



## Working Women's Mental Health: Challenges and Prospects in Delhi

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to explore the challenges and prospects of mental health among working women in India. The objectives of the study are to identify the mental health problems faced by working women, explore the contributing factors, and understand and apply diverse theoretical perspectives contributing to mental health by sociologists. The study used qualitative research methods and collected narratives through in-depth interviews with working women in various industries. The findings suggest that working women in India face various mental health challenges, including stress, anxiety, and depression, which can be attributed to work-related issues, family responsibilities, and societal expectations. The study also identified various factors contributing to these mental health problems, such as lack of support from family and colleagues, gender discrimination, and work-life imbalance. Applying diverse theoretical perspectives, including social support theory and feminist theory, provided a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by working women in India. The study recommends that employers and policymakers should develop policies and programs that address these challenges and promote mental health among working women.*

**Key Words:** *Mental Health, Working Women, Work-life balance, Sociology of mental health.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION :

Women's mental health is often viewed through a biomedical lens, which neglects mental health issues resulting from globalizing economic and cultural forces. This approach fails to recognize that social problems are not merely individual problems, but are shaped by broader social and economic structures. It is essential to examine how the social and economic conditions that structure women's existence as part of poor urban households require attention. By examining the experiences of women within their communities and social structures, this article seeks to understand the complex interplay of social and cultural factors that contribute to women's psychosocial distress. Understanding the social and cultural factors that contribute to psychosocial distress makes it possible to develop more effective interventions that address the root causes of women's mental health issues. This article emphasizes the need to move beyond the biomedical mental health model and examine the social and cultural factors that shape women's lives. The use of narratives provides a powerful tool to understand the complex interplay between these factors and women's experiences of distress.

#### 1.1 MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

According to recent surveys and studies, working women are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health problems than men. Here are some key figures from recent surveys:

- According to a survey conducted by the American Psychological Association in 2021, women are more likely than men to report symptoms of anxiety and depression, and the gap has increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey found that 44% of women reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety, compared to 32% of men, and 37% of women reported experiencing symptoms of depression, compared to 21% of men. (Source: APA Stress in America Survey, 2021)



- A 2019 survey conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) found that women are more likely than men to experience mental health problems, with 22.3% of women reporting a mental health condition compared to 15.1% of men.
- According to a 2020 survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, women are more likely than men to report experiencing stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey found that 57% of women reported feeling worried or stressed, compared to 46% of men. (Source: KFF Women's Health Survey, 2021).
- A 2018 study published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health found that women who work in male-dominated occupations are at a higher risk of experiencing depression and anxiety.
- A survey conducted by the National Women's Law Center found that nearly half of working women reported feeling stressed or anxious due to their job during the pandemic. The survey also found that women of color and low-income women were more likely to report experiencing negative mental health effects (Source: NWLC Workplace Mental Health Survey, 2021).

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE :**

Goyal et al (2021) in their study of Work-life Balance and its Impact on Mental Health of Working Women in India highlighted the significant impact of work-life balance on the mental health of working women in India. The study found that poor work-life balance led to high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among women. Work-life balance is essential to the mental health of working women in India. Women who are able to balance their work and personal lives tend to be happier and experience lower levels of stress. Women who struggle with work-life balance often report higher levels of anxiety and depression. Social support, including support from spouses and co-workers, is critical to achieving work-life balance. Employers can play a key role in promoting work-life balance by offering flexible work arrangements and promoting a culture of work-life balance within the organization.

Sinha, N. (2019). Work-Family Interface and Mental Health Among Working Women in India This literature review examine the interplay between the work-family interface and mental health of working women in India. The author discusses the various factors that contribute to work-family conflict and its impact on the mental health of women. The article suggests that policies and interventions should be implemented to support working women.

Bhatia, T., & Aggarwal, S. (2018). Mental Health and Work-Life Balance of Working Women: This literature review examines the relationship between mental health and the work-life balance of working women in India. The authors discuss the various factors that impact work-life balance and their impact on the mental health of women. The article suggests that organizations need to implement policies and practices that support work-life balance for women.

Sahoo, S., & Singh, A. (2018). Mental Health of Working Women in India: This literature review explores the mental health of working women in India from a holistic perspective. The authors discuss the various factors that contribute to women's mental health and well-being at work. The article suggests that interventions should address not only the individual but also the organizational and societal factors.

Ali, M., Smith, P. K., & Dasgupta, R. (2017). Mental health of women in non-standard employment in India: This literature review focuses on the mental health of women employed in non-standard employment in India. The authors discuss the various challenges that these women face and their impact on mental health. The findings suggest that there is a need for targeted interventions for working women in non-standard employment.

Amani, N., & Bhanot, M. (2017). Mental Health of Working Women in India: A Literature Review. This article provides a comprehensive literature review on the mental health of working women in India. The author discusses the different stressors that women face in the workplace and how it affects their mental health. It highlights the need for intervention programs for working women to improve their mental health

## **3. SOCIOLOGY OF MENTAL HEALTH :**

Sociologists have made significant contributions to the study of mental health through their various theories and research. Some of the theorists directly contributed to the study of mental health while others did not specifically address mental health as a topic, but their work has significant implications for our understanding of the social factors that shape mental health outcomes and we can apply these theories to the study of mental health. A growing area in Sociology examines the social causes and consequences of mental health and illness. Overall, sociologists have played a crucial role in shedding light on the social, cultural, and political factors that influence mental health.



## **Erving Goffman**

One of the pioneers in this area was Erving Goffman, who explored the impact of institutionalization on the mental health of patients. In his book "Asylums," Goffman argued that the stigma associated with mental illness led to the dehumanization of patients in mental institutions. His research highlighted the need for a more humanistic approach to mental health treatment. Here are some of Goffman's key contributions to the field of mental health:

- **Stigma:** Goffman's work on stigma and social identity provided insights into the ways in which individuals with mental illnesses are stigmatized and marginalized by society. He argued that stigma is a powerful force that shapes social interactions and can lead to discrimination, exclusion, and self-stigmatization.
- **Total institutions:** Goffman's concept of total institutions, such as mental hospitals and prisons, highlighted the ways in which these institutions can be dehumanizing and oppressive to those who reside within them. He argued that the structure and organization of these institutions can lead to the loss of individual identity, self-esteem, and agency.
- **Impression management:** Goffman's work on impression management provided insights into how people with mental illnesses engage in various strategies to manage their social interactions and present a positive image of themselves. He argued that individuals with mental illnesses are acutely aware of the stigma and negative stereotypes associated with mental illness, and often work to present themselves in a positive light to avoid social rejection.
- **Labeling theory:** Goffman's labeling theory argued that the process of being labeled as mentally ill can have profound effects on an individual's identity and self-concept. He suggested that being labeled as mentally ill can lead to a "spoiled identity" and stigmatization, and can result in negative consequences such as discrimination, exclusion, and reduced opportunities.

## **Michel Foucault**

Michel Foucault was a prominent French philosopher and social theorist who made significant contributions to our understanding of power, knowledge, and mental health. His work focused on the historical and social construction of mental illness, the role of power in the production and regulation of knowledge about mental health, and the effects of institutionalization and medicalization on people with mental illnesses.

Here are some of Foucault's key contributions to the field of mental health:

- **The history of madness:** Foucault's book "Madness and Civilization" provided a critical analysis of the history of mental illness, arguing that the way society has treated people with mental illnesses has changed over time. He showed how, in the past, people with mental illnesses were often marginalized, excluded, and subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment. He argued that this history is important for understanding how mental illness is socially constructed and stigmatized today.
- **Power and knowledge:** Foucault's concept of power/knowledge argued that power is not just about repression and domination, but also about the production and regulation of knowledge. He argued that the medicalization of mental illness is a form of power that produces knowledge about mental health and shapes our understanding of mental illness.
- **Discipline and punishment:** Foucault's work on discipline and punishment showed how institutionalization and medicalization can be used as forms of social control. He argued that the power of institutions, such as mental hospitals and prisons, is often exercised through surveillance, discipline, and punishment, which can have negative effects on the mental health and well-being of those who are institutionalized.
- **The medicalization of mental illness:** Foucault's work on the medicalization of mental illness showed how the medical profession has become the dominant authority on mental health and illness. He argued that this has led to a narrow and reductionist understanding of mental health, which has resulted in the over-diagnosis and over-treatment of mental illness.



## **Durkheim**

Emile Durkheim was a French sociologist who made important contributions to our understanding of mental health and suicide.

- **Anomie:** Durkheim's concept of anomie refers to a state of normlessness and confusion that can arise when social norms and values break down. He argued that anomie can lead to feelings of meaninglessness and despair, which can, in turn, contribute to mental illness.
- **Social integration:** Durkheim's concept of social integration refers to the degree to which individuals are connected to their social environment. He argued that individuals who are socially integrated have strong social ties and are more likely to feel a sense of belonging, purpose, and meaning in life. Conversely, individuals who are socially isolated or disconnected are more likely to experience mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety.
- **Suicide:** Durkheim's study of suicide provided important insights into the social causes of mental illness. He argued that suicide is not simply an individual act, but is also influenced by social factors such as social integration, regulation, and anomie. He showed that suicide rates vary across different social groups and that this variation is due in part to differences in social integration and regulation.

## **Karl Marx**

Karl Marx was a philosopher and social theorist who is best known for his contributions to our understanding of capitalism and social inequality. While he did not specifically address mental health as a topic, his work has significant implications for our understanding of mental health and its relationship to social factors.

Here are some of Marx's key contributions to the field of mental health:

- **Alienation:** Marx's concept of alienation refers to a feeling of estrangement or disconnection from oneself, others, and the world. He argued that capitalism creates conditions of alienation for workers, as they are forced to sell their labor power to capitalists in exchange for wages. This relationship of exploitation and domination can lead to feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and isolation, which can contribute to mental illness.
- **Social inequality:** Marx's work on social inequality highlighted the potential negative effects of economic and social disparities on mental health. He argued that inequality and poverty can lead to stress, anxiety, and depression, and can exacerbate existing mental health conditions.
- **Material conditions:** Marx's emphasis on material conditions highlighted the importance of social and economic factors in shaping mental health outcomes. He argued that individuals' access to resources, including food, housing, and healthcare, can significantly impact their mental health.

Gender difference in mental health is another area in which conflict theory is applied. The conflict theory informs why women experience higher levels of mental health problems compared to their male counterparts. In order to explain this gender difference in mental health, researchers analyzed the distribution of power between men and women within the household. Women are often associated with low status compared to men. This observation leads to the notions of dominated and dominant. Given that men are for the most part the dominant figures and women the dominant figures in the household, it is clear, through Marx's theory, that the latter will suffer more mental health problems than the former. Marx did not specifically address mental health as a topic, his work has significant implications for our understanding of the social factors that shape mental health outcomes. His emphasis on alienation, social inequality, material conditions, and critique of psychiatry all provide important insights into the ways in which social factors can impact mental health.

## **4. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONG WORKING WOMEN :**

- **Gender Inequality:** Gender inequality is widespread in India and affects every aspect of women's lives, including their mental health. Women are often discriminated against in the workplace, and they are paid less than their male counterparts for the same work. This can lead to job insecurity and stress, which can affect their mental health.



- **Lack of Social Support:** Working women in India often face a lack of social support from their families and colleagues. They have to juggle between work and family responsibilities, which can lead to a sense of isolation and loneliness.
- **Work-Related Stress:** Work-related stress is one of the major contributors to mental health problems among working women in India. Long working hours, tight deadlines, and constant pressure to perform can lead to chronic stress, which can affect mental health.
- **Lack of Work-Life Balance:** Balancing work and family responsibilities is a significant challenge for working women in India. The Indian workplace culture is demanding, and women are expected to perform both their professional and domestic roles without any support.

## 5. OBJECTIVES :

- To identify the mental health problems faced by working women in India.
- To explore the factors that contribute to mental health problems.
- To understand and apply diverse theoretical perspectives contributing to mental health by sociologists.

## 6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :

A narrative research methodology is an approach to data collection in social science that emphasizes the importance of storytelling and personal experiences. This method involves gathering and analyzing individuals' narratives, which are personal accounts of their lived experiences. The researcher collects data through interviews, observations, and documents that capture personal stories, memories, and experiences. Narrative research methodology is particularly useful in understanding complex social phenomena that cannot be easily measured quantitatively. It is a qualitative research method that aims to understand the lived experiences of individuals by exploring their personal stories, and how they make sense of their experiences. I collected 5 narratives of working women who were facing mental health problems to highlight the issue of mental health and also the social causes pertaining to it.

Ethical principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent were followed throughout the study to ensure that participants' rights and privacy were protected.

## 7. NARRATIVES ON MENTAL HEALTH :

*Sarah was diagnosed with depression at the age of 30 after experiencing a series of traumatic events including the death of a loved one and divorce. She quickly realized that her mental health had been affected for much longer than that and that she had been living with undiagnosed mental illness for most of her adult life. Sarah sought professional help and began educating herself about her condition. With the help of medication, therapy, and support from her loved ones, she was able to regain control of her life and improve her mental health.*

*Anjali suffered from anxiety and panic attacks since she was a teenager. She struggled to manage her symptoms for years until she reached out for professional help. Through cognitive-behavioral therapy, she learned coping mechanisms that gave her the tools she needed to manage her anxiety. Anjali's story highlights the importance of seeking professional help when experiencing mental health issues, as well as the efficacy of therapeutic interventions for mental illness.*

*At the age of 25, Maria was diagnosed with bipolar disorder after a long period of instability and hospitalizations. She had struggled with her mental health for years and often dismissed her symptoms as "just being moody" or "having a bad day." Her diagnosis led to a greater understanding of her condition and the importance of staying on her medication regimen. She also credits therapy, self-care, and a strong support system for helping her manage her bipolar disorder.*

*Aisha experienced postpartum depression after the birth of her first child. She was unprepared for the overwhelming feelings of sadness and anxiety that came with motherhood. Aisha sought help from her healthcare provider and was able to receive treatment that helped her recover. Her story highlights the importance of mental health support for new mothers and the need for greater awareness and understanding of postpartum depression.*



*With a history of trauma and abuse, Maya suffered from depression and anxiety that was compounded by the isolation and harassment she experienced as a woman of color in the workplace. It took a toll on her mental health, and she sought out therapy to help manage her symptoms. Maya's story calls attention to the intersectionality of mental illness and the impact that systemic discrimination and oppression can have on an individual's mental health.*

## **8. SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS :**

- Sarah's experience shows the impact of traumatic events and undiagnosed mental illness on one's mental health. It highlights the importance of seeking professional help and support from loved ones to improve mental health.
- Anjali's story emphasizes the importance of seeking professional help and the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy in managing anxiety and panic attacks.
- Maria's experience highlights the importance of proper diagnosis, medication, therapy, and a strong support system in managing bipolar disorder.
- Aisha's experience highlights the need for mental health support for new mothers and the importance of raising awareness of postpartum depression.
- Maya's experience illustrates the intersectionality of mental illness and the impact of systemic discrimination and oppression on an individual's mental health. It emphasizes the need for greater awareness of the impact of social inequalities on mental health.

Sociological analysis of the issue suggests that the gendered nature of work and societal expectations placed on women to balance work and family responsibilities contribute to the mental health problems experienced by working women. Women may face discrimination, harassment, and unequal pay in the workplace, which can lead to stress and anxiety. Additionally, women who are primary caregivers for children or aging relatives may struggle to balance their work and caregiving responsibilities, leading to increased stress and burnout.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS :**

There are several ways to tackle the mental health problems of working women, and here are some recommendations:

- Promote work-life balance: Employers can offer flexible work arrangements, such as part-time work, telecommuting, and job sharing to help working women balance their work and family responsibilities. This can help reduce the stress and burnout that women experience.
- Provide support for caregivers: Employers can provide support for caregivers, such as on-site child care, elder care, and employee assistance programs to help working women manage their caregiving responsibilities. This can reduce the burden of caregiving and help women maintain their mental health.
- Address gender discrimination: Employers can address gender discrimination in the workplace by implementing policies that promote gender equality, such as equal pay, promotion opportunities, and anti-discrimination policies. This can help reduce the stress and anxiety that women experience as a result of discrimination.
- Create a supportive workplace culture: Employers can create a supportive workplace culture by promoting employee well-being, providing opportunities for professional development, and creating a positive work environment. This can help reduce stress and increase job satisfaction.
- Increase awareness and education: Employers can increase awareness and education about mental health issues in the workplace, such as stress management, coping skills, and mental health resources. This can help reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues and encourage women to seek help when needed.

## **10. CONCLUSION :**

The mental health problems faced by working women in India are a consequence of various factors, including gender inequality, lack of social support, work-related stress, marital discord, and lack of work-life balance. Addressing these factors requires a holistic approach that involves government policies, workplace reforms, and cultural change.



Providing support and resources for working women can go a long way in improving their mental health and well-being, which in turn can lead to a healthier and more productive workforce. As a society, we need to recognize the importance of mental health and take steps to promote it among working women in India.

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