

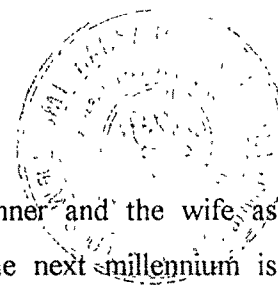


CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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The traditional family model - the husband as bread winner and the wife as homemaker - is becoming a vestige of the past society. As the next millennium is approached, more women in more households are earning more money. Today, there is a widespread cultural mandate among members of the society that bright and talented women should not confine themselves to domestic and child rearing concerns only, but instead along with men they should engage in high commitment careers. The job participation of women has resulted in the rise of dual career families.

The concept of dual career families emerged from the early research of Rapoport and Rapoport, who differentiated dual career life style from the more traditional marital relationships. According to Rapoport and Rapoport (1969), a career is defined as life long work involving a high degree of personal commitment and reward. The dual career dyad is characterized by the involvement of both spouses in professions that many times generate excessive demands on personal time and energy.

The career women, who stepped beyond traditional roles may be at an advantage in terms of their social status and thereby their mental health. There are benefits and psychological advantages when women work outside. Career women report greater self-esteem, effectiveness, well being and more marital satisfaction. They also provide positive role models for children. There is a positive relationship between mother working and academic performance of children (Mishra, 1994). It is a tenet of Marxism that gender equality can be achieved only in a society where women work outside the home.

Coping with dual role responsibilities, deprived of corresponding changes in the definition of the roles, facing inadequate social support and encountering discrimination at work itself, the Indian women who dare to step out is often in a worse position than her non-working counterpart (Taylor, 1990). He stated further that :

Modern women are now facing an ever worse situation, where, on the one hand, society encourages them to believe that they are in every respect equal to men and should think of themselves as such, while on the other, it systematically denies them the opportunity to compete on equal terms (P 108).

Statistics on Indian women reflect the feminisation of certain professions and occupations, which are lower in status (Govt. of India, 1974). Social and cultural factors deprive them of availing of the allegedly gender-delinked employment and education opportunities. The ones who eventually rise to the forefront in professional career have to struggle hard to prove themselves. Moreover, lack of adequate facilities, physical isolation and specific social disapproval are factors that cause role overload. This can cause role stress whereby they feel pulled in various directions (Bharat, 1994).

The fact that conflict and stress can occur, when trying to balance work and family roles, has been well documented (Pleck, 1977; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1987; Greenhaus et al. 1987). In families where both parents are working, whether for personal fulfilment or for financial necessity, there is evidence that the rewards of two incomes are diminished by the stresses and strains associated with trying to balance both work and family (Sekaran, 1985).

The concept of stress was first introduced in life sciences by Hans Selye in 1936 (Selye, 1956). According to him any external event or any internal drive which threatens to upset the organismic equilibrium is stress. Stress is a response to the perceived relationship between demands on a person and her or his ability to cope. The supports available help a person to meet or manage effectively the demands, while the constraints limit her or his capacity to do so. These demands and constraints create pressure. The effect is the experience of stress by the person. When there is too little stress, performance is low, where stress level is too high, again performance suffers. Somewhere between these two extremes is the optimum level of stress, where one attains peak performance. Under conditions of over stress an individual may experience exhaustion or even illness. Many symptoms like palpitation, breathlessness, headaches, skin troubles, excessive

sweating, indigestion, respiratory ailments like common cold, raised blood pressure, hot flushes, over-sensitivity to noise or smell, muscular cramps, loss of sexual desire and disturbed sleep are stress results (Asha, 1991). The stress producing factors are called stressors. Career women may experience stress due to stressors attached to their career and family organisations.

Two broad categories of stressors have been described by Everly (1989), namely, (i) biogenic stressors and (ii) psychosocial stressors. Biogenic stressors effect a stress response through electrical or biochemical properties that may initially bypass the higher brain centres where interpretation of events normally occurs. Some biogenic stressors, called sympathomimetics, activate human stress response through direct physiological mechanisms that may override a person's interpretation of them. Psychosocial stressors alternatively become stressors, mainly because of the individual's cognitive interpretation or meaning given to the event, the physiological arousal experience, or both. Thus, these stressors may be real or perceived events from both or either the external social environment or internal physical experience. While they cannot cause the response directly, psychosocial stressors work through the person's own cognitive approach mechanisms. Clearly, the greater part of repeated stress in a person's life arises from psychosocial stressors that come to possess stress-evoking characteristics through the individual's interpretations of stimuli that are otherwise neutral (Everly, 1989).

When educated women assume responsibilities of career and family, they have to take care of the respective role responsibilities in both the organisations. These roles may be enacted with different degrees of involvement. An important dimension of role structure is aspirations. Aspirations refer to the goals and ambitions which an individual strives to attain. A goal is a desired state of being which when becomes a reality, finds a niche in the hierarchy of goal complex of individual or collective systems, to be attained by the system at a particular point of time in its life through consistent lines of action (George, 1983).

A person's role achievement or role effectiveness or role fulfilment can be viewed with reference to the attainment of goals through efficient functioning (Likert, 1967) Role fulfilment can be measured in terms of realisation or achievement of goals in respective realms. Any role may be enacted with different degrees of organismic involvement. This is essentially an intensity dimension, the intensity of the enactment being manifest in the number of organismic systems involved. Career women in dual career families may enact roles with minimal organismic involvement or with maximal organismic involvement. High demands from one of the dual roles will limit capacities and capabilities of career women to meet the demands of the other role. This results in some degree of stress which in turn affects their role fulfilment in employment and family organisations. Career woman's response to stress represents the epitome of mind-body interaction that underpins physiological and emotional arousal. Arousal, which has evolutionary value for preservation and survival, can be activating or inhibitory on target organs, resulting over time if unrelieved in disease or dysfunction. A major role in the stress response is played by her, in the ways she selectively interprets stress stimuli and their effects and her subjective analysis serves both to initiate and maintain the stress experience. Each person is able to tolerate particular levels of stress and these highly individualistic thresholds are the product of genetic features, acquired temperament, cognitive style and learned behaviours.

1.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

An attempt is made in the present investigation to assess extent of stress experienced by career women in dual career families in executing their multiple roles and their role fulfilment. When single career women enter matrimony and subsequently assume the role of housewife or homemaker or when women, especially housewives or homemakers, assume the role of career women, they have double workday to attend to. Recent literature(United Nations, 1994) cites that:

For women with educational qualifications the possibilities of getting into paid, white collar employment are increasing... However, their participation in the market has not led to a corresponding reduction in their workload at home... As a result, more women are providing their families with income and at the same time are shouldering the burden of domestic work and responsibilities that devolve them. They try to balance the two by inordinately stretching their working hours and making adjustments at home and at work, which results in tremendous amounts of physical and mental strain...(p.4).

Since the UN Decade for Women 1975-85 has been declared, a renewed interest has existed in studying women's issues and development among researchers and policy makers. Of special research interest are the topics of women in labour market, their multiple roles and stress. Review of literature showed that in most of the Indian studies, attempts were made to find out the contribution of demographic, personality and organisation factors to various role stress (Madhu, 1976, Parasuraman, 1978; Surti, 1982; Harigopal, 1995) and its effects on marital adjustment (Gupta, 1982) and mental health (Asha, 1991). In general stress in relation to diseases of various organs, bodily systems and psychological disturbances was explored. Little focus was laid by researchers to understand the coping strategies adopted by managerial personnel and female professionals. Social support in the work place and its buffering effect gained the attention of a few social scientists. Though stress and job satisfaction gained attention of a few researchers, role fulfilment and reciprocal relationship between stress and role fulfilment seemed to have been least explored.

The studies conducted abroad on dual career families focused on work conflict, family conflict, work and family conflict, gender variations in stress experienced, stress and mental health (William et al., 1991; Ray and Miller, 1994, Moore, 1995).

It is evident from the literature that in India not much attention was focused on learning sources of stress, the extent of stress experienced or level of role fulfilment achieved with reference to their roles in family and employment organisations by career women in dual career families.

The circumstances of roles with which people have to contend with in their daily lives are highly productive of stressors. For women, in dual career families both the employer organisation and the family organisation can be sources of stressors. Stressors linked to these roles are likely to influence their role fulfilment both in the employment organisation as well as in the family organisation and vice versa. Hence, the stress experienced and role fulfilment of career women in dual career families cannot be anything but important, not only to the lives of individuals and to the structure and functioning of social systems, but also to academicians and researchers. Home Management discipline can never be divorced from the fact that it concerns people; it is interwoven with family and group relations and their feelings of well being. The phenomenon of dual career families is increasing day by day and their presence is felt more in the contemporary society. The traditional family system is in transition. The impact of transition of women's roles on the traditional gender based roles is yet to make a dent in the Indian society. Hence the interest in understanding the issues related to career women in dual career families was born.

Some of the research questions that the researcher found intriguing were - Do career women from dual career families experience differential levels of stress? Are career women from dual career families able to accomplish all career and familial goals? Does stress experienced by career women in dual career families affect their career and familial role fulfilment? What are the stressors and what are the coping strategies adopted to check stress? What are the facilitators in controlling stress and accomplishing their dual roles? To seek answers to these queries and many others, the present investigation was planned

The findings of the investigation would make valuable contribution to the knowledge base concerning the stressors embedded in employment and family organisations and their impact on health and functioning. Moreover, the study would bring out the stress and role fulfilment dynamics in dual career families.

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Broad and specific objectives drawn to give proper direction to the investigation were :

2.1 BROAD OBJECTIVE

To assess the effect of factors on the extent of stress experienced and levels of role fulfilment by career women in dual career families.

2.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- 2.2.1 To measure the extent of stress experienced by career women in dual career families
- 2.2.2 To assess the perceived levels of career and familial role fulfilment by career women in dual career families.
- 2.2.3 To develop scales that would appropriately measure -
 - 2.2.3.1 Stressors from (a) employment and (b) family organisations
 - 2.2.3.2 Stress coping strategies that would be adopted by the selected sample to deal with stressful situations in (a) employment and (b) family organisations
 - 2.2.3.3 Social support that would be extended by (a) employment and (b) family organisations.
- 2.2.4 To find out the interrelationship that exists between the dependent variables, viz., (i) extent of stress experienced, and (ii) perceived levels of role fulfilment and selected independent variables.

3.0 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is based on the assumption that:

- 3.1 Career women in dual career families exhibit differential levels of stress and role fulfilment.
- 3.2 Career women do have aspirations regarding their career and familial roles.
- 3.3 Career women use coping strategies to manage stressors due to their multiple roles.

4.0 HYPOTHESES

HA : There exists a relationship between extent of stress experienced by career women in dual career families and selected personal, family and situational variables.

HB . There is a difference in the extent of influence exerted by selected variables on extent of stress experienced by career women in dual career families.

HC : There exists a relationship between perceived levels of role fulfilment in relation to career and familial roles respectively by career women in dual career families and selected personal, family and situational variables.

HD : There is a difference in the extent of influence exerted by selected variables on perceived levels of career and familial role fulfilment respectively by career women in dual career families.

5.0 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was limited to

- 5.1 Career women with a minimum of three years of work experience, who assumed the primary role of homemaker in dual career families that were intact, and where

husband and wife were staying in the same establishment, and who had borne at least one child.

- 5.2 Career women who were in the middle and top management levels or who were Class I employees in selected private and public undertakings like institutes of higher education, national research organisations banking institutes, state and central government establishments and industry.
- 5.3 Perceived levels of role fulfilment as measured through present perception of level of goal attainment over the past three year with reference to career and familial roles assumed by career women in dual career families.
- 5.4 Assessment of career women's perception regarding stressors pertaining to employment and family organisations was from selected sources (i) work (ii) role (iii) personal development (iv) interpersonal relations and (v) organisation climate.
- 5.5 Ascertaining the interrelationship between (i) stress experienced, and (ii) role fulfilment and the following variables.

Personal Variables : Age, personal income, length of service, extent of involvement in household work and coping strategies.

Family Variables : Family size, family income, age of the youngest and the oldest family member and number of children in school education.

Situational Variables : Employment organisation stressors and family organisation stressors, namely, work stressors, role stressors, personal development stressors, inter-personal relations stressors, organisation climate stressors and overall stressors and social support in the respective organisations under study.