control over the production, distribution and consumption of service provide by them. The exclusiveness of a profession is maintained by stringent admission procedures, a long and highly specialized socialization process and by successfully causing lay interference and control by autonomy or self-regulation and monopoly over the market.

There are **two points** of view from which the relationship between women and professions could be perceived. **One** is the position of women is full-fledged professions- like medicine, law, academics etc. **Another** is the semi professions-like nursing, teaching, secretarial work etc., and their attempts at professionalization.

Firstly, let us consider the career choice and patterns of women entering the full-fledged professions, which are determined to a great extent by this position in the social structure. Silverstone (1980) observes that all women use contingency approach in the selection of their career. "The contingency approach implies that women chose occupations in which they see the greatest opportunities for flexibility in which they can respond to any contingency such as marriage, child birth and geographical mobility. To cite an example practically all over the world medicine and teaching attract more women than the other profession for they provide greater flexibility and are compatible with the image of (a) women as gentle and emotionally responsive and (b) the 'mother' role of women. There are doubts about women's capabilities in professional fields which are derived from the belief that the ray biological functions of women. The demands of the elder in laws as well as the household chores, which are still considered as women's area of responsibility, hamper the uninterrupted pursuit of career. Silverstone and Ward (1981) point out that the career pattern of women in different from that of a man. While for a man career progresses from education –training work-retirement. The career of most women follows education-training-work-interruption-retraining-re-employment-retirement. Interruption is accounted by the inevitable period a woman has to spend in child bearing and child rearing as well as the subordination of a women's career to that of her husband and the consequent geographical mobility. Interruption may sometimes require long periods of retraining. Re-employment may also be difficult in the face of competition from fresh and younger batch of professionals. A compromise between the roles means sacrificing one in toto which is a waste of the investment made in the training process.

Women enter into employment due to various causes, which are as complex as those influencing other choices that affect their way of life. It is generally believed that socio-cultural changes play a very important role in creating a situation in which women would like to seek employment. While one would not deny the importance of socio-cultural changes, there are several other factors, which lead one to take individual decision to work or not to work. The analysis of individual's decision to work gives insight about the processes inducing women to take to employment. Such an analysis also helps in making prediction about the future impact of the working-women.

The contingency approach to career choice restricts women to certain spheres of professional activity and discourages aggressive pursuit of career in competitive spheres. Men who are viewed as dominant independent and capable are also viewed as practicing professions that reinforce such images. Women who are secondary in the

family and who play supportive sustaining and conflict resolving roles are expected to play the same role in the work setting also.

As we have seen already women prefer to take up free professions, which allow private practice or independent work like medicine, teaching, academics, law etc., then organizational professions. There is very limited scope for private consultancy. Women who are working in professions such as engineering, scientific pursuit, architecture, accountancy etc., find it very difficult to challenge the male stereotypes. They are further constrained by the difficulties they face in socializing with the clients, colleagues and others, the need for their presence in the field and the demands made on their free time. They have to be extra-successful to gain recognition in their chosen field.

Now we dwell on semi-professions, which are at the bottom of the hierarchy. These occupations have limited technical and cognitive inputs. They have supportive functions to play and are subordinate to a dominant group or profession. The underprivileged sections-including women dominate the membership of these groups. Another aspect to which I would like to draw attention is the general conclusion drawn by many studies that women are less professional in their orientation than men. Thus, is so because the indicators are not selected properly in most cases with far greater emphasis on professional meetings attended, number of journals prescribed, research paper published etc., which show men who pursue their career mindedly is a better light than women. Sufficient emphasis should be placed instead on service-orientation. Commitment to tasks, effect put into the work and professional client relationship etc., which would provide a more balanced insight into the professionalism of men and women. Since the occupational hierarchy is a reflection of the social hierarchy. No drastic changes can be expected until there are far reaching changes in the society in its technological basis, value-orientation, power relations as well as division of responsibility at home. The fact that women are entering elite occupations in no cause for complacency, until we realize and make conscious attempts to remove the inherent prejudices as well as the hindering social-structural imbalances.

Demographers are interested in work, or more narrowly in 'labor force participation' because it interacts with so many demographic variables. For both males and females there are strong causal links between both occupation and work status and marriage, fertility, migration and mortality. In order to understand the nature this causal relationship it is necessary to have reliable data on the working behavior of individuals.

From the point of view of women and development, one of the biggest barriers preventing women from having adequate recognition and opportunities to participate in development is the acceptance of the myth that women do not work.

According to 2018 World Bank report the labor force participation rate (LFPR) was 26.97% females in India. LFPR of females in India is among the lowest in the world. And this comes as no surprise. The world average stood at 48.47% in 2018. The 2017-18 report of the NSSO also said that the fall in the LFPR was far more in rural areas (from 67.7% to 58.7%) than in urban areas (from 49.3% to 47.6%).

Rural areas including tribal and backward areas: Women workers in rural areas are largely landless agriculture laborers; members of households with uneconomic holdings; those engaged in traditional household industries like hand-spinning, hand-weaving, oil-pressing, rice pounding, leather, tobacco processing etc.

**Women workers in urban areas fall into three distinct categories:**

**The first category** consists largely of migrants from villages and members of families whose economic position has deteriorated to near starvation. The women of this class work mainly as domestic servants and as unskilled labor in various unorganized industries.

These categories of women workers, who are largely slum dwellers, are below subsistence level. Their problems are to find a job which is secure or provides them regular income at least to subsist, a place for comfortable living, as most of them are away from their homes located in villages; and rehabilitation facilities for their families, particularly children and preparing them for livelihood, through better education and training; in that order.

**Second category** consists of women, who need employment either to keep their families away from starvation or to ensure better standards of living. Most of such women are found employed in industries, services and professions. Some are even self-employed. In the case of second category of women workers in urban areas, their existence ranges from subsistence to security. Some of these women, particularly those residing away from their families, are likely to be exposed to the dangers of exploitation from undesirable and anti-social elements. Personal security is therefore a major problem for them.

**The Third category** consists of women who are highly educated and work in higher ranks of services and professions for personal satisfaction and independence. Belonging as they do at least to the upper middle-class families, they do not as a group face any serious problems requiring immediate attention here.

My paper focused on above second and third categories of urban areas. In one of the ILO studies dealing with women's employment it was presumed that motives differed with marital status both objectively and subjectively. Not only the economic needs but the motivational reasons also vary with marital status. They broadly mentioned two reasons: (a) Women's economic need, and (b) national necessity for increased production. The ministry of labor, Government of India has pointed out that whatsoever the stage of economic or social development of a country, four factors prevail which led women to join working force. They are: (a) the inadequate income of the principal earner of the family, (b) mishaps, such as incapacity of the bread winner, (c) death of bread winner; and (d) a women's desire for economic independence or for securing higher standards of living. There is also desire on the part of the women to give expression to their own talents and skills.

Now time has been changed. The newly formed working class began to fight. First for economic survival, but with an increasing awareness, that they had the power in their hands to change society and end exploitation itself.

A United Nation's study shows that women provide 2/3 of the world's labor, earn 1/10 of the world's income and own only one hundredth of the world's property. This economic vulnerability leads ultimately to social inequality and long-term exploitation.

### **Working Women at Work Place, Home & Society:**

The problems and difficulties of workingwomen are multi-dimensional, varying from women to women at personal level, and section-to-section at general level and hence need to be analyzed in depth. The problems of workingwomen at work places are multiple and differ from women to women according to the nature of the work and positions. Ms. Aruna Broota, a psychologist of Delhi University, is categorical in stating that no girl/woman is respected in the office if she is known to be a single

woman. In fact, in India women are considered less of an individual than as an object of vice by men whether she is single or married, this is particularly true for the women who are working among the males. Yet they consciously or unconsciously adopt their mother's role of subservience to the male. So, women, in general have to be taught to develop their self-confidence, as well as self-respect and not accept the apologetic and subservient role instilled in them since childhood.

### **Challenges:**

- 1- **Workingwomen & Male Colleagues:** The efficiency of workingwomen is always suspected. Especially upper-class cadres, even though other qualifications are equal, men are preferred, the authorities are doubtful whether she would be able to handle male subordinates, take independent decision, cope with crisis and manage her duties. Even though she has proved her efficiency, they think twice before promoting her. Even if she is given a chance, there is always remark that she has been taken because she is a woman. The male co-workers in the office cannot mentally accept the superiority of the women's work. The male colleagues get together and pass comments. As the woman is brought up in a protected atmosphere in the family, she is not mentally prepared to face this kind of situation. She feels helpless and often breaks down. This further leads to the misconception that women workers are not fit for outside work.
- 2- **Workingwomen & Female Colleagues:** The workingwomen have their own problems. Mostly do not get jobs in the fields of their interest and place. The composition of staff at the work place also creates problems. Some traditional families in India would like their women to be posted exclusively in the girls' college/school. These families are afraid that their women will be looked upon as sex objects. Sex segregation in the office and establishments are an unhealthy pattern either for the present or for the future. It is negation of equality with men. But in this contest another issue develops at workplace where only women staff.
- 3- **Office & Family:** There is another type of problem, which arises when she has to work over-time to complete her work. In certain government jobs the women employee also faces transfers, she finds it difficult to go, having the family behind. If she is married, she cannot go leaving her husband and children. In such a situation generally, she has to give up the job/promotion. One more problem face that if she is unmarried the parents would not allow her to go alone or live alone and in married condition it depends on approval of in laws. The worst part of this married condition, if in laws allowed then she has double workload, office work as well as households' chores too. In some cases, women have to leave the job when the children are too young and there is no body in the family to look after them. By the time children are grown up, women are out of touch with their field and are not able to find work again. But the situation is different when it comes to workingwomen in government sector. If they are married, the family never wants to leave their government job (sarkari naukari) for the lucrative salary and job security. The workingwoman here has to manage the family front, do the household chores as well as continue her service. It won't be hyperbolic if we call them super women. In reality these super women are actually sufferer women. Another issue that needs to be addressed is the causal approach with which the government jobs are catered to even by these workingwomen in question. They also keep on hassling anyhow with their duty hours and giving more time to their family life. And this is how their quality of professional work dwindles.
- 4- **Women as Manager/Boss/ Head of the Institution:** It is equally difficult a situation where the women are boss. The male subordinates do not like to accept

the authority of a woman boss. If she demands work, efficiency and discipline, she is criticized as harsh as dictatorial. She is supposed to dominate only to hide her efficiency and inferiority complex. If she is polite, mild and courteous, she would be labeled as inefficient, talkative and what not. In any way, they do not carry out her orders and instructions. Even the female subordinates do not like a female head (Boss) especially she is younger and more efficient than them. There is another problem; while working with men, a woman tends to develop close relation with any one of them owing to prolonged and constant association. If the place where both are women, like women colleges/schools, medical gynecology department, NGOs, and business sector like parlors, boutiques etc. situations are quite different, especially in offices.

**5- Health Issues:** Although the Union Budget 2022 put women's employability at a healthy approx. 52%, according to the World Bank, since the pandemic, female employment in India actually fell by 9% in the same year. The number of women in employment in India has fallen in recent years, and commentators argue that one of the reasons is poor support from employers when women experience female-specific health problems that affect their ability to perform to their best at work, such as the menopause. Even overwork at home and office she ignores her health. Skipping breakfast or dinner or not taking healthy food. So, working women may be more likely to develop lifestyle disorders such as obesity, thyroid issues, anaemia, vitamin D deficiency, infertility, diabetes, and blood pressure issues. Work-related stress may increase the risk of heart problems, including cardiovascular disease (CVD). Women with certain lifestyle risk factors, such as high weight or obesity, limited exercise, poor diet, smoking, and alcohol use, have an increased chance of developing breast cancer. **Mental health** is also important issue for working women. Home and workplace atmosphere played a major role in deciding the mental health status of married working women. Conducive workplace atmosphere, favourable attitude of colleagues at workplace, and favourable attitudes of husbands/in-laws at home were found to be protective of overall mental health. Working women may experience poor mental health due to the stress of balancing work and home life. They may also be more prone to depression if they don't have much family support or domestic help. Women who were sharing their own problems with their husbands had maintained good mental health. In addition, we found that some family, social issues like those women who experienced job-family conflict or did not participate in decision making process of family were at increased risk of developing poor mental health whereas spending time to attend social obligations and devoting some time for yoga, meditation, exercise had good mental health outcome. Usually, when women work, most nations develop faster. That's true for India as well.

**6- Monetary Challenges:** Here are a few things to consider first: Nearly one-third of working women lack a retirement account, but it's not always because they don't make money. Many times, it's because they never learned financial literacy skills. Meanwhile, women typically outlive their male counterparts by several years. Gender disparity indicates the difference in pay between men and women in the workforce. Civils daily noted that India has the highest gender pay gap. While the World Inequality Report of 2022 noted that men earn 82% of the labor income while women earn 18% of it.

Here are a few things to consider first:

- Nearly one-third of working women lack a retirement account, but it's not always because they don't make money. Many times, it's because they never learned financial literacy skills.
- Meanwhile, women typically outlive their male counterparts by several years. Thus, they're more likely to suffer disproportionately after a death or divorce.
- Women spend more time fulfilling familial duties outside the workplace, which can significantly impact their ability to perform on the job.

Simply, women spend much of their lives caring for others and then neglect to build a financial foundation. However, they also survive for longer and require support in old age. Otherwise, they risk poverty instead of enjoying their golden years. Unfortunately, retirement planning problems aren't the only financial challenges for women.

- 7- **Sexual Harassment:** Sexual harassment is an abominable reality for Indian women on a daily basis. Every day, their greatest challenge is to retain their holiness in their homes, on the road, in their educational institutions, and at work. Despite the increase in numbers, women are finding that their complaints are not being adequately addressed by their employers. Employers are either uninformed of the law's provisions or have only partially implemented them, and those that do set up internal panels have members who are poorly trained. According to the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act of 2013, every commercial or public organisation with 10 or more employees must have an internal complaints commission (ICC).

### **Suggestions:**

#### **1- Encourage Male Allies:**

**Shared Responsibilities:** Promote shared caregiving responsibilities between genders at home and in the workplace.

**Involvement in Advocacy:** Encourage men to advocate for gender equality and challenge workplace biases.

#### **2- Enforce Equal Opportunities and Pay:**

**Legislation and Policies:** Governments should implement and strictly enforce equal pay laws and anti-discrimination regulations. Organizations must comply with these laws through regular audits.

**Pay Transparency:** Mandate transparency in salary structures to ensure fairness in remuneration.

**Merit-Based Opportunities:** Establish clear, unbiased criteria for hiring, promotions, and performance evaluations.

#### **3- Work-Life Balance:**

**Flexible Work Arrangements:** Offer options such as remote work, flexi-hours, compressed workweeks, or part-time roles.

**Parental Leave Policies:** Provide equitable maternity, paternity, and parental leave policies to share caregiving responsibilities.

**Workload Management:** Encourage realistic deadlines and proper delegation of tasks to reduce stress.

#### **4- Address Sexual Harassment:**

**Clear Policies:** Develop comprehensive policies that define, prevent, and penalize sexual harassment in the workplace.

**Training Programs:** Conduct regular workshops to educate employees on acceptable workplace behavior and reporting mechanisms.



Safe Reporting Systems: Create anonymous and secure channels for reporting incidents and ensure strict confidentiality.

#### **5- Mentorship and Leadership Development:**

Establish mentorship programs to guide women in their career paths. Encourage and support women to take up leadership roles through skill-building programs.

Mentorship Programs: Pair women with experienced mentors who can guide them in their career growth.

Skill-Building Initiatives: Offer leadership training, public speaking workshops, and technical skill-building programs targeted at women.

Leadership Opportunities: Actively encourage women to apply for managerial and decision-making roles.

Address Stereotypes and Bias: Conduct regular gender-sensitivity training to challenge stereotypes and unconscious biases. Promote diverse and inclusive workplace cultures through policies and campaigns.

Unconscious Bias Training: Organize workshops to help employees recognize and challenge their own biases.

Promote Role Models: Highlight successful women leaders to inspire others and break stereotypes.

Inclusive Culture: Encourage diversity in all teams and ensure all voices are heard and valued.

#### **6- Health and Wellness Support:**

Workplace Wellness Programs: Provide access to health services, such as counseling, stress management workshops, and fitness facilities.

Mental Health Support: Offer confidential counseling services and create awareness about mental health.

Reasonable Work Hours: Avoid extended working hours and ensure women have adequate rest and personal time.

#### **7- Networking and Collaboration Opportunities:**

Networking Events: Facilitate professional networking opportunities within and outside the organization.

Women-Led Forums: Create groups where women can share experiences, challenges, and solutions.

Conference Sponsorships: Support women employees to attend industry conferences and events.

#### **8- Strengthen Legal Protections:**

Labor Law Enforcement: Governments should regularly monitor compliance with laws that protect working women.

Complaint Redressal Mechanisms: Establish fast and effective grievance mechanisms to address workplace violations.

Equal Opportunity Commissions: Set up independent bodies to investigate workplace inequalities and ensure accountability.

Promote Awareness and Advocacy:

Public Campaigns: Launch awareness campaigns to address societal stereotypes about working women.

Educational Reforms: Incorporate gender equality topics in school and college curricula to foster early awareness.

Collaboration with NGOs: Partner with non-profit organizations to promote women's rights and address systemic issues.

Promote Financial Independence:

Workplace Financial Education: Offer workshops on financial literacy and investment opportunities for women.

Equal Benefits: Provide women with equal access to retirement benefits, healthcare, and other job-related perks.

### **9- Create Childcare Support Systems:**

Provide on-site childcare facilities or childcare subsidies for working parents. Collaborate with community organizations to make affordable childcare accessible.

On-Site Childcare Facilities: Set up daycare centers within the office premises for ease of access.

Childcare Subsidies: Provide financial support for external childcare services.

Parent-Friendly Policies: Permit bringing children to work occasionally in emergencies and organize family-friendly workplace events.

### **Conclusion:**

**“No nation, no society, no community can hold its head high and claim to be part of the civilized world if it condones the practice of discriminating against one half of humanity represented by women.” – Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh**

Working women, or those who work for a living, confront challenges at work just because they are women. Due to the fact that they are female The public perception of women’s roles lags far behind the law. The assumption that women are only suitable for specific tasks leads to discrimination among those who work with them. Employees should be recruited. As a result, women can readily find work as nurses, doctors, teachers, secretaries, or in other fields.

Even when well-qualified women are available, a male candidate with equal qualifications is given preference. Gender bias poses a barrier during the recruitment process. Even while the law declares equality in remuneration, it is not always followed. The ingrained belief that women are incapable of doing difficult work and are less effective than males have an impact on the payment of differential salaries and compensation for the same job.

As a result, all of a woman’s rights, including her right to property, health, education, and a dignified existence, must be respected, protected, and fulfilled. Law enforcement must look into these offenses in particular and use an iron fist to put a stop to them. Women are unable to fully participate in public life because of a lack of safety. As a result, ensuring safety or seeking solutions must be done within a legal framework.

Only then will women be able to exercise the full spectrum of rights that come with being a legitimate citizen. We are the same country that celebrated P.V. Sindhu’s Olympic victory and admired Kalpana Chawla’s space mission. When a woman is given the correct opportunities to develop her gift and explore her potential, she has a world of options open to her. Let us treat women with the respect they deserve, and they will provide us with endless reasons to be proud of them.

Women empowerment is one of the most important factors in overall growth and development. Four key pillars of women empowerment are in terms of women’s health, education, income, and participation in decision-making, out of which health is of paramount importance. As the working women are contributing immensely in the overall social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women, ensuring their health would not only lead to their own good health but also result in greater productivity, growth, and development of the entire society. Let us see as to how

working women can maintain their own health while remaining connected to their office jobs as well as caring for others.

The role of working women in the decision-making process is pivotal in shaping inclusive, diverse, and equitable outcomes across personal, organizational, and societal levels. Their participation brings unique perspectives, creativity, and a balanced approach to decision-making. Empowering women to take active roles in leadership and decision-making not only fosters gender equality but also contributes to better economic performance, social harmony, and sustainable development. Recognizing and supporting the contributions of working women is essential for creating a fair and progressive society.

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