

REVIEW ARTICLE

Job stress amongst female faculty members in higher education: an Indian experience from a feminist perspective

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Abstract: Women academicians in higher education in India have a more rigorous path to follow than their male counterparts in achieving their due professional status. There are several factors that hinder their progress, including patriarchal concepts in certain role expectations from women; stereotyping of women in certain roles; and non-acceptance of women in certain others. The notions about women that have thus got embedded in the higher education sector in India have a negative impact on their career progress. There is also the need to understand the phenomenon of the glass ceiling that women are faced with in their career promotion efforts in higher education and the inequalities they often encounter under male chauvinism. Against this backdrop, the present paper strives to study the factors that contribute to the job stress and dissatisfaction of women in higher education in India, using the constructs of feminism. The paper concludes that understanding these constructs enables the members of the academia to rationally navigate the experiences of women in higher education and to create supportive policies that ensure a sustainable future for academic women with job security, satisfaction, and dignity.

Keywords: Women, academicians, feminist theory, job stress, higher education.


INTRODUCTION

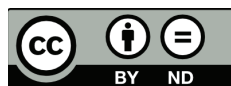
Globally, as development parameters emphasise, women have more access today to education, health, and public services and resources than they used to about two decades ago (Max Roser, 2020). Yet, the ground realities are different; women in many contexts and geographies still struggle to have access to the basics. Feminists look at the inequalities implied by this situation from varied lenses and consider that a detailed study of the nature,

causes, and effects of such inequalities is essential to make any progress in their optimal mobilisation for national development. In this scenario, this paper looks at the experiences of women in higher education in India through the lens of feminist literature to understand the stress and dissatisfaction of women in the higher education sector of India.

Feminism evolved into a theory through the work of a group of feminist ideologists, including Mary Wollstonecraft (Wollstonecraft, 2014), Simone de Beauvoir (Beauviour & Parshley, 1949), Judith Butler (Butler, 2002), Vandana Shiva (Mies & Shiva, 1993) and Sharmila Rege (Rege, 1998) that focuses on the personal experiences and lifestyles of women, living in various circumstances. Ideas and concepts such as patriarchy, objectification, violence, discrimination, stereotyping, and inequality are explored in feminist theory concerning the agonies of women. Within this, there is also cognisance given to the intersectional experiences of women of colour, women belonging to vulnerable castes, religious minorities, and the like. In this study, the constructs of inequality, discrimination, patriarchy, and gender-based stereotyping are investigated in interpreting the discriminatory experiences of women in terms of feminism.

Traditionally, women have to deal with the double burden that they are expected to play at home and on the job front. Social expectations as a homemaker and as a caregiver and personal ambitions as a career woman often led to their increased stress, difficulty in prioritisation of their wants and needs, and an overall impact on the

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quality of their personal and work life. There are, of course, women who need to become breadwinners in situations when the income of the family solely rests on their shoulders. No matter whether their decision to formally work is by choice or by compulsion, it adds to the roles that women need to play in their day-to-day lives. Its impact remains a hard-hitting realisation about the expectations of women. A telling fact substantiating this truth is the report by the Harvard Business Review found that over 87% of Indian women feel stressed at all points of time (Rashid, 2011). The impact of this scenario, especially with the growing numbers of women who are choosing to be educated and entering the workforce is a major concern. The 2011 report by Nielsen also shows that while women report globally higher feelings of empowerment, the management of their dual roles also leads to increased stress, a feeling of overwork and little time to relax and recoup (Nielsen, 2011).

In the specific context of India, although, over the past two and a half decades, as per the World Bank data presented by Das *et al.*, (2015) on women's participation in the labour force has reduced from 35% to 27% (% of the female population 15+ years of age). Even the meagre percentage of women who manage to enter formal employment, the barriers (seen and unseen) are critical and numerous. There is, of course, a sizeable dichotomy in the Indian scenario when it comes to women's empowerment and involvement in the workforce. While urban India seems to be seeing an increase in the education levels of women, rural India (the majority in the Indian context) sees a large exodus of women and men alike to urban locations for involvement in informal/ unorganised labour at daily wage contracts. Such informal work often sees a lack of basic amenities for women, a lack of safety and equal pay as well as a lack of social security measures.

Certain sectors such as academia and nursing are traditionally considered women's strongholds. Yet within these sectors the glass ceiling is real creating a significant hindrance to women's path to economic independence. The glass ceiling is a phenomenon that prevents minorities from climbing the ladder to senior roles and achieving their potential. Even in these sectors, women are again, typically, relegated to 'caring' job roles and women are often not seen in roles requiring leadership and decision making. A recent study by the University Grants Commission, India, also mentions those phenomena such as 'glass ceiling' and 'fears over promotions' need to be examined critically since they indicate widespread discriminating practices against

women in India's higher academia (University Grants Commission, 2013).

The Indian higher education sector is one of the fastest-growing entities, globally accounting for almost 91.7 billion US\$ in the 2018 financial year (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2020). With a fast-growing youth population, the country caters to the higher education needs of almost 37.4 million students. There is a considerable foreign direct investment in the sector in the recent years as well. Over the past few decades, the number of women students enrolling in higher education has also exponentially increased. The All India Survey in Higher Education (AISHE) Report 2015 mentions that there has been a significant increase in the number of female enrolment in higher education in the last decade alone (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2015). This is to be viewed in light of the earlier statement on the reduction of women's participation in the labour force. Studies, of course, argue that women's labour force participation acts as a U-shaped curve where educated women will eventually enter the workforce with reinforcements in the form of advanced qualifications (Lahoti and Swaminathan, 2016). Yet, if the atmosphere is not suited for them to advance, their struggle continues to be the same.

The higher education sector also employs a large number of individuals who pursue advanced degrees in various subjects. Advanced degrees include doctoral studies and India shows a significant increase in enrolment in doctoral studies over the past few decades. The dichotomy lies in the fact that while India accounts for a high number of women in its higher education student enrolment and women in the lower ranks of the professorship, women are not represented in the leadership ranks of higher education. Recent data from the All India Survey on Higher Education (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2015) shows that women are severely underrepresented in ranks of academic leadership with women occupying less than 30% of Principal positions, 20% of Director roles and less than 10% of Vice-Chancellor roles in universities across the country. It is also visible that women do not advance past middle-management roles to obtain more senior leadership positions partly because the higher education environment may not be conducive to supporting women in pursuing their leadership aspirations.

While women constitute 44% of the 27.4 million student population of the Indian higher education institutions, they constitute only 1.4% of the body of professors and 3% of the body of vice-chancellors of the

Indian universities (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). With huge demand for experienced and interested candidates for senior managerial roles in academia (Marshall, 2010) and a great need for young talent (Gupta, 2014) women are supposed to deal with job stress and gain leadership roles in the higher education sector as well. There is a case for increasing the number of women in colleges to attract more numbers of women students. India, in recent years, has seen a positive increase in the number of women students enrolling in higher education. The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) encourages having a representative number of women faculty in each college for its ranking. Colleges that provide better facilities for women, better safety and security, tend to attract more women faculty members and, as a result, larger numbers of women students. Hence retaining women faculty for colleges across the country makes sense from a business perspective (Aithal & Suresh Kumar, 2016). This finding is mirrored in other studies as well and is explicitly stated in a Government of India commentary on the education sector in India (All India Survey on Higher Education, 2016). But with increasing reports of job stress and dissatisfaction in the higher education sector, there is a need to understand the factors contributing to such stress and addressing the issue urgently.

Purpose

The purpose of this review is to use feminist theory to try and better understand the factors contributing to the job stress of the female faculty in Indian higher education sector. The feminist constructs of inequality, discrimination, stereotyping and patriarchy are used for this review. There are studies that look at the factors impacting job stress on faculty members in varied contexts, but a comprehensive review of these factors through the lens of the feminist theory, especially in the higher education sector in India, is missing. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the specific contributors to their stress in light of feminist literature.

METHODOLOGY

The research uses peer-reviewed studies from 2000-2020 that respond to keywords including job stress, gender, women, faculty, patriarchal role, patriarchy, stereotyping, gender inequality, discrimination, feminism, work-life balance, job satisfaction, teaching staff, and higher education institutions gathered from databases including Springer Link, PubMed, Sage Journals, Emerald Publishing, and Scopus. Studies specific to the Indian/South Asian contexts and specific to the higher education sector, focusing on the job stress faced by faculty members in the higher education sector are included, but with no focus on the stress of administrative staff in the higher education sector. The constructs of patriarchal roles/ norms, stereotyping, gender inequality and discrimination are used for the analysis of this review. From feminist literature, the broader themes, as mentioned, are chosen and specific codes within the same are analysed as represented in Table 1.

Studies on job stress faced by the teaching staff in higher education across India

Job stress is a major area of concern and research focus amongst the organised labour force across the globe. The higher education sector is no exception to the effects of job stress on its teaching staff and women, especially, deal with the job stress considering the dual role they play at the work and home front in their lives. Multiple studies look at the impact of job stress on the lives of women in the higher education sector. The literature review is divided into broad themes as given in Table 1. patriarchy, stereotyping, gender inequality and discrimination.

Patriarchy

A unique study was conducted amongst teachers from the universities in the north-eastern states of India with a sample of 508 participants (254 dual-career teacher couples) to understand the relationship between work role stress (amongst other variables) and the job

Table 1: Tabular representation of quality review analysis

	Themes	Codes
Feminist Theory	Patriarchal norms	Role expectations, double burden, caregiving responsibilities
	Stereotyping	Lack of authority, avoidance of conflict and assertive roles
	Gender Inequality	Lack of representation in leadership positions, lack of representation in prominence, imposter syndrome
	Discrimination	Unequal exposure to opportunities, lack of leadership possibilities and promotions

satisfaction of the dual-career teacher couples in India hypothesises that females have a higher amount of stress compared to their male counterparts. This is specific to areas such as work-family conflict, family role stress, and work role stress that indicate the increasing stress of the female teachers concerning the management of their dual responsibilities of work and home. The study further suggests that those experiencing low levels of stress report a higher job satisfaction level (Singh 2014; Singh & Singh, 2012) but the same study finds that women have higher job satisfaction than men, presumably because of the positive impacts of the economic independence due to participating in the formal labour force. This is especially true in a country like India, where having the opportunity to step out of the house, work and earn money increases the sense of self-worth in women and therefore, reflects higher job satisfaction even if it comes at the cost of increased stress due to the management obligations of the dual roles (Singh, Singh & Singh, 2012). In the feminist literature, this phenomenon is widely documented where women seem to express gratitude for having employment and economic independence in a phenomenon called the imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is the feeling of not belonging to a particular space and feeling like an outsider. Parkman (2016) in her study talks about how this syndrome is found amongst the women faculty, students and management in the higher education sector and the need for supportive policies to help address the same. Laux (2018) talks about the imposter syndrome and its effect on the career advancement of women in the higher education sector and on promotion processes (Laux, 2018).

One can also presuppose that increased job commitment, even with subtle unequal practices may be higher amongst women affected by the imposter syndrome. Meimanat Tabbodi (2009) collects data from 93 faculty members in the Humanities Departments of Mysore University, India, on studying the impact of leadership on their commitment. Having investigated whether there is a positive relationship between the organisational commitment and the gender of the faculty members, the study shows that women have a higher organisational commitment than their male counterparts in similar circumstances. The study also finds a significant relationship between institutional leadership and the commitment of female faculty members and claims that, with supportive organisational policies, women are more committed to their roles in the workplace than men (Tabbodi, 2009). Whether this is due to having an imposter syndrome or true to all women in general, needs to be further researched.

In order to find the levels of occupational stress and the relationships between such stress and work-life

balance amongst the female faculty members in two central universities in the city of Delhi, India, Zaheer *et al.* (2016), using a self-administered questionnaire to collect data from 90 female faculty members from the two universities and analysing the correlation of the data, find that their occupational stress level included in the study is as moderate as their work-life balance. Another significant finding of the study is that there is a significant negative relationship between work-life balance and occupational/job stress of the women faculty in two central universities in Northern India. The study finds that an increase in occupational stress has a significant positive impact on the work-life imbalance of faculty members. This means that an increase in occupational stress will lead to further work-life imbalance. Hence, such studies can be used for policy-level changes and contribute to the literature on women and their job stress in India (Zaheer *et al.*, 2016).

The role of the institution in supporting the work lives of women also needs to be understood. It is found that a lack of clarity of roles leads to furthering the sense of dissatisfaction amongst women in the higher education sector. In a comparison of the job satisfaction levels of the faculty members in India and those in Saudi Arabia, it is perceived that the faculty members in the Indian context report a moderate amount of occupational role stress. The study aims to compare the organisational role stress and organisational commitment amongst female faculty members across two countries, Saudi Arabia and India. The total sample consists of 245 randomly selected faculty members of which 90 are from Saudi Arabia and 155 were from India. It is noticed that the inability of being able to divide the time between the workplace and home is among the most significant contributors to stress among the faculty members in the Indian scenario. This feeds into the patriarchal role narrative of the Indian woman from a feminist perspective. The lack of clarity in the job role and varied expectations about the job role among varied individuals also causes stress among female faculty members. This is followed by a lack of recognition for roles played and a lack of resources to enable one to play one's role, all contribute to role stress. When compared with the Saudi Arabian scenario, the faculty report that role erosion was a major stressor, meaning that the credit for their work was taken by someone else in the organisation leaving them frustrated. This was followed by a conflict in their specific role within themselves and amongst others in the organisation depicting a lack of clarity in the procedure of role allocation.

It was noticed that the organisational role stress among the Indian faculty members was significantly high compared to the Saudi Arabian faculty members.

The study also tries to look at the differences between the two countries from a gender lens and finds that there is a significant difference when it comes to the Indian women faculty members' perceptions of organisational stress. The study finds that, in the Indian scenario, women faculty members report higher stress due to the lack of resources to complete their roles and responsibilities while those in the Saudi Arabian context show a high organisational commitment; this could be due to the high costs of living in the university. The study concludes in the Indian context women faculty members have a high commitment to the organisation as they are morally obliged to remain committed to their organisation (Qazi & Nazneen, 2016).

Stereotyping

The need to understand stereotyping in the context of higher education institutions has been explored by researchers such as Gupta and Sharma who have looked at the role of women in four reputed science and technology institutes in India. They find that stereotyping and patri-focal approaches give women scientists a disadvantage. This is further aggravated by the fact that women do not have a critical mass in such institutions to make their presence felt (Gupta & Sharma 2002). The impact of gender career patterns on the professions of women in an Indian university has also been explored by Chanana who finds that the limited visibility of women in positions of power and the constructs of passivity amongst women have a negative impact on the appointments and governance of women in higher education (Chanana, 2003).

Morley & Crossouard (2015) find that women in the higher education sector in South Asia are often not identified for leadership in the sector. They try to determine whether women are absent from leadership positions due to discriminatory practices or whether women themselves chose to stay out of such positions. The study finds that the reasons are a complex maze of multiple issues including socio-cultural norms and expectations from women, under-representation at leadership levels, and a lack of training and development of women in higher education. Concerning the socio-cultural expectations, the role attributed to women through patriarchal norms seems to be critical. Women are still identified only within the domestic sphere and are believed to be solely responsible for caregiving duties. Social roles that further stereotype women as not suitable to have authority over men, also partly play in the absence of women in higher education leadership.

The study also finds that women in privileged elite classes report a higher degree of cultural acceptance and family support while those in vulnerable sections of

class and caste categories report a lower degree of such advantages. This also brings to light the intersectional conversation in feminist theories (Sabharwal *et al.*, 2019). Patriarchal expectations from women have also influenced their decisions to become leaders in higher education as is found in another study by Morley & Crossouard (2016) They reveal that women do not find leadership a desirable option since it is associated with women leading men and exertion of authority which is seen as unacceptable in the patriarchal setting of the South Asia. The researchers believe that this leads to a series of 'ugly' emotions and a reduction of their well-being as well (Morley & Crossouard, 2016).

Gender inequality

As early as 2002, Gupta & Sharma (2002) researched the issues faced by women scientists in India in career and the challenges faced by them on the ladder. Data was collected using the triangulation method of data collection including questionnaires, interviews, case studies and such alike. Four recognised Indian institutions of national repute were selected and all women faculty members (a total of 96) were included in the study. The women reported three major issues faced by them including a feeling of isolation, male dominance in the workplace and feelings of conflict about being a woman and a scientist. Apart from the institutional issues faced by women in science, women in the study also mentioned the increased stress due to the dual role that they had to play as homemakers and as scientists. 92% of the respondents of the study felt that they had a double burden with 52% of the sample feels stressed out due to the same. 90% of the respondents also believed that marriage affected their careers because of social obligations and also due to the need to move from one location to another as per the patrilocal system that India follows (Gupta & Sharma, 2002). This again is an expression of the patriarchal roles that women are expected to follow in the Indian system and has been explored in various other studies as well (Chanana, 2020). Another study conducted by Rosemary Deem in 2003 amongst higher education faculty in the United Kingdom also finds that women's perceptions of their roles in higher education, their participation in management and their expectations from others are still marked by gender, even in a society that has progressed considering the South Asian context (Deem, 2003). Thus, the management of gendered norms is a reality for women across the globe.

Discrimination

In another study conducted in the state of Haryana in India, researchers set out to find the factors that influence the work-life balance of faculty members in technical

education institutes. The study includes 213 respondents from government and private institutions across the National Capital Region and Haryana. The study had an almost equal distribution of male and female faculty members as respondents, and they were asked questions to determine the factors that influence their work-life balance and job-related stress. The study finds that stress is the highest influencing factor on work-life balance amongst the respondents. This factor is followed by others including challenges in work life, attitude towards the work, and work environment. The respondents specifically mention that balancing between home and work needs causes stress and this affects their overall well-being. The women and men respondents differ in certain specific factors contributing to work-life balance. The women mention excessive household duties, responsibilities of a nuclear family and health-related problems as major contributors to lowered work-life balance. Men, on the other hand, mention a need to increase their income causing stress and that they are satisfied with the amount of time they have for themselves. The study thus concludes that stress is one of the main factors influencing the work-life balance of faculty members and that women and men have varied factors that affect their work-life balance (Rathee & Bhuntel, 2018). As is evident from the two previous studies, the dual roles of home and work responsibilities have an impact on the stress and job satisfaction of women faculty in higher education (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004). Similar findings are seen in studies conducted in other South Asian contexts such as the one conducted with women in the banking sector in Sri Lanka (Kodagoda, 2010). Further, in the context of Sri Lanka, studies have found that there is a positive correlation between the work-life balance of academics and their job performance, emphasizing the need to understand these areas of research (Vithanage *et al.*, 2017). Researchers Fazal *et al.* (2019) in their study based in Pakistan find that women in academia report stress in the management of dual roles of home and work as well as survival in a male-dominated academic scene. Balancing discrimination and inequality seems to be a cross-cutting theme when it comes to women's struggles in higher education (Fazal *et al.*, 2019). Balancing home and work fronts and the need for additional support from families in successfully managing careers have also been explored in the study by Amsaveni & Punitha (2019). This dual role and the need for support from the family are critical for women to survive in the competitive education sector. Similarly, Kumar & Deo (2011) also find that women deal with considerably larger amounts of role overload and inter-role distance in higher education than their male counterparts.

DISCUSSION

This review has looked at the causes of job stress and dissatisfaction amongst women faculty members in Indian higher education sector through the lens of feminist literature. The feminist constructs of discrimination, gender inequality, patriarchy and stereotyping have been considered for this review. The study finds that women speak about all of these constructs through their experiences in the sector. One major construct that has been explored is that of patriarchal norms and expectations by society that hinder women in higher education. This includes the 'double burden' or the 'dual role' played by women in their work and domestic lives. This dual role causes additional stress to women since the management of child-rearing and home management responsibilities, coupled with a competitive and often unsupportive work environment, leave women susceptible to additional stress. Women, specifically in the STEM fields have mentioned that they face male domination in the workplace and experience a sense of isolation. Further, studies have found that women also do not feel a sense of accomplishment in exerting authority over men and becoming leaders in higher education. This is a further confirmation of the patriarchal expectation of women to remain docile and not be authoritative. Women have spoken about a sense of isolation in leadership positions and about the need for social relationships to provide a sense of meaning.

When it comes to gender inequality, women speak about the concept of the 'glass ceiling' which is an unseen barrier that women often have to face in higher education. Another study emphasised the feeling of 'powerlessness' faced by women when there is a lack of recognition is given to them for their work (Singh, 2014). Role conflict and personal inadequacy have also been mentioned by women academicians as conditions leading to increased stress along with the lack of resources to do their job. Studies also suggest that male faculty members have indicated a larger amount of stress when it comes to pay and benefits while women have shown a heavy stress when it comes to the management of their dual roles at the work and the home front. This seems to mirror the social expectations of the male and female faculty members. The male faculty members indicate stress when it comes to provide for the family and playing the role of the breadwinner while the women seem to experience stress if they are unable to perform their expected care roles. This furthers the patriarchal expectations set for men and women and also stereotypes their roles. Thelwall *et al.* (2019) also find that for every 2.8 male first authors in

India, there is only one female first author. While India is the fifth largest research generator in the world, gender inequality is promising in the field and is visible in the number of female first authors (Thelwall *et al.*, 2019).

Several studies have reported that increased family support has a better chance of providing work-life balance as well as better job satisfaction amongst female faculty members (Pattusamy & Jacob, 2017). Thus, family support and job stress seem to be in a cyclic conundrum with poor family support leading to chances of work dissatisfaction and increased job stress leading to reduced work-life balance. Supportive organisational policies and the freedom to determine their work schedules have shown a direct increase in organisational commitment amongst women faculty members (Tabbodi, 2009). Similar findings have been made in studies conducted by researchers in the Sri Lankan context where freedom at the workplace, ability to use their full potential at work, and knowledge of the job are reported to have a significant impact on the satisfaction of employees in Sri Lankan universities (Dias *et al.*, 2018). These seem to indicate that proactive organisational policies, family support, and a reasonable degree of personal independence lead to a reduction in job stress and an increase in job satisfaction.

Another important aspect explored in this review is the phenomenon of imposter syndrome that multiple women in higher education seem to indicate. Though not specifically mentioned, women do not seem willing to negotiate for better salaries, dissatisfied with the basic amenities available to them, and wanting to exert authority within their workplaces. There is a further need to explore this aspect of women's experience in higher education. This review, as per its objective, thus finds that feminist constructs such as adhering to patriarchal expectations in the management of dual roles by women and gender stereotyping in the available roles and leadership causes job stress amongst women in higher education. The review also finds that unequal practices, the presence of the glass ceiling and a lack of support are proven to be major contributors to job stress among women in higher education. The review, thus finds that the constructs of feminist theory still hold relevance to Indian women and that this review can specifically identify the studies that highlight the same.

Conclusion & Implications

The studies included in the review reveal that women face patriarchal norms and expectations in the field of higher education in India today. They are governed by social and self-expectations which are a product of their socialisation since birth. Women often live with imposter

syndrome and find it difficult to assert themselves, even in situations of inequality. Though feminist literature has been used to understand these, there is a need to further understand the specific issues faced by women in sustaining themselves in the higher education sector. From leading a complete academic career to rising within the ranks and reaching higher positions of leadership and authority, women's paths, struggles and successes need to be understood further.

The above review was conducted to understand the factors that contribute to the job stress of women in the higher education sector in India through the lens of feminist theory. The review has looked at the primary studies that have delved into the specific experiences of women in the higher education sector in India. Experiences of female faculty members in the higher education sector have been explored and a specific focus has been laid on the factors that cause job stress and dissatisfaction. From the double burden to the pressure to fulfill social expectations and to the glass ceiling, women have expressed a range of issues that are specific to their journey as female academicians in the higher education sector in India. These issues are congruent with the feminist theory used for the review and the objective of identifying stress factors of women in higher education achieved.

This study has aimed to use a literature review as a tool to understand the issues faced by academics and specifically women in the higher education sector. There is also a need to understand the specific strategies used by women in higher education to enable them to lead satisfying careers, reaching senior positions and making their mark felt. The coping mechanisms, support systems and specific strategies used by women in higher education need to be further researched. These research gaps, in terms of specific strategies and solutions that women have adopted to be able to succeed in higher education, will enable practitioners and researchers alike to better the issue of women in the higher education sector.

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