

## **Stressors Barricading the Women Researchers**

**\*Dr. T. S. Santhi**

**\*\*Dr. M. Jaya**

\*Director, Asan Institute of Management, Chennai.

\*\*Associate Professor and Head, Dept. of Commerce, Asan Memorial College of Arts and Science, Chennai.

### **Abstract**

The social status and economic outlook of a woman in India has gone sea changes over the past four decades. The women of today are placed in a position to combat both the home front and the career tensions simultaneously. When the working women are at cross roads to balance their work and family life with lot of difficulties, the pursuance of the research adds fuel to the existing furnace. This study is conducted to identify, analyse and rank the various stress causing elements of women researchers working in Self financing colleges in Chennai. The perception of the women researchers are analysed with the Likert's five point scale and ranked based on the mean score.

The analysis reveals that the family and institution ranks on the top stress contributor for a women academician while undergoing research. Facilities for Research, Guidance from guide and colleagues cooperation are identified as the hindering factors for the respondents. Finance and other factors being internal are under their control to a greater extent. Hence the study concludes that each women researcher should understand the herculean nature of the research task which they scheduled to undertake and sketch strategies for each stress factor well in advance to scale up new heights in their research career. The policy makers should chalk down appropriate polices keeping in mind the peculiar nature of the stress environment of the women researcher in higher educational institutions. This will facilitate them to complete their research work successfully.

Keywords: Stressors, Women Researchers, Ph.D., Higher education

### **Introduction**

The social status and economic outlook of a woman in India has gone sea changes over the past four decades. The women of today are placed in a position to combat both the home front and the career tensions simultaneously. It is easier for womenfolk to reach upto the level of secondary education; Of course a significant percentage of them enter into the undergraduate level. When it comes to the post graduation level there is a drastic decrease in the numbers. There is a miniscule percentage only when it comes to the research level. Thanks to the authorities for making the doctorate in philosophy (Ph.D.) as mandatory for teaching at the higher educational institutions. This situation makes the newcomers and the existing employees to enrol for Ph.D. to enter into and sustain in their profession.

Though there is a considerable increase in the number of people registered for Ph.D., the numbers of people successfully complete their research is significantly lesser. More particularly, the womenfolk as victims of various stress causing factors, find it difficult to complete their research work and they outnumber the men in dropping out the research work. Hence there is a dire need to identify and analyse the various stress causing elements of women researchers in order to suggest suitable measures to overcome the same.

### **Review of Literature**

Kirsi Pyh"alt" et. al. (2012) are of the opinion that Ph. D. education is a complex matter. The authors explores the problems that Finnish doctoral candidates face during their doctoral studies as well as students' well-being in relation to their studying engagement. On analysing 669 doctoral students from the Faculties of Arts, Medicine, and Behavioural Sciences, it was found that the varied problems reported were related to general working processes, domain-

specific expertise, supervision, the scholarly community, and resources. Doctoral students' well-being and study engagement showed a clear relationship. The study suggests to have more effective means to foster students' ability to overcome problems encountered during their Ph. D. studies.

Muhammad Zafar Iqbal (2012) made an attempt to identify the problems of PhD research scholars in the public universities of Punjab, Pakistan. In their qualitative study, a sample of 50 Ph.D. scholars were taken for study and interviewed. The study reveals that PhD scholars face diversified problems related to financial support, hostel facility, research knowledge, weak verbal and written English communication, research competencies of supervisors, inadequate advisor-advisee meetings, politics of staff, weak communication between supervisor and supervisee, inadequate access to online and IT resources, and provision of the latest books in the libraries. The study suggested that there should be streamlining of submission of synopsis and final thesis and strongly recommends for the improvement of library facilities and online learning resources.

Kiley (2009) highlighted the need for continuous assessment of doctoral students study and research process to enhance, promote and regulate it in a meaningful, goal-oriented, and constructively aligned way. The author stressed the need for an ideal learning environment for a good interaction with their supervisors and peers.

Nevada (2009) analyses the problems of research scholars in three different views namely problems related to infrastructure, academic work and administration. The study revealed the existence of problems right from the registration, inadequate infrastructure facilities, lack of guidance, support etc., and the author highlighted the importance of common academic interest in the minds of both the student and research advisor and the compatibility is very much essential.

Vermunt and Verloop (1999) described the need for existence of constructive friction between the learner and the learning environment, where learners are constantly challenged to develop their academic skills and knowledge. It is also mentioned that if the learning environment is not disciplined and sufficient guidance is not given, there exists the destructive friction.

The review of the research indicates that there are studies pertaining to various universities in different parts of the world. But there is a paucity of literature related to the problems of women researchers working in Self Financing Colleges in Chennai city during this time period. This research study is done with a view to address this research gap.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To identify and analyse the factors hindering the women research scholars working in Self financing colleges in Chennai.
- To rank the stressors barricading the respondents and suggest measures to combat them successfully.

### **Data and Methodology**

The study is based on primary data which is collected through a well structured questionnaire. Multi stage random sampling method is applied in this analysis. The self financing colleges in Chennai city is the first stage of selection of respondents. In the second stage, women faculty members alone are selected and in the third stage only those who are pursuing their Ph.D. research studies are selected. Random sampling is applied in the final stage of sampling. The perceptions are collected through Likert's five point scale on various stress factors while pursuing their research studies.

**Limitations of the Study**

- The study is restricted to women academicians in Chennai city only.
- The full time research scholars, industrial research scholars and male research scholars are not taken into the purview of the current study.
- The perception of the individuals may vary due to the changes in the environmental variables.

**Analysis and Interpretations**

The analysis is bifurcated into two parts. The first section of the analysis examines the perception about the stress factors among the women faculty members. The mean score and standard deviation is calculated to know the nature of the perception of the respondents. The second section ranks the stress factors according to their mean score. The analysis aims to identify the stress creating factors and rank them to facilitate the researcher to understand the stressors and plan strategically to combat them in a successful passion.

**Table No. 1**

**Stress Factors and its Constituent Elements**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Stress Factors</b>	<b>Constituent Elements</b>
1.	Family	Spouse, Kids, Timings, Extended Family Support, Motherhood, Childcare, Adult care
2.	Finance	Salary, Fees Expenditure, Research Expenditure, Family Income, Cost of Publications
3.	Institution	Leave Facility, On duty, Work Allotment Incentive, Increment, Designation
4.	Colleagues	Peer Pressure, Support, Sharing of work Motivation
5.	Guide	Non-Availability of seat, Lack of Support in Research, Busy Schedule, Motivation
6.	Facilities for Research	Research Institutions, Research Network Library – Reference, Accessibility Infrastructure, Software Applications
7.	Miscellaneous Factors	Health Issues, Social commitments, Lack of specialised knowledge

Chart No. 1

Women Researchers and Stressors barricading research



Table No. 1

Perception of Respondents on Stress due to Family Factor

Particulars	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents (%)	Total	Mean	S.D.
Highly Stressed	97	40.4	240	4.02	0.46
Stressed	86	35.9			
Moderately Stressed	29	12.1			
Diminutive Stress	25	10.4			
Stress Free	3	1.2			

Source: Primary data

Women have to battle with myriad factors in their life to run their day-to-day life. The toughest engagement of their life is family. The stress created by the family stands as a barricade for every woman to do any additional tasks. When the working women are at cross roads to balance their work and family life with lot of difficulties, the pursuance of the research adds fuel to the existing furnace.

The table 1 clearly brings to the fore that the family contributes for high stress among the respondents with 76.3 per cent. A miniscule percentage is blessed with a stress free environment from the family. Moderate and lower levels of stress are perceived by 22.4 per cent of the respondents. A close scrutiny of the pattern of the perception reveals majority of the women are more concerned about their family while pursuing their career dreams. This is clearly evident by the high mean score of 4.02 with a standard deviation of 0.46. A woman by virtue is a responsible, caring and compassionate human being. The additional loads increase their burden and stress them highly. Hence it is suggested that those who pursue research has to plan well in advance the ways in which they can manage their family during those timings. A mental preparation among the family members like spouse, kids, and extended family members will help them to meet their ends in a satisfied manner.

**Table No. 2**

**Perception of Respondents on Stress due to Finance Factor**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>No. of Respondents (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Highly Stressed	42	17.5	240	3.09	0.58
Stressed	47	19.6			
Moderately Stressed	65	27.1			
Diminutive Stress	62	25.8			
Stress Free	24	10			

Source: Primary data

The volume of expenditure related to research in term of fees and the related are huge and also recurring in nature. Research scholars working in private institutions find it difficult to meet the expenditure with their salary. Other than the Government sector, there is no or meagre support or incentive from the organisation side for the research work. Nevertheless, women faculty members finance stress depends upon the financial background of the family. If the financial background is sound, then this is not stress creating factor for them.

It is evident from the results, that 10 per cent of the researcher states that they are free from stress due to finance factors. Diminutive stress or moderate stress is felt by more than 52 per cent of the respondents as finance stress are less for them due to the spouse and parental finance support. Those of the researcher who is not supported financially or single earning member consider this as a highly stressed factor which is displayed by 17.5 per cent. 19.6 per cent are stressed due to the finance factor. The analysis of percentage score is supported by the moderate mean score of 3.09 with a standard deviation of 0.58. It is suggested that the women researcher has to plan well in advance and save money for doing research and ensure sufficient finance at the time of doing research to alleviate this problem.

**Table No. 3**

**Perception of Respondents on Stress due to Institution Factor**

Particulars	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents (%)	Total	Mean	S.D.
Highly Stressed	76	31.6	240	3.74	0.41
Stressed	83	34.6			
Moderately Stressed	35	14.6			
Diminutive Stress	36	15.0			
Stress Free	10	4.2			

Source: Primary data

Though the University Grants Commission insists on the qualification and research work, many institutions failed to facilitate the candidates. Restrictions in availing leave and on duty facilities, over load of work both academic and administrative causes mental stress to the researchers. Perception analysis indicate that 66 per cent of the respondents are affected by the institutional factors while doing their research work. Around 30 per cent also asserts the stress of institution at varied degrees. Only a miniscule 4 per cent states that institution does not give them stress. The mean score of 3.74 with a standard deviation of 0.41 also substantiates the opinion of the respondents. The perception analysis indicates the sorry state of affair of the higher educational institutions in self financing stream. The policy makers have to chalk down appropriate policies and guidelines to the institutions for encouraging research work in their vicinity.

**Table No. 4**

**Perception of Respondents on Stress due to Colleagues**

Particulars	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents (%)	Total	Mean	S.D.
Highly Stressed	51	21.3	240	3.11	0.48
Stressed	46	19.2			
Moderately Stressed	49	20.4			
Diminutive Stress	67	27.8			
Stress Free	27	11.3			

Source: Primary data

Lack of support from the peer group adds more stress to the researcher. Unwillingness to share the work, failure to motivate, loading with additional responsibilities etc., are present among the colleagues. The response is mixed as in most of the cases, 20 per cent affirms the stress across the various levels. Hence the stress due to colleagues does not fall under rigid structure. Through developing interpersonal relationship in a positive way, the stress generated by the colleagues can be decreased to a greater extent. The low mean score of 3.11 also signifies the same.

**Table No. 5**

**Perception of Respondents on Stress due to Guide**

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>No. of Respondents (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Highly Stressed	58	24.2	240	3.35	0.43
Stressed	66	27.5			
Moderately Stressed	42	17.5			
Diminutive Stress	57	23.7			
Stress Free	17	7.1			

Source: Primary data

Blessed are those who had the opportunity to learn research from a resourceful guide. But it is not bestowed to all the researchers. A direction less guide is the highest stressor for a researcher. A women researcher undergoes untold miseries if the guide misrepresents. Meeting the guide, discussion with the guide, finalising the dissertation, doctoral committee meeting, external and internal examination and viva voce examination are all decided by the guide. Hence a smooth sailing of the research ship depends mainly on the guide. This is evident from the perception analysis also.

More than 50 per cent of the respondents signify that guide gives them stress. 41 per cent are of the opinion that guide gives them moderate and less stress. Hardly 7 per cent asserts that there is no stress from the guide. Hence it can be concluded that stress by guide depends upon the individuals and varied widely according to the nature of the different persons. Hence it is suggested that the research candidate should get more information about the guide through their senior researchers to carry out their research in a stress free environment.



**Table No. 6**

**Perception of Respondents on Stress due to Facilities**

Particulars	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents (%)	Total	Mean	S.D.
Highly Stressed	63	26.3	240	3.46	0.45
Stressed	69	28.7			
Moderately Stressed	48	20.0			
Diminutive Stress	46	19.2			
Stress Free	14	5.8			

Source: Primary data

The facilities for carrying out the research work are Research Institutions, Research Network, and Library for reference purpose, accessibility to various sources of literature like books, magazines, journals, published and unpublished dissertations, and infrastructure and software applications. The respondents gave a mixed response. Depending upon the nature of the institution, the accessibility varies. Those of the respondents who have access to the facilities opine that they are not affected by this factor which is witnessed by their response. The poor facilities and access denial to many research facilities adds to the woes of the researcher is also evident by 45 per cent of respondents. Even though they consider this as one of the important factor but not the main factor which is disclosed by the low mean score of 3.46. But this stress can be eradicated neatly if the researcher develops a good network and access the modern libraries by taking efforts. Hence this facilities stressor can be tackled in a better way if the respondents systematically plan and spend money for the access.

**Table No. 7**

**Perception of Respondents on Stress due to Miscellaneous Factors**

Particulars	No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents (%)	Total	Mean	S.D.
Highly Stressed	33	13.8	240	2.96	0.63
Stressed	47	19.6			
Moderately Stressed	65	27.1			
Diminutive Stress	72	30.0			
Stress Free	23	09.5			

Source: Primary data



Health related issues are very common among the women researchers. Not attending the health issues, unable to compromise with the social commitments due to family pressure causes more stress. 33 per cent of respondents are under the clutches of these factors and stressed while 27 per cent felt a moderate stress by this factor. Around 40 per cent are not pressurised or face a minimal disturbance. Social Commitment and health issues are manageable with proper care and consistent efforts. Though it is considered as one of the stress factor, it is not a leading factor is evident by the low mean score of 2.96.

**Table No. 8**

**Ranking of Stress Factors**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Stress Factors</b>	<b>Mean Value</b>	<b>Ranks</b>
1.	Family	4.02	1
2.	Institution	3.74	2
3.	Facilities for Research	3.46	3
4.	Guide	3.35	4
5.	Colleagues	3.11	5
6.	Finance	3.09	6
7.	Miscellaneous Factors	2.96	7

Source: Primary data

Table 8 exhibits the ranking of various stress factors of women faculties during the course of their higher education based on the mean score. It is interesting to note that family stands on the top with rank one, which indicates the real position of the womenfolk. They already travel in two horses namely family and occupation; the afflictions are heightened when they join for higher studies. Hence it should be noted by the women faculty members and they should plan properly to reduce this stress through support systems in various ways.

The second stress causing factors based on mean score is institution. It is not easy for a woman to get permission to register for their higher studies, even if they get they are not facilitated, supported or motivated by the institution. Instead their stress is increased by the addition of the workload in the already long list of scheduled tasks. Those who aspire for higher studies should be backed up by the institution which will facilitate more number of women in the higher echelons. The research facilities and the beacon light from the guide will help a researcher to travel in a smooth way in the path of research. But the absence of the facilities and guidance will make the researcher blank and desperate. Cooperation of Colleagues in this deserted time is a boon which may not be blessed to all. Sometimes the peer pressure makes them to break.

Finance and miscellaneous factors stands at the bottom of the list indicating that it falls under the controllable stressors. Women faculties are capable of managing finance and miscellaneous factors in a better way as it is an internal factor which may be controlled unlike the uncontrollable external factors. In this backdrop, it is recommended to the policymakers to consider the unique problems of women researchers working as faculty members and facilitate them the needed external factors to make them successful. Each women researcher should understand the herculean nature of the research task which they scheduled to do and plan for each stress factor well in advance to scale up new heights in their research career.

## Conclusion

The women of today are placed in a position to combat both the home front and the career tensions simultaneously. Though there is a considerable increase in the number of people registered for Ph.D., the numbers of people successfully complete their research is significantly lesser. More particularly, the womenfolk as victims of various stress causing factors, find it difficult to complete their research work and they outnumber the men in dropping out the research work. This study is conducted with the primary motive of identifying and analysing the various stress causing elements of women researchers working in Self financing colleges in Chennai. The perception of the selected stress factors based on the review of literature are analysed individually with the aid of percentage, mean score and standard deviation in the first stage. In the next stage, stress creators are ranked based on the mean score and the possible backdrop behind this ranking are examined. The family and institution ranks on the top stress contributor for a women academician while undergoing research. Facilities for Research, Guidance from guide and colleagues cooperation are identified as the hindering factors for the respondents. Finance and other factors being internal are under their control to a greater extent. Hence the study concludes that each women researcher should understand the herculean nature of the research task which they scheduled to undertake and sketch strategies for each stress factor well in advance to scale up new heights in their research career. The policy makers should chalk down appropriate polices keeping in mind the peculiar nature of the stress environment of the women researcher in higher education institutions. This will facilitate them to complete their research work successfully.

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