



OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG WORKING WOMEN IN TEXTILE INDUSTRIES OF COIMBATORE

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Abstract

Occupational stress has emerged as a major concern in labor-intensive industries, particularly among working women who experience the combined pressures of employment and domestic responsibilities. The textile industry, a significant employer of women in Tamil Nadu, is characterized by long working hours, repetitive tasks, physical strain, and low wages, which contribute to occupational stress. The present study examines the level of occupational stress among working women employed in textile industries in Coimbatore district and identifies the factors influencing their stress experiences. A descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Primary data were collected from 100 women textile workers selected through convenience sampling using a structured interview schedule. The tool covered socio-demographic details, occupational stressors, work-life balance, support systems, economic stress, health problems, and coping mechanisms. Secondary data were sourced from books, journals, and previous research studies. The collected data were analyzed using percentage analysis and correlation techniques. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents experienced a moderate level of occupational stress. Major stressors included workload, long working hours, low income, and physically demanding working conditions. Most respondents reported moderate work-life balance and moderate support from family and workplace sources. Stress-related health symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, frequent cold, and sleep disturbances were commonly reported, although severe chronic illnesses were less prevalent. Correlation analysis showed no significant relationship between marital status and work-life balance or between income and workload stress. Coping strategies were largely passive, with respondents relying mainly on entertainment-based activities such as watching television and movies, while active stress-management practices were limited. The study concludes that occupational stress among working women in textile industries is persistent and influenced by organizational, economic, and social factors, highlighting the need for workplace interventions and gender-sensitive occupational health policies.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Working Women; Textile Industry, Work-Life Balance, Health Problems, Coping Strategies.

Introduction

Occupational stress has emerged as one of the most significant challenges confronting modern organizations, particularly labor-intensive industries such as textiles. The adage “a healthy employee is a productive employee” aptly captures the essence of the relationship between employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. Stress, though a universal human experience, assumes critical importance in the workplace because of its direct and indirect influence on employees’ physical health, psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and productivity. In recent decades, rapid industrialization, technological advancement, globalization, and changing work patterns have intensified job demands, thereby increasing the prevalence of occupational stress.

Stress is generally understood as a state of tension arising from the interaction between individuals and their environment. Scholars such as Ivancevich and Matteson conceptualize stress as the interaction of



the individual with environmental demands, while Beehr and Newman emphasize the deviations in normal functioning caused by the interaction between people and their jobs. Stress may be positive (eustress), motivating individuals to perform better, or negative (distress), leading to adverse physical and psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, headaches, and cardiovascular disorders. In occupational settings, prolonged exposure to distress can culminate in burnout, absenteeism, reduced efficiency, and high employee turnover. Occupational stress refers specifically to stress that arises from job-related factors such as workload, role conflict, lack of control, poor working conditions, inadequate support systems, and organizational climate. The textile industry, characterized by long working hours, repetitive tasks, strict deadlines, and physically demanding processes, provides fertile ground for the emergence of occupational stress. In India, and particularly in Tamil Nadu, the textile sector is one of the largest employers of women workers. Women form the backbone of several textile operations such as spinning, weaving, garment manufacturing, cutting, ironing, and packaging.

Working women often experience multiple and overlapping roles, balancing paid employment with domestic responsibilities such as childcare, elder care, and household management. This dual burden significantly heightens their vulnerability to stress. Research indicates that women report higher levels of ongoing stress than men, often perceiving lower levels of control over their lives. In labor-intensive industries, women workers are additionally exposed to physical strain from prolonged standing, monotonous postures, and inadequate ergonomic facilities, which further compound stress-related health problems. Tamil Nadu occupies a pivotal position in India's textile economy, accounting for nearly one-third of the country's textile production. Districts such as Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Erode, Salem, and Dindigul are major textile hubs, housing spinning mills, power looms, garment units, and cooperative mills. The industry provides employment to lakhs of workers, many of whom are women from lower socio-economic backgrounds with limited educational qualifications. Despite its economic significance, the textile sector is often criticized for demanding work environments, low wages, limited career advancement opportunities, and inadequate occupational health measures.

Against this backdrop, understanding occupational stress among working women in the textile industry becomes imperative. Examining the sources, effects, and coping mechanisms of stress not only contributes to academic knowledge but also has practical implications for policy formulation, organizational interventions, and social work practice. The present study focuses on occupational stress among working women in textile industries of Coimbatore, aiming to identify key stressors, assess their impact, and suggest measures to mitigate stress and enhance the well-being of women employees.

Review of Literature

A substantial body of research has examined occupational stress across various sectors, highlighting its multifaceted nature and consequences. Studies consistently reveal that occupational stress adversely affects employee health, job satisfaction, and organizational performance. Meenakshi, Nagarajan, and Prakash (2022) examined occupational stress among employees in private hospitals in Salem district, Tamil Nadu. Their findings indicated that excessive pressure at work negatively influenced employee conduct and mental health, underscoring the need for effective human resource practices to promote work satisfaction and reduce stress.

Vinothini, Gandhimathi, and Karthik (2021) conducted a study on stress management among working women in Coimbatore city. The study revealed that a majority of respondents experienced moderate to high levels of stress, manifested through physical, psychological, and behavioral symptoms. The authors emphasized that juggling work and family responsibilities significantly contributes to stress



among working women. Sujitha (2017) explored occupational stress and job satisfaction among employees in the automobile industry. The study found higher stress levels among female employees, younger age groups, and those with fewer years of experience. A negative relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction was established. Anita (2016) studied occupational stress among employees of a financial technology firm in Chennai. The findings highlighted workload and conflicts with management as major stressors, reinforcing the notion that organizational factors play a critical role in stress generation. Research focusing specifically on the textile industry reveals similar patterns. Nandini (2012) examined stress among women employees in textile units in Tiruppur and identified economic factors and lack of social support as primary stressors. Jayalakshmi (2012) reported higher stress levels among younger textile workers and those with lower educational attainment. Studies by Chitra Devi (2013), Shanti (2011), and Ravi (2012) in spinning and garment mills consistently point to long working hours, shift work, heavy workloads, and poor working conditions as significant contributors to stress. Women workers were found to be particularly vulnerable due to combined occupational and domestic pressures. Overall, the literature suggests that occupational stress among women workers is influenced by a complex interplay of organizational, individual, social, and economic factors. However, despite the concentration of textile industries in Coimbatore, empirical studies focusing exclusively on occupational stress among women textile workers in this region remain limited, justifying the present study.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design to assess the nature and extent of occupational stress among working women in textile industries.

Aim: To study the causes of occupational stress among working women in Textile Industries of Coimbatore.

Objectives

- To study the various factors that cause occupational stress.
- To find out the effects of stress on women employees.
- To find out how stress is managed by women employees.
- To provide suggestions for women employees to overcome stress.

Universe and Sample

The universe comprised women employees working in textile industries in Coimbatore district. A sample of 100 respondents was selected using non-probability convenience sampling.

Tools for Data Collection

Data were collected using a self-structured interview schedule. Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized. Primary data were gathered through direct interviews, while secondary data were obtained from books, journals, reports, and previous studies.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using simple percentage analysis and correlation techniques to interpret relationships among variables.

Limitations: The study was limited by time constraints, possible respondent bias, and difficulty in accessing respondents during working hours.



Results And Discussion

The present study examined the level and determinants of occupational stress among working women employed in textile industries of Coimbatore. The analysis of socio-demographic variables indicates that a majority of the respondents were young women, with a substantial proportion belonging to the 18–25 age group. Most respondents were married and lived in nuclear families, suggesting the presence of dual responsibilities related to both work and household management. Limited educational attainment, with most respondents having primary or SSLC-level education, reflects restricted employment mobility and limited job autonomy, which may intensify stress experiences.

With respect to occupational factors, the results reveal that the majority of respondents experienced a moderate level of workload and work pressure. Although only a small proportion reported high levels of workload stress, the predominance of moderate stress suggests a persistent and continuous strain rather than acute overload. This finding aligns with earlier studies in textile and garment industries, which report that repetitive tasks, long working hours, and physically demanding work gradually accumulate stress over time. Work–life balance emerged as another critical dimension of occupational stress. Most respondents reported a moderate ability to balance work and personal life, while a significant proportion experienced difficulty in maintaining equilibrium between job demands and family responsibilities. The predominance of nuclear families and marital status of respondents may explain this pattern, as women are often expected to manage household duties alongside paid employment. However, correlation analysis indicated no statistically significant relationship between marital status and work–life balance, suggesting that stress related to work–life balance is experienced across marital categories. Support systems play a crucial buffering role in occupational stress. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents received moderate support from family members, supervisors, and colleagues. While this support appears to mitigate extreme stress, it may not be sufficient to completely offset occupational pressures. Similar findings in previous research suggest that informal support helps women cope emotionally but does not eliminate structural stressors such as low wages and demanding work schedules.

Economic factors were also found to contribute to occupational stress. Most respondents reported moderate economic stress, reflecting low to modest income levels. However, correlation analysis showed no significant relationship between monthly income and workload or work pressure, indicating that financial stress operates independently of job demands. This suggests that even when workload is manageable, inadequate wages and rising living costs continue to generate stress among women workers. Health-related outcomes revealed notable patterns. A considerable proportion of respondents reported frequent cold, headaches, and sleep disturbances, which are common psychosomatic symptoms of stress. However, serious health conditions such as hypertension, ulcers, digestive disorders, and metabolic disturbances were reported by relatively few respondents. This may indicate that while stress is present, it has not yet progressed to severe chronic health conditions for most workers, though continued exposure could increase future health risks.

Importantly, none of the respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment either within or outside the workplace. This finding may reflect effective organizational controls or underreporting due to social stigma, which warrants cautious interpretation.

Regarding coping mechanisms, the majority of respondents relied on passive and recreational strategies such as watching television and movies. Very few engaged in active stress-management practices like yoga, meditation, or adequate sleep. This pattern highlights limited awareness and access to structured



stress-reduction techniques. Overall, the results suggest that occupational stress among women textile workers is moderate but widespread, rooted in work demands, economic constraints, and role overload, with coping largely dependent on informal and recreational strategies rather than health-promoting practices.

Findings: The major findings of the study are summarized as follows:

Demographic Findings

- Most respondents belonged to the 18–25 years age group, indicating early entry into the workforce.
- A large majority of respondents were married, reflecting the dual burden of work and family responsibilities.
- Most respondents lived in nuclear families, which may reduce access to shared domestic support.
- Educational levels were generally low, with most respondents having primary or SSLC-level education.
- The majority worked as helpers and were employed in departments such as auto corner and spinning sections.
- Most respondents had short to moderate work experience, both in previous and current organizations.
- Monthly income levels were predominantly in the lower income range, indicating economic vulnerability.

Occupational Stress Factors

- Most respondents experienced a moderate level of workload and work pressure.
- Work–life balance was rated as moderate by the majority, with a significant proportion reporting difficulty in balancing roles.
- Support from family, supervisors, and peers were mostly moderate, indicating partial emotional and social backing.
- Economic stress was reported at a moderate level by most respondents, reflecting financial strain.
- Family-related stress, including responsibilities toward spouse and children, was also largely moderate.
- Working conditions and company policies were perceived as moderately stressful by the majority.

Health-Related Findings

- A considerable proportion of respondents reported frequent cold, headaches, and sleep disturbances.
- Most respondents did not report severe health conditions such as hypertension, ulcers, diarrhea, or metabolic disorders.
- Psychological symptoms such as irritation and fatigue were present but not severe for most respondents.

Coping Mechanisms

- The most commonly used stress coping strategy was watching television and movies.
- Other coping methods included spending time with family and recreational outings.



Very few respondents practiced yoga, meditation, or structured stress-management techniques. Overall, the findings indicate that occupational stress among working women in textile industries is moderate, persistent, and multifactorial, influenced by work demands, economic conditions, and family responsibilities.

Conclusion

The present study provides valuable insights into the nature and extent of occupational stress among working women employed in textile industries in Coimbatore. The findings clearly indicate that occupational stress is not an isolated or extreme phenomenon but rather a moderate and continuous experience embedded in the daily lives of women workers. This stress arises from a complex interaction of occupational demands, economic pressures, family responsibilities, and limited coping resources.

Women workers in the textile industry often enter the workforce at a young age with limited educational qualifications, confining them to lower-level positions that involve repetitive tasks, long hours, and physical strain. These job characteristics, coupled with low wages and limited opportunities for advancement, create an environment conducive to sustained stress. Although the majority of respondents reported moderate rather than high stress levels, the persistence of such stress over time poses serious risks to both physical and psychological health.

The study highlights the critical role of work–life balance in shaping women’s stress experiences. While many respondents managed to maintain a moderate balance, a significant proportion struggled to reconcile occupational responsibilities with domestic roles. The absence of a significant relationship between marital status and work–life balance suggests that stress related to role overload affects women regardless of marital status, emphasizing the structural nature of the problem. Support systems emerged as an important but insufficient protective factor. Moderate levels of support from family members, supervisors, and colleagues help women cope emotionally but do not address underlying structural stressors such as workload, economic insecurity, and working conditions. This underscores the need for organizational interventions rather than relying solely on individual resilience. Health-related findings indicate early warning signs of stress, such as sleep disturbances, headaches, and fatigue. Although serious health problems were not widespread, continued exposure to occupational stress may lead to chronic health issues in the long term. Preventive measures are therefore essential to safeguard women’s well-being.

The absence of reported sexual harassment is a positive finding; however, it must be interpreted cautiously due to the possibility of underreporting stemming from fear, stigma, or lack of awareness. Organizations must continue to strengthen grievance redressal mechanisms and awareness programs to ensure safe working environments. Coping strategies adopted by respondents were largely passive and entertainment-based, such as watching television and movies. The minimal use of active stress-management practices like yoga, meditation, or regular exercise highlights a gap in awareness and access to health-promoting resources. These points to the need for structured stress-management programs at the workplace. From a social work and policy perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of holistic interventions. Textile industries must prioritize employee welfare by improving working conditions, ensuring fair wages, providing health facilities, and promoting work–life balance through flexible scheduling where possible. Counseling services, recreational activities, and stress-management training can play a vital role in reducing occupational stress.



In conclusion, occupational stress among working women in textile industries is a significant concern that demands attention from employers, policymakers, and social work professionals. Enhancing the quality of work life for women workers is not only a matter of social justice but also a prerequisite for sustainable industrial productivity and economic development. Addressing occupational stress through comprehensive and gender-sensitive strategies will contribute to healthier employees, stronger families, and more resilient organizations.

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