

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMPUTER APPLICATION & MANAGEMENT

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## TASK DEMAND AS A FACTOR CAUSING JOB STRESS: A STUDY OF WORKING WOMEN OF IT SECTOR IN NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION OF DELHI

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### ABSTRACT

*Working women in the IT sector India is prone to job stress due to imbalance between the demands of the organizational environment and individual resources affecting her psychological well-being. Based on a research of 300 working women in IT sector of NCR region of Delhi, task demand was found to be a definite factor leading to job stress in working women. Out of the various sub factors analyzed under task demands, non availability of flexible timings, training for their career growth, organizations layoff & retrenchment policies, office politics and unrealistic expectations from the job were found to be significant factors influencing job stress.*

### KEYWORDS

Working Women, Job stress, Task demands, IT sector.

### INTRODUCTION

Job related stress can be conceptualized as an interactive imbalance between the individual and the individual's work environment (French, et al., 1974). The workplace represents a community of workers, which serves as an important source of social support for stressed employees where they could be made to feel like at home (McGuire 2007). The level of social support that workers receive at the workplace influences their levels of job stresses, and strains as well as the levels of their satisfaction with their jobs, and job performances (House 1981, Fisher 1985, Haines, Hurlbert & Zimmer 1991, Hurlbert 1991, Nelson & Quick 1991, Ducharme & Martin 2000, Park Wilson & Lee 2004, Synder, Claffey & Cistulli 2011, Brotheridge 2001). Hofboll, Geller & Dunahoo suggest that it is important to consider the stressors that are unique to employed women, as this can increase the understanding of the specific needs of working women. These include- organizational climate ( Miler, Greyling, Cooper, Lu, Sparks & Spector multiple roles (Burke2003), lack of career progress (Brass 1985); discrimination, stereotyping, (Waterhouse1991, Schneider1997) marriage/work interface, social isolation ( Nelson & Quick). The current work environment has resulted in a growing number of workers reporting work overload, stress-related illnesses, depression, substance abuse, and other personal and family problems (Banta, 1989; Hopkins, 1993; Myers, 1985)

Task demand is related to everyday conditions in the organization that affect the general working & productivity of employees in the organization. For women these include relation with seniors & peers, acceptance by male subordinates, facility of flexible timings, training & development, layoff, office politics & unrealistic job expectations.

Over the past decade, India has emerged as one of the fastest growing IT markets in the Asia Pacific region. The National Capital Region has been one of the top regions in terms of ICT (Information communication technology). The number of Indian & multinational organizations present in this area is a testimony to this (Nasscom-McKinsey report 2005). The dynamic environment of the Information technology sector puts a lot of pressure on employees and organizations, demanding more immediate and direct changes across all functions. This sector is very volatile and faces the problem of lack of job security and constant upgradation of skills to remain marketable. The working conditions in the Information System profession is becoming very stressful (Vowler, 1995; Engler N. 1996; Sethi et.al., 1999; Thong and Yap, 2000) with average working hours extended to 50 hours per week, working on Saturdays and Sundays and not being able to take leave when sick (King, 1995). According to K. S. Rajeswari and R. N. Anantharaman (2003) fear of obsolescence and individual team interactions accounted maximum stress among software professionals. In another study by K. S. Rajeswari and R. N. Anantharaman (2005) on Role of Human-Computer Interaction Factors as Moderators of Occupational Stress and Work Exhaustion found that IT professionals have long work hours with different time zones, total team work, task to be completed on deadline with perfection as per client needs, which requires interpersonal, technical, and organizational. These characteristics lead to occupational stress and work exhaustion.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the task demand as a factor causing stress in the working women. To begin a review of the literature is provided on the factors leading to job stress in working women and the various constructs of task demand. Following this, the results of survey of working women in the IT sector of the NCR region are presented. Pie chart and item response theory is used to analyze the results of the survey. To conclude, the practical and academic implications of the findings are discussed in the context of managing job stress in working women.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE

Women's participation in the workforce is increasing all around the world (Davidson & Burke, 2004). This trend is resulting in the transformation of traditional gender roles and raising concerns about the psychological well-being of women and men who are experiencing role overload and work-family conflict (Elloy & Smith, 2003; Pleck, 1977). Weiss 1987 proposes that females face difficulties in their relationships at work, the highest degree of stress was with working with superiors. Training is considered as a waste on women as eventually they will leave work for marriage and children (Crampton & Mishra, 1999).

The information technology field (IT), organization cultures represent a barrier for women advancing to upper management positions (Lemons and Parzinger, 2001). In addition, Bae (2002), in a study on women in the US found that women have less access to relevant training and are less likely to be trained than men. Mitchie and Nelson (2006, p 18) found that regardless of the recruitment efforts and incentives to encourage more women in the IT sector within the US, managerial work positions are still highly dominated by men. The main problem was due to institutions not addressing the retention of IT women professionals. Similar to women in other professions, women in IT face social barriers that restrict their career persistence and advancement (Ahuja, 2002). The social pressure of work-life balance was one of the commonly cited challenges of IT work. Women are expected to be chaste and especially modest in all actions (Dube and Palriwala, 1990), which may constrain their ability to perform in the workplace on an equal basis with men.

#### INDIAN CONTEXT

The Indian society is presently experiencing and accelerated change in economy, social structure, and family structure. Despite the increasing workforce participation of women, India remains largely a hierarchical male-dominated society. The cultural traditions and family role-structures have not changed significantly and women on average still bear responsibilities for daily household chores, such as cooking, shopping, providing care for children and aged family members (Aziz, 2004). Research on career women in India shows that work and family dilemmas are often different from those reported by women in the West (Sekaran 1992).

The Women of Tomorrow Study (2011), which examined 6,500 women from 21 developed and developing countries like Sweden, the US, the UK, France, the BRICS economies from February through April 2011, found that an overwhelming 87% of Indian women said they felt stressed most of the time, with 82% claiming they had no time to relax. The latest study done by Nielsen (2011) reveals Indian women are the most stressed in the world today. An overwhelming 87% of Indian women said they felt stressed most of the time, and 82% had no time to relax. The survey, covered 6,500 women. The biggest stress is felt among women of 25-55 years of age, typically married where expectations from women have risen and where conflicts between what all women must do too has surged. Indian women are not alone. The vast majority of Mexican (74%) and Russian (69%) women surveyed also reported feeling stressed. Nielsen's survey (year) found that worldwide, women play multiple roles that contribute to their stress levels, but that the social infrastructure allowing them to navigate these roles differed between emerging and developed markets. As a result, women in emerging markets tended to be more stressed than women in the developed world, with women in India, Mexico and Nigeria feeling the most time-pressured. Despite the technological prowess of India's engineers and outsourcing firms, the country's basic infrastructure isn't sophisticated enough to support telecommuting and work-from-home arrangements on a widespread basis. Ojha and Rani (2003) indicated that working women significantly perceived higher stress. Nelson and Quick (1985) exhibited greater stress caused by marital, social, familial and professional roles.

The TCS-People Matters Gender Inclusion Survey 2010-11, found that though women are relatively well represented in the services and the IT sectors, they are mostly concentrated at the entry levels. In the IT sector, 70 percent of the respondents claimed that they have between 15-30 percent of women in their total workforce, while in the finance sector 73 percent of the respondents claimed that the women share of their workforce was up to 15 percent. The World Economic Forum's 2010 Global Gender Gap Index shows that the education attainment gap has almost disappeared in the Indian context the gap has reduced 16.7 percent in 2011, but this is not translating into women being retained, developed and advanced in the workforce. Despite two decades economic renaissance, India is the worst among the 6 top Asian economies (including China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore) when it comes to representation of women in the workforce at junior and middle-level positions, according to the Gender Diversion Benchmark of Asia 2011 report. Worse, at 48 percent, India has the most significant drop from junior to middle level positions. These numbers mean that the pipeline is either leaking or is stuck.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

Some consequences are job dissatisfaction, enhancement of organizational accidents, absence, (Houtman et al 1999) productivity deterioration and job quit (Giorgi, 2009,) apathy, resignation, fantasy, forgetfulness, inability to concentrate, procrastination, and inability to make decisions. High levels of unchecked and unmanaged occupational stress not only undermine the quality, productivity and creativity of the employees but also employees' health, well-being and morale (Calabrese et al., 1987; Matteson and Ivancevich, 1987; Frese, 1985; Cohen and Williamson, 1991), high turnover of labor (Giorgi, 2009) with the loss of "good" employees, and a large increase in recruitment and retraining costs (McHugh and Brennan, 1992, Cooper and Cartwright, 1994; Edworthy, 2000). Turnover of highly skilled employees can be very expensive and disruptive for firms (Reichheld, 1996). Losing highly skilled staff members means that companies incur substantial costs associated with recruiting and re-skilling, and hidden costs associated with difficulties completing projects and disruptions in team-based work environments (Niederman and Summer, 2003). The "job churning", specifically, with relation to information technologies have short life cycles, requiring continuous hiring of new workers with new skills, as opposed to the more time consuming approach of training current employees (Network, 2000). Certain aspects of work, however, can be toxic. The health benefits of careers can be compromised by the health risks associated with stressors at work. There are gender differences in physical, psychological, and behavioral symptoms of stress. Physical symptoms reported more often among women include headaches and poorer overall physical health. Anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances are the psychological symptoms most often reported by women, and work stress has been implicated as a culprit in these distress symptoms (Nelson, D. L., Hitt, M. A., & Quick, J. C. 1989). Lawless (1992) reported that women suffered fifteen percent more stress related illnesses than men. They also thought about quitting their jobs more often, and reported a higher incidence of burnout. The coping strategy adopted by the working women was based on the intensity of stress experienced by them.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The foregoing review of literature led to certain specific research questions. The question were: How is task demand related to stress in women, Which construct in task demands plays a significant role in increasing stress? How organizations can help to reduce such stress?

Task demands include general organization environment & support system. The study through review of literature identified eight constructs of task demand which were stress influencers that played a significant role to stress in working women especially IT sector: (1) Support from seniors, peers (2). Acceptance of male subordinates (3) non-inclusion in training programs (4) arrangement of flexi-timings (5) office politics (6) workload (7) layoff policies of the organizations and (8) unrealistic expectations from the job.

#### OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to investigate task demand as a factor of job stress among the working women of IT sector in the National Capital Region.

#### HYPOTHESIS

Working women have significant stress due to task demands in the organization.

#### METHODOLOGY

Data for this study was collected using a questionnaire. This was developed with the help of American Psychological Association Stress Survey, Health & Safety Executive Management Standards indicator Tool. The responses were measured on the Likert scale.

Convenience random sampling technique was used for selecting the sample. The sample was selected based on references in various organizations. A sample size of 300 was identified for the purpose of this study.

The questionnaires were mailed explaining to them the purpose and the need of their involvement. Out of 300 questionnaires sent 262 responded back, a response rate of approximately 87%. The responses were coded with numerical value 1 to 5 with strongly agree at 5 & strongly disagree at 1. The analysis of these factors & its relationship with stress was done with the help of item response theory using R software.

**DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION**

Item Response Theory (IRT) was used to plot item response characteristics curve (ICC) for the latent trait variables .

IRT entails three assumptions:

1. A unidimensional trait denoted by  $\theta$  ;
2. Local independence of items;
3. The response of a person to an item can be modeled by a mathematical item response function (IRF).

The trait is further assumed to be measurable on a scale (the mere existence of a test assumes this), typically set to a standard scale with a mean of 0.0 and a standard deviation of 1.0. Unidimensionality should be interpreted as homogeneity, a quality that should be defined or empirically demonstrated in relation to a given purpose or use, but not a quantity that can be measured. 'Local independence' means

- (a) The chance of one item being used is not related to any other item(s) being used
- (b) The response to an item is each and every test-taker's independent decision, that is, there is no cheating or pair or group work.

Item characteristics curve(ICC):A mathematical function that relates the probability that a respondent will answer a question correctly according to his or her underlying ability or skill.

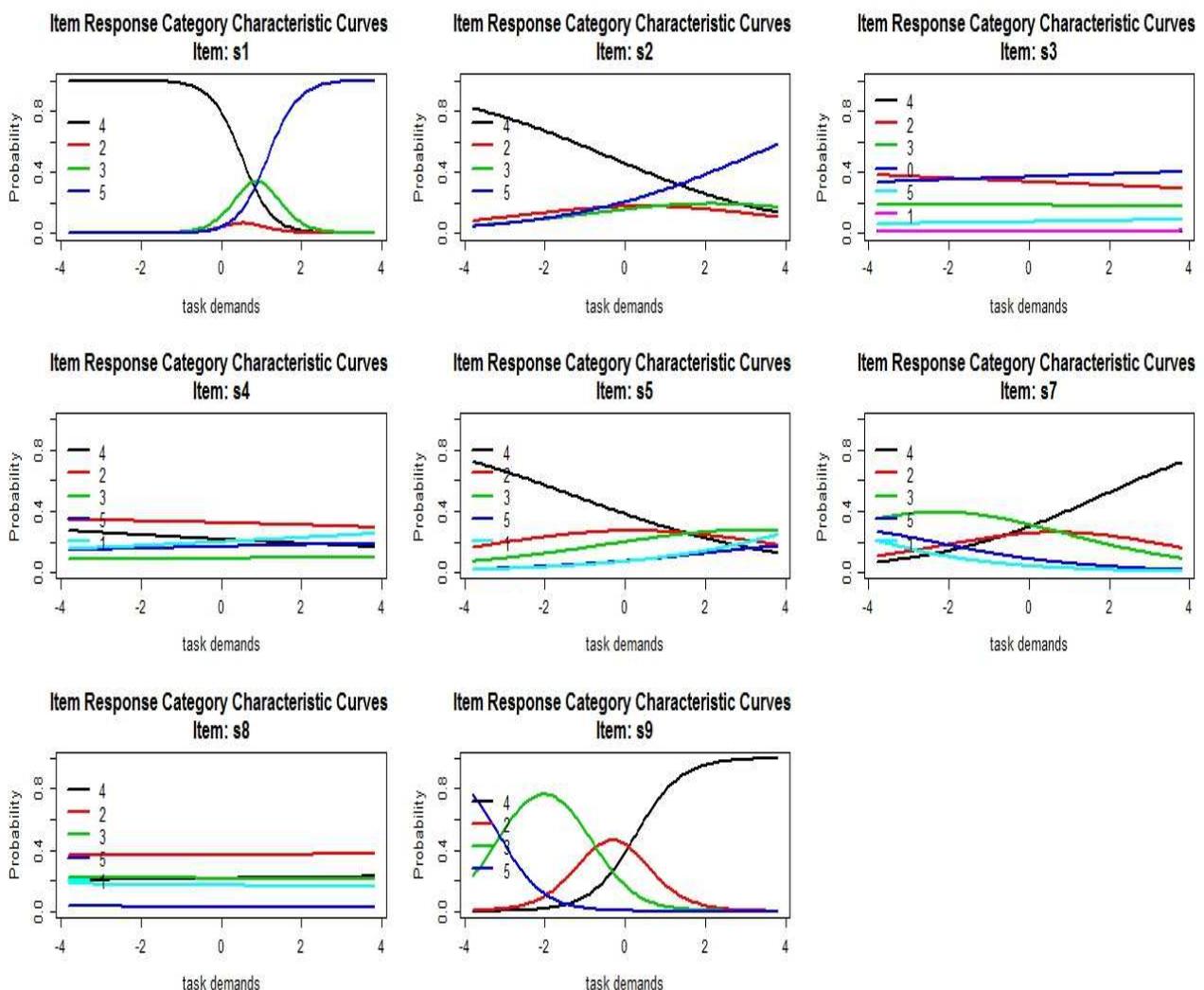
Here ICC curve of each categorical response i.e. from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” based on scale rating scale is plotted against continuous latent score as task demand with mean zero and variance constant .

scaling is done as:

(Strongly agree =5; Agree=4; Neutral=3; Disagree=2; Strongly disagree=1; missing value=0)

X axis represents continuous latent score task demand with mean zero and variance constant=1 which is an assumption in “Item response theory”. Y axis represents probability.

**GRAPH PANEL SHOWING “ICC” FOR ‘TASK DEMANDS’**



**ON ANALYSIS**

**1) ITEM RESPONSE CATEGORY CHARACTERISTICS CURVE FOR ITEM (S1)**

**ITEM S1: I HAVE GOOD RELATIONS WITH MY PEERS & THEY ARE THERE TO HELP ME WHENEVER I NEED.**

For an average value of latent trait score for “Task demands” Probability of endorsing category “Agree” is high. Hence, the respondents agree with the fact that they have good relations with their peers & they get help from their peers whenever they need. Research studies also indicate the Co-worker support to be associated with organizational outcomes such as turnover intentions (AbuAlRub, 2010; Glass & Riley, 1998; Jonas & Butler, 1980), job satisfaction (Ducharme & Martin, 2000), increased psychological well-being (Beehr & Mc Grath 1992), decreased role conflict (Jones & Butler, 1980) and increased positive spillover from work-to-family (Colton, 2004).

**2) ITEM RESPONSE CATEGORY CHARACTERISTICS CURVE FOR ITEM (S2)**

**ITEM S2: I CAN RELY ON MY IMMEDIATE SENIORS TO HELP ME WITH A WORK PROBLEM.**

From graph it is seen that for an average value of latent trait score for “Task demands” Probability of endorsing category “Agree” is high. The respondents agree with the fact that they can rely on their immediate seniors to help them with a work problem.

**3) ITEM RESPONSE CATEGORY CHARACTERISTICS CURVE FOR ITEM (S3)****ITEM S3: I FEEL MY SUBORDINATES WHO ARE MALE ACCEPT ME AS THEIR SENIOR.**

From graph it is seen that for an average value of latent trait score for "Task demand" Probability of endorsing category "disagree" is high. The respondents agree with the fact that they don't agree that their subordinate who are male accept them as their senior. This is supported by earlier research studies that the behavior of coworkers and supervisors is a major source of workplace stress, as captured by constructs such as abusive supervision (e.g., Tepper 2000), toxic workplace (e.g., Frost 2004), and sexual harassment (e.g., Bergman et al., 2002).

**4) ITEM RESPONSE CATEGORY CHARACTERISTICS CURVE FOR ITEM (S4)****ITEM S4: THE ORGANIZATION GIVES THE FACILITY OF FLEXIBLE TIMINGS OR WORK FROM HOME.**

Probability of endorsing category "Disagree" is higher with respect all other category. Thus it is concluded that most of respondent feels that their organization does not give the facility of flexible timings or work from home.

**5) ITEM RESPONSE CATEGORY CHARACTERISTICS CURVE FOR ITEM (S5)****ITEM S4: THERE ARE REGULAR TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN MY ORGANIZATION TO HELP ME UPGRADE MY SKILLS FROM TIME TO TIME.**

From graph it is seen that for an average value of latent trait score for "Task demands" probability of endorsing category "Agree" is maximum followed by category "Disagree" next to it thus it is concluded that there is more or less likely to be regular training & development activities in their organization to help them upgrading their skills from time to time.

Further though there are regular training & development activities in the organization to help upgrade the skills of female employees from time to time" with increase in task demands probability of respondent agree that "There are regular training & development activities in my organization to help me upgrade my skills from time to time" decreases. Thus it is indicated that there should be regular training & development activities in organization to help workers in upgrading their skills from time to time which may lead to increase in productivity of individuals as well as organization. Therefore from the study it may be found that there are training programs for women, they decrease sharply with increase in task demands or as ability of respondents increases.

**6) ITEM RESPONSE CATEGORY CHARACTERISTICS CURVE FOR ITEM (S7)****ITEM S7: I WORRY ABOUT THE LAYOFFS & RETRENCHMENT IN THE ORGANIZATION.**

In this graph, probability of endorsing category "agree" increases with increase in latent trait score "Task demand". Thus most of respondents of the study agree with the fact that they worry about the layoffs & retrenchment in the organization.

**7) ITEM RESPONSE CATEGORY CHARACTERISTICS CURVE FOR ITEM (S8)****ITEM S8: I AM NOT SUBJECT TO OFFICE POLITICS & PERSONAL HARASSMENT IN THE FORM OF UNKIND WORDS AT WORK.**

In this graph, it is seen that probability of endorsing category "Disagree" is relatively higher than all other category for latent trait score "task demands". Thus, respondents agree with the fact that they are subjected to office politics & personal harassments in the form of unkind words at work.

**8) ITEM RESPONSE CATEGORY CHARACTERISTICS CURVE FOR ITEM (S9)****ITEM S9: THE EXPECTATIONS FROM MY JOB ARE SOMETIMES UNREALISTIC.**

In this graph it is seen that probability of endorsing category "Agree" increases with relatively high latent trait score "task demands" and have high probability of endorsing category "Agree" for relatively high latent trait score "task demand" value. Thus, respondents agree with the fact that their expectations from their job are sometimes unrealistic.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The study indicates that task demand is a significant factor causing job stress in the women information technology professionals in India. Women in organizations usually tend to have good relations with their seniors, colleagues & subordinates but these sometimes in itself can be a reason of job stress because in the process of maintaining the relationships they tend to extend and exert work pressures from office to home. Further, acceptance of a female senior by the male subordinates is somewhat low. This may lead to job stress because for getting output acceptance by subordinates is very important. The study also indicates that office politics is an important factor leading to stress. Non availability of flexible timings as per the requirements of the women makes the handling of both office and home tasks feel more burdensome. Keeping updated about the advances in technology especially in the IT sector has women professionals more worried in this sector, hence if proper training programs are not available the women perceive a sense of insecurity at their workplace. The study clearly indicates that in today's context the women professional is also worried about the Organizations' layoff & retrenchment policies as she too is a breadwinner for her family due to rising costs. The organizations expectations from the job are sometimes unrealistic as competition in the market place is increasing, thus putting extra pressure on the employees for higher level of performance. The IT organizations in India can help to reduce the job stress in its women professionals by involving this group right from the time of policy formation to its implementation as it would give the professionals a chance to address their concerns in a much more effective manner.

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