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Role conflict among working women in IT Sector

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Abstract: 'Role conflict', in the context of the present study, is conceptualized as mutually competing expectancies and demands that confront the working women as a result of the pervasive nature of women's family and domestic roles. Work and family role conflicts have been welktocumented by several researchers (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971, Gray, 1983, Valdez & Barbara, 1987). Marriage and parenthood appear to be incompatible with a career for women and are seen as conflict arousing. Working women experience greater inter role conflict and overload than either men or non-working women (Kapur, 1974). Although the theory of role accumulation .asserts that such conflict and overload may be reduced by the rewards of multiple roles, there are convincing evidences that working women do face tension due to their dual role (Uma Shankar Jha; Arati Mehta & Latika Menon, 1998).

Keywords: women, sexual harassment, workplace, role conflict.

Introduction

Work-life conflict occurs when the cumulative demands of work and non-work roles are incompatible in some respect so that participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in the other role (Duxbury and Higgins, 2008). According to Edwards and Rothbard (2000); and Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), work-family conflict is a form of work-life conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respects. Work-family conflict is conceptually bi-directional. There can be family-to-work conflict, which occurs when experiences in the family (for example, the presence of young children, primary responsibility for children, elder care responsibilities, interpersonal conflict within the family unit, and unsupportive family members) interfere with work life (Frone et al, 1996). There can also be work-to-family conflict, which occurs when experiences at work (such as extensive, irregular, or inflexible work hours; extensive travel, and unsupportive supervisors or organizations) interfere with family life. Although these two types of interference are strongly correlated, research has found that work roles are more likely to interfere with family roles than vice versa (Mokomane, 2009). In this study, the term "work-family conflict" will be used to point to general conflict between work and family where the directions of conflict (family-to-work/work-to-family) are not separated. The work-family conflict is prevalent today mainly due to the increased participation of women in the labour market.

Virtualy everyone would agree that doctors and nurses are health care workers. However, even here there may be controversy. Do we include among our doctors those who practice chiropractics and homeopathy? Do we include nursing aides and orderlies when we talk about nurses? When it comes to other jobs created by the developments in technology and in the division of labour, there is even less consensus. Increasingly, many of these more controversial jobs are described as ancilary. The Romanow Report on the Future of Health Care in Canada, for example, makes a distinction between those who provide direct care and those who are engaged in ancilary services. While not offering a clear definition of ancil ary services, the Report does describe them as services "such as food preparation, cleaning and maintenance". Clerical workers and laundry workers would also seem to fit in with this understanding of ancilary, given that these workers too do not provide 'direct' care. But the lines between the two kinds of work remain blurred. For instance, some of those who provide homemaking services do food preparation and cleaning but

also may provide some direct care. At the same time, personal care providers who work in homes and hospitals do cleaning and food preparation, fitting them into both categories as well.

Well, without going all out to accuse men of gross misconduct and abuse of position, women too can be perpetrators of sexual harassment. Amazingly, when sexual harassment allegation is made by a woman, we easily discard it as a mere claim to seek public sympathy or dismissed it as a cynical ploy to hurt the reputation of the alleged perpetrator. It should be investigated as it might contain some grains of truth. Sexual harassment is so pervasive that, in student girls are pressured by some lecturers/teachers for sex as a quid pro quo in our universities/colleges, some medical doctors are constantly harassing young nurses and even patients, some pastors harassing women who go for prayers and deliverance, women traders suffer in the hands of customs/revenue officials. Everyone seems to be at it. It's so disgusting to see some 'potbelly' politicians and government officials old enough to be grandfathers of some of these young women, subject them to horrifying sexual assaults, exploitation and harassment. Sexual harassment is so endemic in our society.

Discrimination and harassment against women are not only appalling but against the law. Our women suffer disparaging and lewd comments, groping, pestering, psychological and emotional abuse and exposure to explicit sexual contents [soft and hardcore porn] at workplace. Many women suffer from lack of promotions, some underpaid, and some lose positions after taking time off to deliver. These are serious problems in sex discrimination laws and employment laws alone cannot bring a substantial change. We need Government's intervention to create a conducive, welcome and accepted work environment. We also need to change our mindset and sexual attitudes towards women at work. Women have the right to dignity and respect in their workplaces and in their daily lives. It's time for women to stand up against the sexist culture that normalises the sexual objectification of women and the gender discrimination that have gripped our society.

Literature Review

The major sources of data on woman abuse in IT sector have not included world majority women including immigrant, native, lesbians and older women. Many surveys were done by telephone or mail out documents, both of which excluded poor women without telephones or adequate levels of literacy. Native women on reservations were excluded due to geography or inaccessibility. This lack of attention created inconsistencies in research and research that generalizes abuse across cultures often does not mention those who are marginalized.

In addition, much of the literature makes non-dominant groups homogeneous. Ethnic minorities or world majority peoples are lumped together including aboriginal peoples. In fact, like other ethnic minorities, American and Canadian are heterogeneous. Assumptions as to whether a culture is matrilineal/matrilocal or patrilineal/patrilocal is also not dealt with adequately in the literature. Many cultures place a high value on community responsibility and inter-dependence rather than individualism and independence as seen by radical feminist approaches.

It is important to note here that words used in this literature review may need some explanation to further explain and to attempt to avoid bias. The word "traditional" may be seen as representing traditional cultures and therefore presents bias. It would seem appropriate therefore to define tradition as a social custom passed down from one generation to another through the process of socialization. Traditions represent the beliefs, values and ways of thinking of a social group.

"Western feminist discourse runs the risk of assuming the image of the 'average third world woman'. This 'average third world woman' leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.) This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexuality, and the freedom to make their own decisions...This mode defines women primarily in term of their object status.

Feminist theories which examine these cultural practices as 'feudal residues' or labelled 'traditional,' also portray third world women as politically immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of Western feminism. These theories need to be continually challenged."

Circumstances occurred with the Abused Woman

In the early stages of abuse, a woman will project a positive image of her partner to herself and others. Often others feel uncomfortable challenging her denial or validating her experience of abuse. Eventually her sense of self and subjectivity are destroyed and the more she adapts the more she loses her unique self.

The impact of spousal intermittent emotional (italics and words mine)support in an abusive relationship and the woman's perception that the relationship is working indicates that abused women may offer benign explanations for her partner's negative actions and her propensity to depress.

The shame and guilt experienced by the victim results in passivity and a sense of helplessness. Depression becomes normalized due to its duration. Some women find eating as a form of comfort.

Power and Anxiety

Due to socialization patterns, girls often repress or deny their own aggression or assertiveness and the need to be independent and powerful are projected onto men. Being powerful seems unfeminine and women fear acting powerfully may alienate them from traditional women and men. Even acting out one's own self interest is experienced by women as being selfish or aggressive. The anxiety between power and passivity can prove highly destructive when coupled with emotional abuse. Anxiety can be explained plausibly as anticipated unfavourable appraisal of one's current activity by someone whose opinion is significant. The dichotomy intrinsic in this situation is extreme when there is tension between loving a person and at the same time feeling hostile towards him.

Emotional Exhaustion

As the abuse escalates, the woman finds that she begins to experience psychic numbing, fragmentation of thoughts, and estrangement from her own body. (Loring, 1997) The emotional exhaustion experienced by the victim is brought on by a cycle of debility, dependency and dread. As the oppression and fear continues and perhaps escalates, the woman may come to feel fatigued, passive, and unable to act, unable to think concretely, and has poor memory.

Harassment of Women in IT Companies in India

A survey by a non-government organisation has claimed that nearly 88 per cent of the female workforce in Indian Information Technology and business process outsourcing and knowledge process outsourcing (BPO/KPO) companies reported having suffered some form of workplace sexual harassment during the course of their work.

Close to 50 per cent women had been subjected to abusive language, physical contact or been sought sexual favours from, it reveals.

The “Workplace sexual harassment survey,” carried out by the Centre for Transforming India, a non-profit organisation in the IT and BPO/KPO industries, has brought out some startling revelations about the status of implementation of policies to prevent such harassment.

As many as 47 per cent employees did not know where to report, while 91 per cent did not report for fear of being victimised.

The survey, covering 600 female employees working in IT and BPO industries across all the major IT destinations of India, revealed that there exist poor awareness levels among female employees on the issue and a majority of female employees continue with their ordeal for fear of professional victimisation. Another major finding was that more than 82 per cent of the incidents which could be classified as sexual incidents occurred outside the boundaries of the office and in nearly 72 per cent of the incidents the perpetrator was a superior.

Workplace sexual harassment has been emerging as a critical challenge for female employees working across industries, especially in the service sector. While the manufacturing industry is largely regulated in terms of working environment, there is no framework for reference in the service industry.

Further, the service industry faces a challenge of working 24x7 which entails working at odd hours for the female employees and also other professional and personal challenges.

Seventy-seven per cent of all respondents said details of sexual harassment policies were not part of their hiring process.

Conclusions

Women in our study reported the experience of a range of behaviors - while leading forms of harassment were verbal or psychological, disturbing numbers of women reported such harassment as unwanted touch, and sexual gestures and exhibitionism. Experiences of sexual harassment reflected, by and large, power imbalances that make younger women and those in subordinate positions particularly vulnerable. Incidents of sexual harassment were most often perpetrated by people in authority, such as senior or consultant doctors and even patients and their families, who were perceived to have the power to influence women's job security in the institution. Nurses and other doctors were likely to be the most vulnerable category although even hospital attendants and non-medical staff reported harassment from colleagues and senior or consultant doctors.

Despite the number of women who had reported harassment, few women took formal action and complained to their supervisors or to the hospital management. Actions taken in these cases were, by and large, indirect and rarely involved confronting the perpetrator or taking action to dismiss him.

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