

Woman and Well-Being At The Workplace: An Introduction

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Abstract

Well-being is a multidimensional construct. Diener, 2009; Michaelson, Abdullah, Stever Thompson and Marks, 2009; Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2009. Bradburn, (1969) has defined well-being as how excess of positive over negative affect. He highlighted how psychological well-being was the variable that stands out as being of primary importance. He referred psychological well-being as happiness many times. His idea of well-being is linked to Aristotle's idea of as eudaimonia, which is generally translated as well-being. According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is the overarching goal of human behaviors. In the same way Bradburn focuses on the difference between positive and negative effect. According the Bradburn, 'An individual will be high in psychological well-being in the degree to which he has an access of positive over negative effect and will be low in well-being in the degree to which negative effect predominated over positive. (Bradburn,9)

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Introduction

Land Diener and Suh (1997) have also emphasized on positive and negative effect model of Bradburn. According to them 'Subjective well-being consists of three interrelated components: life satisfaction, pleasant affect and unpleasant affect. Affect refers to pleasant and unpleasant moods and emotions, whereas life satisfaction refers to a cognitive sense of satisfaction with life. (Diener and Suh, 1977, P.200) Ryff (1989,a) have identified five aspects of well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationship with others, purpose in life, realization of potential and self-acceptance. In recent researches different models of well-being have been emphasized. Foresight mental capital and well-being project (2008) define it as ability to fulfill goals; Pollard and Lee (2003) define it as happiness and Diener and Suh (1997), Seligman (2009) as life satisfaction.

Quality of life may be an important dimension of well-being, but it cannot be used as a synonym of well-being. In recent researches positive functioning of the individual has been emphasized for well-being. Duckworth Steen and Seligman, 2005; Linley and Joseph, 2004; Linley, Joseph, Harrington and Wood, 2006. This approach is correlated with William James's writing on healthy mindedness, (James 1902). Carl Rogers (1961) also discussed well-being in terms of 'The good life'. According to Rogers, every person strives to become "fully functioning person". The person who is open to experience is trusting his own organism, and leads an increasingly existential life (Rogers, 1961, P. 187-189). Ryff and Singer (2008) seem to be influenced by Rogers's conception of well-being. Their six core dimensions of well-being i.e. self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive relationship, personal growth and autonomy show Rogers's influence.

Keyes (2002; 2005) viewed mental health as a syndrome of well-being symptoms. According to him, "mental health is created when an individual shows a high level on at least one symptom of hedonic and

just over half the symptoms of eudaimonia, i.e. positive functioning of life. Keyes work started the use of terms 'flourishing and languishing, as scientific concepts. His work directly influenced on the formulation of "a well-being manifesto for a flourishing society" by Shah and Marks (2004). Shah and Marks (2004) defined well-being as "well-being is more than just happiness. As well as feeling satisfied and happy, well-being means developing as a person, being fulfilled and making a contribution to the community, (2004, P.2).

Martin Seligman, the leader of positive psychology has outlined his new concept of well-being. According to Seligman (2011) five essential elements required for well-being are positive emotion, engagement, positive relationship, meaning and accomplishment or achievement. Positive emotions are the element of well-being, but well-being is about more than just feeling good. It also comes from using our strength in the pursuit of meaningful activities. According to Seligman "well-being cannot exist just in your head, well-being is a combination of feeling good as well as actually having meaning good relationship and accomplishment.

While women's well-being is widely studied in recent years, but the well-being of working women remain a lesser studied area. Women here stepped into almost all conventional and nonconventional professions. But, their well-being has not been studied unlike men's well-being. Their well-being at workplace and its consequence has remained relatively under-researched area. Women in paid workforce have been increasing impressively. According to recent statistics about 43 per cent of women aged 16 and older were in labor force in 1970. This proportion has increased to about 59 per cent in 2006. In India, overall labor force participation rate for women has fallen from 37 per cent in 2004-05 to 28 per cent in 2016. (International labor organizations, Global Employment Trends in 2013, Recovering from secured jobs dip, 2013, p.79). Addressing the well-being of working women has become very relevant with this consistent increase in working women workforce. Women at work do not face the same difficulties and challenges as men do. Well-being of the women at work is very important since it is correlated with many positive outcomes. Research has shown that individuals with greater well-being have been found to have greater success in life, better health, greater career success and better relationship with others, (Robertson and Cooper, 2011). Increased well-being among employees has been associated with higher customer satisfaction, (Moliner et al, 2008), greater productivity, higher profitability, lower employee turnover and decreased absence levels, Harter et al (2003). But, it is quite disappointing to note that as women are progressing at their workplaces, their well-being is not increasing. Cabrera, Beth (2015) says "Women have made huge strides during last several decades to achieve greater equality in education and in the workplace. But they certainly have not figured how to have it all. "In fact striving to have it all is pushing more and more women to the breaking point."

Stevenson, Band, Wolfers, J. (2009) have found in a study that women's happiness has declined over the past fifty years both relative to where they were and relative to men. American Psychological Association (2010) report that 28 percent of women had a great deal of stress versus 20 percent of men. Forty nine percent of women reported increase in their stress level in past five years, while only thirty nine percent men reported increase in stress level. Women reported more physical and emotional systems of stress such as headache or upset stomach as compared to men. Working women have to undergo through a variety of stress are at time. They are under acute time pressure and multiple roles. Brigid Schulte (2014) has described the intense time pressure experience by women at work. Rising levels of role overload leads to a feeling of never ending paucity of time to accomplish the long list of

responsibilities. A well-being project done by care.com (2014) found that 80 percent of working mothers feel stressed about getting everything done with perfection. Women face a variety of newer difficulties as they proceed in their career and family life. The most contributing pressure for women's well-being seems to be the pressure of performing multiple responsibilities simultaneously, that too with perfection. Although employment and economic independence has contributed to women's status and well-being. Work experience has made women more confident, enhanced their self-esteem and self-worth, but it has also created many negative consequences too. Working women's well-being and happiness is negatively affected by these factors. It is, therefore become very essential to address the barriers and biases affecting working women's well-being and finding ways to increase their well-being too. A review of research done the working women and their well-being suggests that many barriers and threats are influencing women's well-being. A brief description of these barriers is presented in following headings.

Balancing Between Work and Family Life:-

Balancing work and family life is the most challenging obstacle for women's well-being. Eagly and Carli (2007), Sandberg (2013) have found this as a main obstacle responsible for women's slow career progression. Traditionally women had the responsibility of maintaining family and children and men had the responsibility to earn and be breadwinner. But, with more and more women entering in workforce and pursuing careers, their traditional roles have started to change. Now, women do not have responsibility only in one domain that is home, rather they have to balance between the competing demands of both work and family domains. Attaining this balance is not easy. Imbalance between work and family like arises due to many factors. At home, women have to perform multiple duties i.e. cooking, cleaning, taking care of children and elderly etc. Work-family imbalance is the result of the performing multiple roles. Household responsibilities interfere with women's ability to perform effectively in the workplace. Younkin (2010), name it "Work-Family Spillover". Many women quit their jobs because of this work-family spillover. They prefer to spend time on raising their family and quit their bright and promising careers. Men on the other hand, rarely do so. If a woman chose her career over family, she is evaluated as selfish and ambitious and not a nice woman, while men are praised for performing well at their workplace. Ignoring family responsibilities are excused for them. This dilemma pushes women back from going to higher positions at their workplace. They often forego promotions, as it will interfere with family responsibilities. Promotions may bring greater time consumption and responsibilities, so they prefer to deny it.

Zhang (2010) has studied the source of work stress among women academicians in research universities of China. He found that women academicians perceived the demand for career development as highly stressful. The main career challenges for them include the need for renewing knowledge, lack of research productivity and slow career progress. Gender related barriers seemed to increase pressure on women academicians. Women academicians experienced more difficulty in fulfilling both academic work and roles. The main conflict situations found in research were related to performing both work and family roles very well, children's education and future and lack of time to satisfy personal interest and hobbies. In another study, Ugwu (2010) investigated the multiple role stress of female employees. He found that the 'sandwich generation' (as she labeled) women that receive caregiving support either from the husbands or from house helps, experience less stress than their counterparts without such care giving support. In similar study, Wei et al (2009) on Chinese professional women, work family conflict has been found the main stream. Abdullah et al (2008) assessed occupational stress, social and family difficulties and job contentment of working women in Bangladesh. Higher level of stress was found in working

professionals due to imbalance between work and family. Loo (2007) has found similar results on working women in Taiwan. He too found that work-family conflict was strongly linked with lower job and family satisfaction, greater stress and more severe physical ailments.

Thus, work-family life imbalance appears to be a significant barrier affecting working women's well-being.

Gender Stereotypes and Biases:-

Gender stereotypes and biases present a subtle but powerful obstacle for the well-being of women. Gender stereotype is a structural set of belief about the personal attributes of males and females. Powell (2003) explains that this belief sees men to be high in 'masculine' traits such as independence, aggressiveness, assertiveness and dominance and women to be high in 'feminine' traits such as gentleness, sensitivity to the feelings of others and tolerant. Despite widespread coverage by media and gender friendly government policies, these gender stereotypes have remained almost unchanged. Stereotype of working women is not positive. Working women are treated as being ambitious, selfish and neglectful to family. They are consistently blamed for neglecting family roles. When women pursue a good career, they are discouraged at every level. They are stereotyped as being masculine and cursed for not behaving like a 'woman'. That is why, women are feared to proceed further in their careers. For men, family roles do not hinder in their career. For men, it is perfectly right to focus on career and overlooking family roles. It is portrayed that leading a happy family and successful career is impossible for women. Women are indirectly forced to choose between work and family.

For women, success at work brings many negative consequences. This is labeled as 'Cost of Success'. Successful women professionals are blamed for being feminist, dominating and ambitious. Success does not bring such negative outcomes for men. Heilman and Okimoto (2007) have found that success and likability are positively correlated with men and negatively correlated with women. Sandberg (2013) named this phenomenon 'Punishment for Success'. When a woman excels in her career, she works hard and proceeds further in career ladder. Such woman is accused for behaving like a man. She is disliked for behaving like a man. Since everybody wants to be liked, women curtail their ambitions, they willingly compromise with their careers. Famous writer Ken Auletta (2002) has summarized this phenomenon as 'self-doubt becomes a form of self-defense'. Women begin to suspect and underestimate their capabilities in order to be liked by others. Sandberg (2013) quotes Professor D.H. Gruenfeld for explaining this phenomenon, "Our entire cultural ideas associate men with leadership qualities and women with nurturing qualities and put women in double bind" Further Professor Gruenfeld explains that women pay cost for their success at workplace. Men can display their abilities and accomplishments, but for women this is considered as a negative characteristic. Rudman, L.A. (1999) has found in a study that for women, taking credit comes as a real social and professional cost. When a woman explains why she is qualified or mentions previous successes in a job interview can lower her chance for getting a job. Women also lag behind men in making negotiations regarding career benefits like perks, salary hike etc. While men negotiate more than women in career advancement pursuits. Asking for oneself is not accepted as a female trait. Women are considered to be caring, nurturing and giving. Whenever a woman negotiates on her own behalf, she violates the perceived gender norms and is disliked a lot.

Discrimination at Workplace:- Women face various forms of discrimination at workplace. This discrimination negatively influences women's well-being.

Although gender discrimination is banned legally, but it is present in many indirect ways. For example, there is no gender discrimination in education and entering in jobs for women, but when women enter into their career and aspire to go to higher positions at their organization or workplace, they face discrimination. That is why they are badly represented at leadership position in the organization. Catalyst Survey (2015) shows that in United States of America only 5 percent of the companies in the standard and poor's 500 index had female executive officers. Despite women's significant gains in education and at the workplace over the past 50 years, they are always behind men in the leadership positions, from corporate boardrooms, to the hall of congress, from universities to the courts, from religious institutions to philanthropic organizations, women leaders are not seen as men leaders. A McKinsey survey report 'Women Matters' (2015) showed that India's corporate sector has only 4% women at senior position compared to the average of 11% average of Asia. The survey reported that number of women at entry level 25% ,at mid management level 16% and at top management level only 4% women are present. Aarti Shyamsunder et al (2015) have presented the representation of gender leadership position in India. They found 24% women at entry level against 76% men, 21% women at managerial level against 79% men and only 14% women at senior manager level against 86% men.

It appears that something is holding women back from becoming leaders at workplace. The Glass Ceiling metaphor portrays the difficulty that women face at workplace while moving ahead to leadership positions at workplace. The glass ceiling thus constitutes an invisible barrier for women preventing them from moving up to career ladder. Weyer (2007) the glass ceiling phenomena has been explained in many ways, including corporate practices such as recruitment, Powell 1987; retention remuneration and development, Will and Nye 1992; and behavioral causes such as stereotyping and preferred leadership. Eagly and Carli (2007) have proposed the concept of labyrinth. By using the metaphor of labyrinth, they explain that women react to senior positions in organization by negotiating within the organization. Their success and promotion is not attributed to their merit, rather it is attributed to negotiations and compromises.

Women are undoubtedly competent and efficient as men. But at workplace men are more encouraged than women employees. Women employees are expected to behave feminine and not supposed to be a male attribute rather. The leadership traits like independence, self-reliance, aggressiveness and assertiveness are supposed to be men's characteristics. When women leader exhibit leadership traits, the image gets conflicted with the traditional women's role. Galanaki et al (2009) have found gender stereotyped perception put women leaders at a disadvantaged position.

Sandberg, S (2013) has elaborated this discrimination 'Leadership Ambition Gap'. Leadership ambition gap is a dominant factor which refrain women from moving to leadership position at workplace. Career progress depends on risk taking and self-promotion. And these qualities are labeled as 'Masculine' in the society. Women are not expected to advocate for themselves and be bold and straight forward at workplace. This is perhaps the main reason for absence of women on leadership positions. Sandberg says "the pipeline that supplies of women at the entry level, but by the time, the same pipeline is filling leadership position; it is overwhelmingly stuck by men. Women lag behind men in their ambitions at workplace. Konrad et al (2009) found that when jobs are described as powerful, challenging and involving high levels of responsibility, they appeal to more men than women. Men are praised for being ambitious and successful, while women are not. Heilman and Tyler (2007) have found that men are continuously praised for their ambitions and success, while women pay a social penalty for displaying those traits. So, the workplace does not offer equal opportunities to men and women employees.

Joan Williams (2014), the directors or the center for work life law at the University of California, has extensively researched over women at work. She has identified four biases that working women generally face. The first bias is that women have to prove themselves over and over again. Men are evaluated on the basis of their 'Potential', while women are evaluated on their performance. Women remain in constant pressure of performing well. Women's failure is easily noticed. Men's success is attributed to skill and women's success is attributed to luck. Second bias is the double standard expectation from women. On one hand, they are expected to behave in traditional way, while leadership traits are many 'masculine' labeled traits. Women who are traditional are judged as less competent as leaders at workplace. And if they exhibit masculine traits, they are blamed for not behaving like a woman. Third bias is associated with motherhood and low competence. Motherhood is generally associated with lack of competence and commitment. Women having smaller kids are not offered promotions or challenging assignments. The fourth challenge was the conflict among women. Within an organization, women adopt different strategies to combine the work and family roles. Women sometimes criticize each other and try to prove their own viewpoint. Thus women start criticizing others inspite of supporting each other.

Discrimination in wage gap of men and women is also an important barrier to women's well-being. ILO's report shows that women are underpaid and discriminated in payment biases in large organization. ILO, Global Employment trends (2003), Somander Tany (2014) have found that women in United States are paid only 78 cents for every dollar that men are paid. In India wage gap exists in many private and non-organized sectors. Women are forced to accept this disparity. This wage gap negatively influences women's self-esteem and self-worth and decreases their well-being.

Enhancing Well-Being of the Working Women:-

Women well-being is consistently threatened by the gender stereotype perception and discrimination. Since working women constitute a significant population of total workforce, their well-being is very important. Well-being is earlier found positively correlated with better production, higher customer satisfaction, higher profitability lower employee turnover and decreased absence level. Well-being is also positively correlated with personal achievements such as greater success in life, better health, greater success in career and better relationship with others. So, women's well-being must be increased. It can be increased by regular practice of techniques of mindfulness, hopefulness, increasing resilience and maintaining strong social relationship. These techniques would certainly help in managing the stress of life and increasing well-being.

First and foremost important way to increase well-being is to develop positive approach towards life in all circumstances. Women should try to have positive approach and remain calm and relaxed. Positive people have better mental health. Lyubomirsky et al (2005) have found that positive people have better mental health and lesser anxiety and depression. Positiveness helps in becoming more resilient. Since positive people have effective coping styles, they use active and approach of coping style where confronted with stressful life conditions. Isen (1991) has found positively related with lower hypertension, diabetes and stroke. Positive people slept better, have fewer cold, and less pain than negative people.

Strong social relationship can also contribute to well-being. Working women should try to develop strong social relationship at workplace and at family both. Earlier research suggests that social relationship enhance our happiness level and psychological well-being. It makes one happier and adds

meaning to life. Social relationship has the most significant impact on human flourishing people having more friends are happier. Friends advice and support one to cope with difficult life situation. Having close and strong relationship enhances physical well-being and longevity too. George Vaillant (2012) has extensively researched on secrets to a fulfilling life and found that “the warmth of people’s relationship has the most significant impact on human flourishing. The only thing that really matters in life is your relationship to other people.”

Martin Seligman and Diener (2002) have found that the single factor that distinguished the very happiest students from everyone else was they all had close meaning connections worth others. Relationships make to feel safe at time of difficulty. Friend’s advice supports our self-confidence. Having close and strong social relationship also enhances our physical well-being and longevity. Baumeister (1999) has found that individuals who had high levels of social support had lower levels for stress and anxiety, they stayed healthier and had longer life too. Janice K. et al (2009) have reported role of relationship in recovery from hurts. Barbara Fredrickson (2013) in her book ‘Love 2.0 : Finding Happiness and health in moments of connection’ discusses how positive social connections raise our oxytocin levels. We experience significant health benefits as a result of increased levels of oxytocin in our bodies that occur when we connect to others.

Thus, it is suggested that women should develop healthy relationship with people around them at workplace and at home. Having good friend at home will give them more access to knowledge and information helping them to do their job better. Working with friends will lead to greater collaboration and lesser effort and stress. Friends can also help in coping with difficulties and bounce back quicker when we really need them. Working with close one gives a feeling of security. So, one is more able to take risk and tough decisions too. Supporting relationship encourages going beyond our comfort zone, leading to more career growth working with people we like energies and brings out our best ideas too.

Mindfulness is also helpful in enhancing well-being. It is the practice of focusing on present and not thinking about the past or future. We are unhappy when we think about past negative experiences and worry about future that is uncertain. Future worries and negative past makes one less happier. So, being mindful keeps one away from useless anxiety about the past and future. By being mindful keeps one away from useless anxiety about the past and future. By focusing on present one becomes able to notice the emotions that he is experiencing at that moment. When one is mindful, he not only better understands his own emotions, but he also better understands other’s emotions too. By understanding other’s emotions, social relationships are strengthened. Mindfulness is important in disengaging individual from automatic thoughts, habits and unhealthy behavior patterns and thus plays important role in fostering informed and self-endorsed behavioral regulation which has been associated with well-being enhancement, Ryan and Deci (2000). Mindfulness contributes to well-being by adding clarity and vividness to experience. Many theorists (Brazier, 1995), Mortin, 1997) have emphasized the positive relation of different attributes of mindfulness and well-being.

Hopefulness also facilitates to well-being. Hope works as a great motivator. Hopeful people are much happier and satisfied with their life. Hope about future give one encouragement to work hard to achieve it. Having a clear picture of one’s future plans is an important element of hope. Women should have a clear ten or fifteen years future plan ready in their minds. Visualizing the future plans makes one energized and active. There is a difference between being hopeful and being optimistic. Optimism is a belief that good things will happen to them while hopefulness is a belief that one himself has to work

hard to make his plans executed successfully. Hopeful person realize that they are responsible for moving towards their vision.

To conclude, it can be stated that women face many complexities at workplace in form of gender stereotypes, discrimination, gender pay gap, sexual harassment, glass ceiling. Their well-being undoubtedly threatened. But, women themselves can overcome this situation by practicing mindfulness, hopefulness, developing strong social relationships and being more resilient.

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