

# A comparative study on stress levels among working women and housewives with reference to the state of Kerala

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## Abstract

Women play a pivotal role in the decision making process of organisations and within the family. Indian culture bestows on women the role of caretaker of the family. Women are increasingly moving out of their homes and into the work environment. A greater number of women are also entering the workforce of restricted industries. Thus women play the dual role of housewives and working women. A comparative study on the stress levels of women in this dual role of housewife and working woman becomes significant. The study explores the stresses faced by women in society. The result indicates that the financial position of the family makes an impact on the stress levels among both housewives and working women.

**Key words:** *Stress, working women, housewives.*

## Introduction

A housewife's main duties are managing the family, caring for and educating her children, cooking and storing food, buying goods, cleaning and maintaining the home, sewing clothes for the family, etc. It is ironical that a woman employed within the home is referred to as a housewife, and outside the home, as a working woman. In both situations, the woman is working but how the woman is referred to, is based on the working place. The duty of the housewife is to take care of the day-to-day chores within the home. A woman who earns salary, wages, or other income through employment, outside the home, is termed as a working woman. With globalization and improvement in education, the literacy rate among women is increasing; this has resulted in more women taking up employment. In India, with women increasingly taking on jobs, the concept of the man being 'head of the family' is now changing. Working within and outside the home are the two phases of a woman's life. Balancing work and family life has become a major issue for women. Dealing with family issues as well as work issues has resulted in women dealing with an increasing amount of stress. This research study attempts to understand the stress among women as a result of dealing with this dual role.

## Literature Review

The concept of stress was introduced in life science by Selye Hans in 1936. Stress was defined as any external event or internal drive which threatens to upset the organic equilibrium (Selye Hans, 1956). Stress was defined as causing a threat to the quality of work life as well as physical and psychological well being (Cox, 1978). Stress is determined as generalised, patterned unconscious mobilization of the body's natural ability (Yahaya et al., 2009). Stress is a consequence of or a general response to an action or situation that places special physical or psychological demands, or both, on a person (Hogan, 1991). Job stress is "a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and is characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning" (Beehr and Newman, 1978).

Job-related stress factors are adverse working conditions such as excessive noise, extreme temperature or overcrowding (Mcgrath, 1978), role ambiguities, conflict, overload and under load (Arcold et al, 1986). Explored stress management techniques used by working women are sleep and relaxation, exercise, time management, diet and yoga (Upamany 1997). The research study has reported that supportive work and family policy, effective management, communication, health insurance coverage for mental illness and chemical dependence, and fixed scheduling of work hours were effective in reducing job burnout (Lawless, 1991). Work and family are two important parts of a person's life and both are closely related (Ford et al., 2007). Since an increasing number of women are entering the work force and pursuing careers (Sevim, 2006), they have to

balance the competing demands of both workplace and family life (Bickasiz, 2009). Working women are working for longer hours and taking more work at home (Dawn et al, 1999). This situation results in a greater amount of stress for working women.

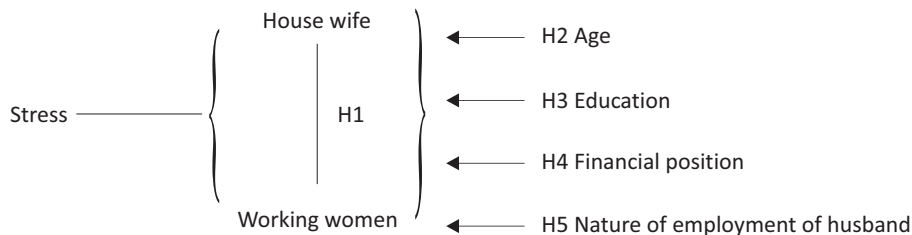
## Objective and methodology of the study

The main objective of the study, which is descriptive in nature, is to identify and compare the level of stress experienced by housewives and working women in the state of Kerala. The study also explores the relationship of demographic factors such as age, education, financial position and employment status of the husband on the level of stress experienced by housewives and working women in the state of Kerala. The targeted population consists of housewives and working women in the state of Kerala. The respondents were from Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Kozhikode district. Data was collected from 180 respondents, of which 90 respondents were housewives and 90 were working women. Probability sampling method was used to collect data from each district. General role stress scale (GRSS) is used in this study. It is a self-administered questionnaire with a respondent rate of 12 items on a 5-point scale. GRSS is highly related to psychometrically established ORS and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of General role stress scale is .733 over 12 items.

## Hypotheses of the study

- H1- There is a significant difference in the stress levels of working women and housewives.
- H2- There is a significant relationship between age and stress levels of housewives and working women.
- H3- There is a significant relationship between education and stress levels of housewives and working women.
- H4- There is a significant relationship between financial position and stress levels of housewives and working women.
- H5- There is a significant relationship between nature of employment of husband and stress levels of housewives and working women.

## Model of study



The model gives an idea about the basic factors leading to stress among women. The stress level comparisons give an idea about how the stress levels vary among working and non-working women.

## Limitations of the study

1. The study is limited to working women and housewives in Kerala state only.
2. The respondents were reluctant to give information due to their busy schedule and socio-economic background.

## Findings and Discussion

### Demographic profile

Ninety working women and ninety housewives - thirty each from Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Kozhikode - participated in the study. Working women with SSLC (14.4%), plus two (17.80%), graduation (34.4%), post graduation (33.3%) and housewives with SSLC (40%), plus two (24.4%), graduation (26.7%), post graduation (8.9%) participated in the study. 8.9% of working women belonged to the upper middle class, 85.6% to the middle class and 5.6% to the lower middle class. 8.9% of the housewives belonged to the upper middle class, 15.6% to the middle class and 84.4% to the lower middle class. Where employment status of the husband is concerned, in the case of working women, 34.4% were working in the government sector and 45.6% in the private sector. 17.8% were self-employed and 2.2% were unemployed. With respect to husbands of housewives, 7.8% worked in the government sector, 45.6% in the private sector and 46.7% were self-employed (Table No: 1).

## Demographics

Table No: 1

S.N.	District	Working women		Housewives	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1	Thiruvananthapuram	30	33.3	30	33.3
2	Ernakulam	30	33.3	30	33.3
3	Kozhikode	30	33.3	30	33.3
<b>Total</b>		<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>
S.N.	Education				
1	SSLC	13	14.4	36	40.0
2	Plus two	16	17.8	22	24.4
3	Degree	31	34.4	24	26.7
4	Post graduation	30	33.3	8	8.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>
S.N.	Financial Position				
1	Upper middle class	8	8.9	0	0
2	Middle class	77	85.6	14	15.6
3	Lower middle class	5	5.6	76	84.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>
S.N.	Employment status of Husband				
1	Government	31	34.4	7	7.8
2	Private	41	45.6	41	45.6
3	Self employed	16	17.8	42	46.7
4	Unemployed	2	2.2	0	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Primary data from research

A comparative analysis on stress levels among working women and housewives was done. The analysis shows that there is a relationship between stress levels of working women and housewives ( $P < .05$ ). Stress levels of working women with a mean value of 27.1667 (SD, 6.5105) and housewives with a mean value of 24.0889 (SD, 5.6977) clearly brings out that working women in Kerala face more stress when compared to housewives. When compared with various factors of stress, self-role distance is high for working women (6.5667) and lower for housewives (5.6222) with a t value of 3.908 ( $P < .05$ ). Stress arising due to inter-role distance is also significantly high for working women (7.3556) when compared with housewives (4.1556) with a t value of 7.406 ( $P < .05$ ). Regarding role boundedness, the mean value for working women and housewives are 7.3556 and 7.6333 respectively with a t value of .878 ( $P > .05$ ). The mean value with respect to stress arising due to personal adequacy comes to 7.0000 for working women and 6.6778 for housewives with a t value of .969 ( $P > .05$ ) indicating no significant difference in the stress levels. The analysis shows that self-role distance and inter-role distance of working women and housewives have a relationship (Table No. 2).

## Comparative analysis of stress among working women and housewives

Table No: 2

	Working women					Housewives					t value	Sig value
	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Std.dev	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Std.dev		
<b>Total stress</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>2445</b>	<b>27.1667</b>	<b>6.5105</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>2168</b>	<b>24.0889</b>	<b>5.6977</b>	<b>3.877</b>	<b>.000</b>
Self-role distance stress	3	14	591	6.5667	2.0611	3	12	506	5.6222	1.8272	3.908	.000
Inter-role distance stress	3	14	662	7.3556	2.5847	3	9	374	4.1556	1.4681	7.406	.000
Role boundedness stress	3	14	662	7.3556	2.5847	4	15	687	7.6333	2.4285	.878	.383
Personal inadequacy stress	3	12	630	7.0000	2.1305	3	15	601	6.6778	2.5739	.969	.335

Source: Primary data from research

The stress level of housewives was measured at 24.0889 with a mean age of 43. Pearson correlation between stress levels of housewives and age is  $-.032$  and significance value is  $.767$  ( $P > .05$ ). The p-value shows that age and stress don't have a significant relationship. With respect to self-role distance, the mean value is 5.622 and r value is  $-.045$  with a significance value of  $.677$  ( $P > .05$ ) indicating that age and stress due to self–role distance among housewives don't have a significant relationship. The analysis on inter-role distance has a mean value of 4.1556, r value of  $.104$  and significance value of  $.329$  ( $P > .05$ ) establishing a weak relationship. Where role boundedness is concerned, the mean stress is measured at 7.6333, with an r value of  $-.046$  and significance value of  $.665$  ( $P > .05$ ). This shows that age and stress due to role boundedness don't have a significant relationship. The analysis on personal inadequacy of housewives has a mean stress score of 6.6778. Pearson correlation between stress of housewives and age with respect to personal inadequacy is  $-.054$  and significance value is  $.611$  ( $P > .05$ ). The p value shows that age and stress due to personal inadequacy don't have a significant relationship.

The correlation between stress of working women and age has a mean score of 27.1667, Pearson correlation value (r) of  $.150$  and significance value of  $.158$  ( $P > .05$ ). The p value indicates that age and stress of working women don't have a significant relationship. The analysis also clearly indicates the same trend on the factors of stress and age among working women. With respect to self-role distance, the mean value is 6.5667, r value is  $-.071$  and significance value is  $.506$  ( $P > .05$ ). Where inter-role distance is concerned, the mean value is 7.3556, Pearson correlation value is  $-.180$  and significance value is  $.090$  ( $P > .05$ ). The mean value of stress due to role boundedness is 7.3556. Pearson correlation between role boundedness of working women and age is  $-.1800$  and significance value is  $.090$  ( $P > .05$ ) which shows that age and stress due to role boundedness don't have a significant relationship. The analysis shows that the relationship between stress due to personal inadequacy and age is 7.00 with an r value of  $-.177$  and significance value of  $.096$  ( $P > .05$ ) indicating a weak relationship (Table No. 3).

## Analysis of age and stress levels of working women and housewives

Table No: 3

Age x stress	Working women						Housewives					
	Mean		Std. Dev		Pearson coefficient	Sig value	Mean		Std. Dev		Pearson coefficient	Sig value
	Age	Stress	Age	Stress			Age	Stress	Age	Stress		
<b>Total Stress</b>	<b>38.81</b>	<b>27.1667</b>	<b>9.163</b>	<b>6.5105</b>	<b>-.150</b>	<b>.158</b>	<b>42.84</b>	<b>24.0889</b>	<b>8.319</b>	<b>5.6971</b>	<b>-.032</b>	<b>.767</b>
Self-role distance	38.81	6.5667	9.163	2.0611	$-.071$	$.506$	42.84	5.6222	8.319	1.8272	$-.045$	$.677$
Inter-role distance	38.81	7.3556	9.163	2.5847	$-.180$	$.090$	42.84	4.1556	8.319	1.4681	$.104$	$.329$
Role boundedness	38.81	7.3556	9.163	2.5147	$-.180$	$.090$	42.84	7.633	8.319	2.4285	$-.046$	$.665$
Personal inadequacy	38.81	7	9.163	2.1305	$-.177$	$.096$	42.84	6.6778	8.319	2.5739	$-.054$	$.611$

Source: Primary data from research

The ANOVA analysis between education and stress of working women gives an F-value of 1.575 and a significance value of .201 ( $P > .05$ ). The p value shows that education and stress have no significant relationship with respect to working women. Even if the relationship is not statistically significant, the stress levels of working women with a degree as their qualification is high followed by post graduation, plus-two and SSLC. The stress of housewives and educational qualifications is also not significantly related. The ANOVA analysis gives a significance value of .841 ( $P > .05$ ) with an F value of .278 (Table No. 4).

## Analysis between education and stress levels of working women and housewives

Table No: 4

	Working women				F value	Sig Value	Housewives				F value	Sig Value
	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max			Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max		
SSLC	24.3077	3.79440	18	32	1.575	.201	24.2778	5.49083	18	42	.278	.841
Plus two	28.1765	5.82275	21	39			23.1364	6.01027	16	41		
Degree	26.4839	7.07517	17	50			24.5833	6.46675	14	42		
Post graduation	28.5862	6.96685	13	41			24.3750	3.50255	21	32		
<b>Total</b>	<b>27.1667</b>	<b>6.51058</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>50</b>			<b>24.0889</b>	<b>5.69771</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>42</b>		

Source: Primary data from research

The analysis to understand the influence of employment status of the husband and stress levels of working women shows an F-value of .852 and a significance value of .462 ( $P > .05$ ). The p value shows that there no significant relationship between stress levels of working women and employment status of the husband. With respect to housewives, the employment status of the husband and stress levels has an F-value of 1.425 and significance value of .246 ( $P > .05$ ). The P value shows that there is no significant relationship between stress levels of housewives and employment status of the husband even though stress levels are high for housewives whose husbands are self-employed and lower for those whose husbands are in government service (Table No. 5).

## Analysis between employment status of husband with stress levels of working women and housewives.

Table No: 5

	Working women				F value	Sig Value	Housewives				F value	Sig Value
	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max			Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max		
Government	27.1613	7.5148	13	50	.852	.469	23.0000	4.0414	18	29	1.425	.246
Private	27.2195	6.2270	17	41			23.1707	5.6608	14	42		
Self-employed	26.1875	5.2690	19	38			25.1667	5.8805	16	42		
Unemployed	34.0000	1.4142	33	35								
<b>Total</b>	<b>27.1667</b>	<b>6.5105</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>50</b>			<b>24.0889</b>	<b>5.6977</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>42</b>		

Source: Primary data from research

Stress is high for lower middle class working women when compared with upper middle class and middle class working women. ANOVA analysis between financial position of working women and their stress levels has an F-value of 4.008 and significance value of .002 ( $P < .05$ ). The P value indicates that there is a significant relationship between financial position of working women and their stress levels. The ANOVA analysis between stress levels and financial position of housewives also has a significant relationship with an F-value of 3.937 and significance value of .050 ( $P = .05$ ). This shows that there is a significant relationship between financial position of housewives and stress levels among housewives (Table no. 6).

**Table 6: Comparison of financial position and stress between working women and housewives**

	Working women				F value	Sig Value	House wives				F value	Sig Value
	Mean	Std.Dev	Min	Max			Mean	Std.Dev	Min	Max		
Upper middle class	29.00	6.5900	22	39	4.008	.022	21.3571	5.6242	14	35	3.937	.050
Middle class	26.4605	6.3612	13	50			24.5921	5.6028	15	42		
Lower middle class	33.6667	4.8027	26	39								
<b>Total</b>	<b>27.1667</b>	<b>6.5105</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>50</b>			<b>24.0889</b>	<b>5.6977</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>42</b>		

Source: Primary data from research

## Conclusion

The research study examined stress levels among working women and housewives, and the factors leading them to stressful situations. The analysis shows that stress levels are high for working women when compared with housewives, and both of them have a relationship. The stress levels of women (both housewives and working women) and financial position of their family have a relationship. Stress is a part of human life; sometimes it can motivate us and help us to become more productive. Stress will increase our ability to be alert, productive, energised and face challenges and dangerous situations. But too much stress is harmful to us. This stress will create tension, anxiety, fatigue and burnout. In order to avoid stress from negatively impacting our lives, we need to increase knowledge about stress and also use stress management techniques. The study offers insights to working women and housewives to understand the determinants of stress. It will also help organisations and spouses in effective management of women's dual role in work and personal life. This research study can become the base for further studies to be conducted by researchers, academicians and organisations for further understanding of stress levels among women.

### Managerial Implication and potential future work

While women have traditionally been caretakers, they have taken on the additional role of working outside the home to earn a living in order to cope with their financial needs. The study indicates that financial position and stress levels of both working women and housewives are related. Managers in organisations need to give sufficient attention to the salary and incentive structure of women employees for better working of the organisation. In this study, the relationship of basic socio demographic factors with stress levels of working women and housewives have been assessed. Future research can focus on including other socio demographic factors and variations of stress levels in different geographic areas.

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