

DEPRESSION AMONG WORKING AND NON-WORKING MIDDLE AGED WOMEN

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this descriptive study was to examine depression in the groups of working and non-working middle-aged women in Pala Municipality and different Panchayats in the Kottayam district of Kerala. Using convenience sampling of 200 (100 middle aged working women from small scale factories and 100 middle aged non-working women from Kudumbashree units). The study sample has used a valid and reliable instrument scale i.e. Beck's Depression Inventory Scale. Results indicated highly significant relationship between marital relationship, depression and family support involved with working and non-working middle-aged women. Also this study assesses the depression experienced by these working and non-working middle-aged women and examines the coping strategies used by them. The working middle aged women had better mental health and reported less depression than the non-working middle aged women. The most frequently reported source of stress for working mothers was not having enough time to do all the house chores. Whereas for non-working mothers' it was lack of proper social life and this was a major stressor for them. The findings of these results also show that non –working married women have to face more problems in their married life as compared to working married women. The results further show that highly educated working women can perform well in their married life and they are comparatively free from depression as compared to non-working married women.

Keywords: *depression, marital relationship, family support and attitude towards job*

Introduction

Middle age is the bridge between adulthood and old age, which requires special attention. During this period, in addition to physical and social changes some psychological changes also occur like fear of losing control, dependence on someone, beginning of realization that youth is getting over and old age is nearer, fatigue, lack of sexual interest, loss of memory, more tension etc. which may affect the overall well-being and positive mental health of both men and women. With the increased pace of urbanization and modernization, in recent years, Indian women from all social classes have entered the work force. The entry of young women into the work force may be relatively less problematic as compared to middle-aged married working women who have multiple roles to perform.

Woman being the nucleus of a the family around which the members live their family life tied with to forces of love, affection, and other emotions, needs proper attention during middle age (40–60 years of age). Preferably, working women require more care due to their dual role responsibility. It becomes difficult for them to manage all their activities with the same efficiency as before. This may create a feeling of guilt, irritation and stress. Physical relaxation, emotional support and essential care are essential for healthy living.

Depression is a normal and natural response to loss or grief, whether a death, separation from a loved one, job loss, loss of physical health, or relocation. Symptoms of depression include feelings of sadness, hopelessness, helplessness, anxiety, irritability, agitation, fatigue, low energy, and a reduced activity level are some common factors, and there may be also withdrawal from social contact and loss of a interest in previously enjoyed activities, including sex. There may be changes in appetite, weight or sleep patterns, memory problems or difficulty in concentrating. Often there are feelings of worthlessness or inadequacy and a lowered sense of self-esteem. In more serious cases there may be suicidal thoughts or a feeling that “life is not worth living” (Comer, 1996: 11).

Working women may be prone to depression because they bear the double burden of housework and a job outside the home. Since they

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have to work in two environments, one being the office environment and the other the home environment and as both are different from one another, the stress at times becomes acute. The stress arising from marital relationships is manifested in chronic disorders such as depression, insomnia and hypertension. A study on working women, family environment and mental health indicated that there were significant differences in the family environment and mental health of working and non-working women.

An attempt is made in this study to find out depression among middle-aged women with reference to their working and non-working status. A vast majority is not aware of the increased possibility of depression among middle-aged women. It often goes unrecognized or ignored and therefore, untreated even though it may be severe, persistent and disabling with the adverse consequences for women, children and family as a whole. When untreated, depression results as an adverse factor for the affected. Due to all these reasons proper attention and more studies related to depression among middle-aged working and non-working women is needed and should be encouraged.

This research would be helpful in knowing the difficulties faced by middle aged working and non-working women. This study will hopefully provide information about the causes behind working and non-working women's depression.

An interview schedule containing 72 questions were prepared to collect information from the subjects related with the objectives of the present study. The schedule had five categories. First category had questions related to socio-economic status and demographic profile of the respondents. The second category had questions on mental health and emotions during middle age. Questions in the third category were related to family environment and the support they receive from the family. The fourth category had questions relating to the respondent's relationship with their spouse. The fifth category had questions relating to respondents attitude towards their jobs.

The BDI (Beck Depression Inventory) is a self-report measure of depression, consisting of 21 items that assess the severity of affective, behavioral, cognitive, and somatic symptoms of depression. Each item is

scored on a 3-point scale. An internal consistency coefficient of 0.86 was obtained in this study. In present study BDI-Malayalam version was used to measure depression.

Working women from small-scale factories, shops and non working women from Kudumbasree units in different Panchayaths like Mutholy, Karror, Bharananganam, and Pala Municipalities in Meenachil Taluk of Kottayam district in Kerala were interviewed.

The study is descriptive in nature. A sample of 200 working and non-working middle aged women were selected to participate in this study. As the study deals with the middle aged working and non-working women I selected 100 middle aged working women from small scale factories/shops and 100 middle aged non-working women from Kudumbashree units in Pala Municipality and different Panchayats, in Kottayam district. The sample was selected on the basis of convenient and random sampling which meant interviewing the women, whom the researcher happened to meet. The collection of data was done during the year 2007-8. The observed data were analyzed using SPSS.

Results

While studying the socio economic and demographic profile of the respondents, it was found that the majority (33%) of the respondents belong to the age group of 45-50. Thirty-four percent of the respondents had completed high school and 26.5% had Pre-degree education. This study reveals that, working women were more from the Christian religion dominated areas and the non-working status seemed predominant in the Hindu religion prevalent areas. Most of the respondents (34%) come under the category of average income (Rs. 5000–7000). Within that, 17.5% are working and 16.5% are non-working groups. About 39% of the respondents belong to the category of daily wagers. Within that, 20.5% are working and 18% are non-working groups. The majority (65.5%) of the respondents are from the village areas. Eighty-one percent of the respondents live in their own houses. Most of the respondents have reading (38%) and gardening (37%) as their hobby. Twenty-nine percent of working and 33% of non-working women live in nuclear families. This may be because people are not keen to live in joint families.

Table 1: Level of Depression

		No of respondents		Total	Percent
		Working women	Non-working women		
Level of depression	Normal	31	19	50	25
	Mild depression	27	31	58	29
	Moderate depression	22	24	46	23
	Severe depression	20	26	46	23

While comparing the level of depression among working and non-working middle aged women, it became evidently clear that the majority of the respondents in working category do not have depression and non-working category were found to be depressed. Majority of the respondents in the working status were found to be in a normal state of mind and non-working groups were prone to a more depressed state of mind. This may be because of lack of socialization, no work, lack of support from the family, low self-esteem, and lack of self-confidence of the non-working women. Majority of the respondents quarreled often even for small matters in marital life. As a result, very few of them had a normal state of mind and in fact , most of them had a depressed state of mind. However, with regard to guilt feelings there was not much difference between the working and non-working class of women. Most of the respondents (40.5%) both working and non-working status did not contemplate killing oneself. However a noticeable factor with the rest of the respondents was that they tended to have suicidal tendency at different levels. Majority of the respondents (44.5%) from both groups have been prone to feelings of sadness most of the time. There is connection between sadness and the levels of depression. There is no significant relation between the level of depression and the working status of the middle aged women.

While studying about the support available from the families for the respondents, it was concluded that the majority of the respondents (38%); both from working and non-working status agreed that they had supportive family members. Majority of the working women (17.5%) were largely in agreement and non-working women (19%) agreed that they had support in solving financial matters from their family members. More than the non-working women, it was the working women who agreed that they had

Table 2: Supportive Family Members

Supportive family members' working status Cross tabulation			Working status		Total
			Working	Non-working	
Supportive family members	highly agree	Count	13	14	27
		% within working status	13.0	14.0	13.5
		% of Total	6.5	7.0	13.5
	Agree	Count	48	28	76
		% within working status	48.0	28.0	38.0
		% of Total	24.0	14.0	38.0
	Partially agree	Count	27	30	57
		% within working status	27.0	30.0	28.5
		% of Total	13.5	15.0	28.5
	Dis-agree	Count	12	28	40
		% within working status	12.0	28.0	20.0
		% of Total	6.0	14.0	20.0
Total	Count	100	100	200	
	% within working status	100.0	100.0	100.0	
	% of Total	50.0	50.0	100.0	

supporting children. This may be because working women are highly sociable and interact more with their children. In addition they have better ability to interact well both mentally and physically, compared to non-working women. Nearly half of the respondents (45%) agreed that they get help in household chores from other family members. This reveals that around half of the respondents do not get enough help from their family members in the household chores. This may be because, with regard to the Kerala context, household work is considered to be done by the house wives; whether they are employed or not. Around half of the respondents (40%) partially agreed that they had good relationship with other family members. This may be because of the busy life style, that they do not take much initiative to maintain a good relationship with the other family members. Majority of the respondents (41.5%) agreed that they do have good friends.

During the assessment of the respondent’s relationship with the spouse, it was found that in working status (25.6%) agreed while in non-working status (16.6%) partially agreed that they had good marital life. According to the assessment nearly half of the respondents did not have a good marital life. Majority of the respondents (22.5%) in working status largely agreed, while (27%) in non-working status agreed that they are getting proper care from their spouses. Majority (47%) of the respondents in working status (27%) and non-working status (20%) are sometimes able to take care of their spouses well. Majority (46.5%) of the respondents in working status and non-working status are of the opinion that they rarely get acceptance from their spouses, at the same time 32.3 % of the respondents never got any acceptance from their spouses. Twenty-three percent of the respondents in working status and 24% of the non-working status partially agreed that they spent time with their spouses. There is a chance that, lack of intimacy among the spouses may lead to depression. Twenty percent of the respondents in working status agreed, while, 21% non-working status partially agreed that they have mutual understanding with each other in their marital life. Majority (48%) of the respondents stated that only sometimes the participated in functions together. This may be because they are denied the time and opportunity to go for functions together. Majority (50.5%) of the respondents often have to support the other in their marital life and even within that ,14% of them are having severe depression. Most of the respondents (57.6%) are sometimes getting help in household works from their spouse. This reveals that they usually do not get much help from their spouses in their household work. Most of the respondents (44.4%) always took joint decisions in various matters together. This may be because in marital relationship, importance is given to both partners. Majority of the respondents often experienced freedom in marital life and because of that the majority did not have depression.

While comparing the respondent’s attitude towards their jobs, it was found that majority of the respondents in working status and non-working status largely agreed that jobs gave financial independence. Majority (39.5%) of the respondents in working status and non-working status agreed that having a job was good for women. Majority (49%) of the respondents in working status and non-working status agreed that their jobs would give financial independence too. Sixteen percent of the respondents in working status agreed that the working women got more care and regard from the family. However, 20.5% of the non-working status partially agreed that working women get

Table 3: Opinion that job is good for women

Opinion that job is good for women working status		Working status		Total	
		Working	Non-working		
Opinion that job is good for women	Highly agree	Count	50	29	79
		% within working status	50.0	29.0	39.5
		% of Total	25.0	14.5	39.5
	Agree	Count	35	36	71
		% within working status	35.0	36.0	35.5
		% of Total	17.5	18.0	35.5
	Partially agree	Count	10	21	31
		% within working status	10.0	21.0	15.5
		% of Total	5.0	10.5	15.5
	Dis-agree	Count	5	14	19
		% within working status	5.0	14.0	9.5
		% of Total	2.5	7.0	9.5
Total	Count	100	100	200	
	% within working status	100.0	100.0	100.0	
	% of Total	50.0	50.0	100.0	

more preference from the family. Both (37%) working and non-working women agreed that working women could lead a more satisfied life. Both (46%) working and non-working women partially agreed that working women were quite fed up with their lifestyle. There is a significant difference between the state of mind and working status of the middle aged women.

Discussion

This research was undertaken to investigate the depression among working and non-working middle aged women. The results indicate that working middle aged women are better adjusted in their life than the non working women. Along with this they also do not feel that much depression and stress in their married life as compared to non-working married women. Whereas the findings suggest that highly educated (above graduation) working

married women often do not have to face difficulties in their married life and nor do they face that much depression in their life.

The findings support the hypothesis that there is some significant relation between the level of depression and the working status of the middle aged women. This means that the more one is engaged in productive work, the less chance she gets to be depressed. Working women have more social support than non working women, which is a big drawback for them at times of need.

The findings indicate that respondents in working status have often, a more normal state of mind compared to the non-working status, who seem to have a more depressed state of mind. This may be because of lack of socialization, no work, less support from the family, low self-esteem, and self-confidence in the non-working women. These findings further indicate that around half of the respondents are not getting enough help from their family members in their household work. Together with this, the findings further suggest that both working and non working middle aged women are of the opinion that doing a job is good for the women and that it adds to providing financial security for them.

Conclusion

Through this research it is identified that non-working women are more prone to facing depression when compared to that of working women. Lessened socialization, tensions and life stresses can be the factors that can lead them to depression. The researcher hopes that the present study will serve as a manual for all those aspiring researchers in this topic, even though it has got some limitations too. However, greater attention and more adequate studies related to depression among middle aged working and non-working women are needed for a better perspective and hence more research on this topic should be encouraged.

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