

Work as a Life Stressor and Social Resource between Middle Aged Working Married Men and Women in Karachi

Zainab Hussain Bhutto* and Erum Kausar

Institute of Professional Psychology, Bahria University,
Karachi Campus

Abstract

The present study is aimed at exploring the difference between work as a stressor and work as a social resource between working middle aged married men and women in Karachi. Given the importance to middle aged working married men and women it was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference of work as a life stressor and social resource between working middle aged married men and women. A total of 150 participants including 75 working married men and 75 working married women from the middle socioeconomic status involved in various occupations from Karachi were included in the sample for the research. Their age range was 35 to 55 years and their education was at least at the graduation level. The Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory - Adult Form (LISRES-A) by Moos and Moos (1994) was administered on an individual basis. The results provided partially significant support for the hypothesis. Work as a life stressor was found to be significantly different ($t=3.207, p<.00$) for middle aged

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Zainab Hussain Bhutto, Institute of Professional Psychology, Bahria University, Karachi Campus, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: zainabbhutto@yahoo.com

working married men and women. However work as a social resource was not found to be significantly different ($t=0.914$, $p>.05$) for middle aged working married men and women.

Keywords: Work, life stressor, social resource, middle age, men and women.

Every human being finds life to be a constant process of responding to stimuli, pressure and changes within and around them. Every person also places demands on himself/herself. Thus, people are always dealing with stressors and demands on their mind and body or both. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe stress as “a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being”.

In the light of the above definition, attention is directed to the interplay between the individual and environment, rather than to the person alone. Stress is seen as a dynamic process in which the human body and mind actively respond. In other words, adaptation is active, not passive and it is also continuous, not static.

Hans Selye (1956), one of the founding fathers of stress research, stated, that stress may be good or bad depending on how the person takes it. Exhilarating, successful, and creative work done under stress is beneficial, whereas stress caused by infection, humiliation, or failure is detrimental. He was of the opinion that certain biochemical effects take place irrespective of stress being helpful or harmful.

Life transitions are inclined to be stressful. Changing from one phase to another in life is called a transition; for example: starting school, moving home, reaching puberty, starting college - especially away from home, starting a career, getting married, becoming a parent, losing a spouse through divorce or death, or facing retirement (Schaefer, 1987).

The timing of a life transition can affect the stress it generates. If a life event takes place at a time when it is not expected then it is stressful. One possible reason of this occurrence is that of having an event too early or too late which could result in the deprivation of the support from friends. An example of such would be having a baby at the age of 38 or later. The acquisition of major life events later in life could be seen as a failing. Some people who graduated late or were promoted late in life feel as though they have failed. So, middle age is also an important life transition for men and women during their life span.

For males and females, the middle age of life could be stressful, as a result of their sensing the passing of their own youth and the imminence of their old age. Sometimes, a stressor can be triggered by transitions experienced in these years, such as extramarital affairs, andropause or menopause, the death of parents or other causes of grief, unemployment or underemployment, realizing that a job or career is hated but not knowing how else to earn an equivalent living, or children leaving home (Jaques, 1965). The result may be a desire to make significant changes in core aspects of day-to-day life or situations, such as in their careers, in maintaining a work-life balance, marriage, romantic relationships, expenditures, or physical appearance.

In addition to physical and social changes some psychological changes also occur during the middle age period which may affect their overall positive mental health and well-being. As working women bear double responsibilities; one at their workplaces and others in the family, excessive work, less freedom, along with high needs for motivation, work and family environment may become powerful sources of stress among these women.

Therefore, emotional balance, adjustment process, tolerance level and other personality attributes are potential threats that can affect the mental health negatively. There may be a chance that if their problems are left unnoticed they might have some psychological

problem in future. Some suitable interventions and modifications in their life style and coping strategy especially during these periods may help in improving and maintaining their good health (Singh & Kaushik, 2000).

Many researchers have discussed the relationship between work and home life of working middle aged married women in the context of the usage of child care or household clearing services; where working women still bore responsibility for their both (Hochschild, 1997) or where women reported more stressors resulting from work-family conflict. As, women traditionally take on more roles related to the care of family and home, they are more likely to experience work overload and role conflict (Hitt et al., 2006).

Hughes and Galinsky (1994) argued that one's ability to juggle various roles has its limits. However, when women lack sufficient child care and household help from their spouses and work in psychologically demanding jobs, their health, and well-being may suffer. The working female who still takes on the burden of responsibility at home and for the children may suffer from the inevitable stress associated with trying to be "superwomen" (Nicholson, 1995).

However in present days many changes are taking place in working conditions and in the family as a unit all over the world as well as in Pakistan especially in the city of Karachi. Working conditions are changing for middle aged married men and women both; now men face more challenges at work whereas women are also getting higher education and achieving high positions in the working environment. Out of the many researches focused on teenagers, adolescents or the problems of aged individuals', very few researches have been done on middle aged working married individuals' problems. This research was designed to see the differences between work as a life stressor and social resource especially of middle aged working married men and

women in a metropolitan city (Karachi). For this it was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference between work as a life stressor and social resource in working middle aged married men and women.

Method

Sample

A total of 150 participants including 75 working married men and 75 working married women of middle socioeconomic status involved in various occupations from Karachi were used as a sample for the present research. Their age range was between 35 to 55 years and their minimum education was taken at the graduate level. A purposive sampling procedure was used for the present research.

Measures

Demographic Information Form

Consisted of items focusing on demographic information and other information on the basis of which participants were selected for the present research (e.g., gender, age, qualification, occupation, marital status, number of children, family structure etc).

Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory-Adult Form (LISRES-A)

LISRES-A (Moos & Moos, 1994) is a 200 item self-report and structured questionnaire. The eight domains of the LISRES-A cover the most important sources of life stressors and social resources including: Physical Health, Housing and Neighborhood, Finances, Work, Relationship with Spouse or Partner, Relationship with Children, Relationship with Extended Family, Relationship with Friends and Social Groups. The LISRES-A has a total of 16 scales; 9 measure life stressors and 7 measure social resources. Work was

assessed as a life stressor, from an index of ongoing stressors for each of the eight domains listed above and an index of negative life events that occurred in the past year. Work as a social resource was assessed from an index of resources for six of the eight domains and an index of positive life events that occurred in the past year.

Procedure

The entire sample was collected from different organizations in Karachi. The total time taken for the administration of the demographic form and the questionnaire, required approximately 35-40 minutes. The researcher took informed consent, explained and described the research in very general terms to participants, so as not to influence their responses.

The questionnaire was administered to participants during and after their office time. Each questionnaire was administered individually. Appointments were taken in advance and participants gave time as per their convenience. All participants were required to fill out consent forms. The data collection took approximately two months to complete for both males and females. After signing the consent form, the demographic information form was filled out and then after checking if she/he fulfilled the criteria for the research the questionnaire was administered. The same procedure was followed for all participants. Participation for both males and females was voluntary. The researcher remained in front of the participant while the questionnaire was being filled out, to answer any questions or concerns, and to ensure that participant was answering at the appropriate place for his/her answer in the answer sheet. After the participant completed the questionnaire, she/he was thanked for his/her cooperation and time, by the researcher.

Operational Definitions of the Key Terms

Work (WK) as a Life Stressor

According to Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory – Adult

form by Moos and Moos (1994) work as a life stressor is defined as problems with supervisors and coworkers, pressure at work, unpleasant physical conditions at work etc.

Work (WK) as a Social Resource

According to Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory – Adult form by Moos and Moos (1994) work as a social resource is defined as challenge, independence and support at work etc.

Results

Table 1

t – Test Comparing Work as a Life Stressor between Middle Aged Working Males and Females

Gender	n	M	SD	SEM	t	df	Sig
Male	75	50.5067	9.0080	1.0401	3.207	148	.002*
Female	75	45.9600	8.3446	0.9635			

Note: *p<.00

The results indicate significant differences between work as a life stressor for males and work as life stressor for females. This shows that work as a stressor is higher in males as compared to work as a life stressor in females.

Table 2

t - Test Comparing Work as a Social Resource between Middle Aged Working Males and Females

Gender	n	M	SD	SEM	t	df	Sig
Male	75	47.1200	8.8896	1.0264	0.914	148	0.362
Female	75	45.9733	6.2557	0.7223			

The result indicates insignificant difference between work as social resource of male and work as social resource of female. This shows that in both male and female there is no difference of work as social resource.

Discussion

This study was specifically concerned with comparing the differences of work as a life stressor and social resource between working middle aged married men and women in Karachi. According to the results of the study as shown in Table 1, work as a life stressor differs significantly for middle aged married men and women. Work is found to be a greater life stressor for men as compared to women. As opposed to the previous researches which have found relationships between work and home life as being stressful for women due to domestic and career related responsibilities (Hochschild, 1997). However inferring from the results of the present research, it may be suggested that working middle aged married men face more work and home responsibilities as compared to working middle aged women. Moreover no significant difference was found in work as a social resource between working middle aged men and women as shown in table 2.

In fact, the existing working married women phenomenon is not connected with old patterns of our cultural traditions. In present days traditional roles of women as homemakers have changed

because in a metropolitan city like Karachi, opportunities are equally available for both men and women in different areas of work and home. Apparently middle aged married working women have a list of various responsibilities at work and home but they mostly have the support of their spouse and family. On the other hand, working middle aged married men have an overflowing list of various liabilities. They have to consider their professional life, marital responsibilities, child development issues, family responsibilities and other household responsibilities or expenditures. These responsibilities also tend to increase in middle age.

Men especially in our society have to face many problems in their professional life face greater stress as compared to the professional life of working women. The problems faced by them vary in nature; including the challenges that are faced by them in terms of the working conditions, relationship with the colleagues and working responsibilities that are more stressful as compared to women. These problems are especially faced by the middle aged men.

Social resources on the other hand include the challenges, the support and the independence that middle aged men and women both attain equally in their professional life. Therefore no significant difference was found between men and women in terms of their social resources.

Conclusion

In the light of the above mentioned results it can be concluded that there is a difference in work as a life stressor between middle aged working married men and women. Work is found to be significantly more stressful for men as compared to women. However work as a social resource is not found to be significantly different for working married men and women.

Recommendations

The current research is just the beginning of a program to study the work as a life stressor and social resource between middle aged working married men and women in Karachi. The findings of the present research have been partially verified. However, future research could be modified and consequently improved by considering the following recommendations:

- Data might be collected from various cities of Pakistan; it would be helpful to make the research more authentic and reliable.
- Research could also be done on married and unmarried middle aged working individuals.
- Various professions might be specified to observe the effects of economic status on work as life stressor and social resource.
- Participation of couples may be included.
- Family system joint/nuclear family system may be considered in future research. Inclusion of different family structures (joint and nuclear) might be helpful, to see the impact of family and social climates, on work as life stressor and social resource.
- This may provide a base for interventions that may help in an individual's home, without the need for professional treatments.

References

- Hitt, M.A., Miller, C. C, & Colella, A. (2006). *Organizational behavior: A strategic approach*. John Wiley and Sons Inc. In N. Perveen. (2009). Investigating occupational stress among married and unmarried working women in Hyderabad city. *Bahria Journal of Professional Psychology*, 5, 21-37.
- Hochschild, A. (1997). *The time bind: When work becomes home and home becomes work*. New York: Metropolitan Books. In N. Perveen. (2009). Investigating occupational stress among married and unmarried working women in Hyderabad city. *Bahria Journal of Professional Psychology*, 5, 21-37.
- Hughes, D., & Galinsky, E. (1994). Gender, job and family conditions, and psychological symptoms. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 18, 251-270. In N. Perveen. (2009). Investigating occupational stress among married and unmarried working women in Hyderabad city. *Bahria Journal of Professional Psychology*, 5, 21-37.
- Jaques, E. (1965). Death and the midlife crisis. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 46(4), 502-514.
- Lazarus, R.S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Moss, H. R., & Moos, S. B. (1994). *Life stressors and social resources inventory- Adult form professional manual*. Florida: Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.
- Nicholson, P. (1995). *Gender, power and organization*. London: Routledge. In N. Perveen. (2009). Investigating occupational stress among married and unmarried working Women in Hyderabad city. *Bahria Journal of Professional Psychology*, 5, 21-37.

Schaefer, W. E. (1987). *Stress management for wellness*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.

Selye, H. (1956). *The stress of life*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Singh, M. & Kaushik, S. S. (2000). A comparison of relaxation, meditation and cognitive therapy for enhancing stress-coping skills of depression at risk middle aged women. *Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 27, 89-96.