

Coping Strategies : A Study Among Working Couples

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Abstract

The invention of push Button Technology coupled with the emergence of educational and employment opportunities has led to a sharp increase in the number of women entering into paid employment. The employment of married women outside the home has resulted in these households where both husband and wife work for pay. Although the domains of work and home may be thought of as separate, yet a growing body of literature acknowledges strains associated with the dual earning. A number of scholars have argued that working couples are vulnerable to the problems of work family spill over and conflict. Consequently they adopt certain coping mechanisms to reduce the strain inherent in dual earning life style. Research findings indicate the use of coping strategies to maintain work family balance. Much of the research is confined to west. The present paper is the modest attempt to identify the coping strategies adopted by dual earner couples living in Chandigarh.

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Introduction

One of the major consequences of the varied processes of change operating in the country has been the emancipation of women from their tradition bound ethos. In India a few research studies have focused on the emerging trends of working women. Kapur, (1970); Singh, (1972); Srivastva,(1978); Devi,(1982); Ramu,(1988); Sethi,(1989); Rao,(1990); Rani &Khandelwal, (1992) have acknowledge the entry of women into the paid work. The last one decade of the twentieth century alone has seen a heavy flux of situation with a 40 percent increase in women in paid labour force Dutta & Singh (2003); Nath, (2000). Sachdeva& Malhotra (2005) state that although women in western countries have been a major part of the labour force, but in India it is only recently that such a massive influx of women population has plunged into gainful employment. They are employed in all sectors of the economy, be it the organized or un- organized sector. The traditional breadwinner home maker life style has given way to those families where both husband and wife work for pay, with the expansion of push button technology, service sector, rising cost of living and economic necessity, the society witnessed a dramatic increase in the proportion of women entering the work force.

The rise in the number of working women fueled interest in the area of work family studies. A few studies indicate that women's employment provide a buffer against economic hardships associated with family crisis such as unemployment, illness or family dissolution through death or divorce. While others' view that although many women work for economic reasons, but there are various other socio psycho situational reasons as well. Extensive research examined the antecedents and consequences of women's paid work.

Barnett & Hyde (2001) report that work provides both men and women a buffer for the stress in the home, a network of social relations and opportunities for meaningful engagement and success that are not available to those who are not employed. Some studies have identified the beneficial effects of women's employment Marshal & Barnett, (1993); Ross, (1990). A contrasting body of research indicate that conflicting demands from work and family tug onto their limited resources and time causing stress. Because of the dual responsibilities, dual earner couples & women in particularly are vulnerable to the problems of work family

spillover and conflict Almeida et al; (1999); Greenstein, (1990); White et al, (2007). Most common outcomes of stress for the working women are poor mental and physical health resulting in depression, anxiety, asthma and colitis (Sailaja and Swaminathan, (1992); Srivastava, (1995). Literature review clearly indicates the presence of stress in the life of dual – earner couples. They experience the stress internally as well as from the outside environment Barnett et al (1993);. It becomes evident to investigate the coping methods that the dual earner couples adopt to deal with the stress. Keeping this view in mind it was thought to examine the coping strategies that these couples adopt to maintain work and family balance.

Review of Literature

A number of scholars have suggested that the use of certain role management strategies can alleviate or mediate role strain (Goods,1960; Marks (1977) Pearlin & Schooler, (1978); Skinner,(1980); . Specific coping strategies have been found to reduce stress for dual earner men and women i.e. organization, Compartmentalization, Reapportioning tasks, avoiding disliked responsibilities , delegating responsibilities changing household standards and subordinating career. Epstein, (1971), Holmstrom (1973), Rapoport and Rapoport,(1976), Heckman, et at,(1977); Johnson and Johnson,(1977); Bird and Bird, (1986, 1987), Poloma, (1972), Voydanoff,(1987), Garey ,(1999;) other identified coping strategies include cultivation of friendships with other dual career families, emphasizing favorable aspects of the life style and limiting vocational activities. (Elman and Gilbert, (1984).Guelzow and Bird (1988), Voydanoff, (1987;) Couples may adopt general strategies like resolving the conflict by breaking the problems into smaller units, prioritizing, active listening , continuing to negotiate,

compromising and co-operating both in spirit and in actual behavior Lawe and lawe,(1978); Paden et al (1995); examine the effects of planning, talking cognitive restructuring and limiting in the dual income marriage. Friedman & Greenhaus (2000) focused on behavioral and emotional support between spouses. Relaxation time, Telecommuting, Flexitime, Periodically change start and quitting time have been investigated by Galinsky & Bond (2001); Glass & Riley (1998); Roehling& Moen (2001), Chesley et al,(2003); Roehling et al (2003); Moen & Sweet(2003);

Altucher& Williams (2003); state that many professional men and women in dual career marriages limit their family size or decide not to have children at all. Dual earner couples commonly adopt staggered shifts as an important way to maintain work family balance. Presser (1999); Steffy & Ashbaugh (2005) examined the structural relationship between dual career and planning, spouse support, problem solving effectiveness, inter role conflict.

Mukhopadhyay ,(1996); Sailaja & Swaminathan ,(1992); Srivastava (1995); in their studies have found most common coping strategies as individual based and include expanding their knowledge base by reading, planning and goal setting, actively seeking social support and investing in developing a social support network.

Need of the study.

It becomes evident that dual earner couples continually develop or adopt coping strategies to prevent reduce, avoid or control stress. There is wealth of literature on coping strategies adopted by these couples. Literature reviews clearly indicate that most of the studies conducted have been confined to west. However not much is known about these coping mechanisms in developing societies like India where the roles of men and women are in

transition. In India also, dual earner couples is an emerging trend. There has been a progressive rise in dual earner couples in which both husband and wife work for pay. There is a dire need to examine the strategies that they adopt. The term Dual earning couple has been operationalized that comprises of those married partners who are gainfully employed outside the home. To investigate the practical solutions that these dual earning, use to reduce strains. It becomes essential to explain the meaning of coping. Coping is defined as any effort which functions to minimize or eliminate effective responses to stressful life circumstances. Coping is done to master the conditions, which are perceived to be harmful threatening or challenging. Folkman & Lazarus (1980); Srivastva (2000);

Igodan and New Comb ,(1986); states that efforts to control, reduce or learn to tolerate the threats that lead to strains are known as coping and the strategy adopted for coping with stress is known as coping strategy. It comprises of behavioral, Physical and Psychological efforts made by people to handle stressful events encountered by them to minimize the harmful consequences.

Research Methodology

The present research was conducted at Chandigarh. Being an administrative city it comprises a sizeable population of dual earner couples. A quota sample of 300 respondents comprising 150 husbands and 150 wives from the same families was drawn. These respondents were gainfully employed outside the home in formal sector. For the selection of respondents a snow balling technique was used. A structured interview schedule was prepared for the collection of core data. The mean value and standard deviation was also calculated.

For the purpose of study, seven coping strategies were selected based on the evidence of their existence and effectiveness form past

research reports, as well as the prevailing system. The research focused on strategies useful in dealing with enduring everyday strains. These strategies were planning, communication, withdrawal, cognitive restructuring, limiting responsibilities, confrontation and self – enhancement. Each coping mechanism consisted of varied statements which were measured on five point Likert scale. The respondents were asked, how often each coping item was used to handle work family issues or reduce the stress? A high score indicated that the coping mechanism has been most commonly used.

Objectives of the study

- To examine the strategies that dual earner couples adopt to reduce the stress.
- To look into the ways the dual earner couples strike a balance between the work and the family.

Profile of the respondents

51 percent of the respondents were more than 40 years of age and their average age was 42.64 years. Nearly two third of the respondents were Hindus. In terms of education all the respondents were educated and were working in formal sector, 58 percent of them were living in nuclear families while 42 percent of them found to be living in joint families. The 50 percent of respondents owned a house. A large majority of the respondents i.e. 87.3 percent were working during the day shifts. A considerable proportion of 64.3 percent had been working six days a week while 37.7 percent of the respondents worked & hours a day while 15.7 percent had been working more than 8 hours.

Discussion

Finding of the study

1. Planning

Planning	No.of Respondents	Range of score	Mean	Standard deviation
Husbands	150	7-35	25.34	5.41
Wives	150	7-35	25.51	5.82
Both Husbands & Wives	300	7-35	25.43	5.61

Planning Pervious research labeled this mechanism as organization Paden (1995) planning strategy consisted of seven items i.e. structuring alternative schedule, set some goals, plan a course of action, setting priorities, doing important things first, organizing tasks and time management . Mean score of 25:43 (SD, 5.61, range 7-35) indicates that planning was most often used as a strategy by the dual earner couples to cope up with work family strain. The respondents opined that adhering to a well planned schedule could help them make more efficient use of time. Similar findings have also been reported by Poloma (1972); Lawe & Lawe (1978); Sailaja & Swaminathan ,(1992); Paden et al (1995); Mukhopadhyay,(1996); Haddock et al ,(2001); Marks et al (2001); Steffy & Asbaugh (2005);

2. Communication

Communication	No of Respondents	Range of Score	Mean	Standard Deviation
Husbands	150	6-28	18.29	4.23
Wives	150	6-28	18.60	3.69
Both Husbands & Wives	300	6-28	18.47	3.97

Communication Basically consist of an exchange of information. Usually it is unintentional and it may be unconscious, but there are times that it is subtle and intentional. Communication as a strategy involves seeking support through talking to others who can empathize with ones situation and provide

support to relieve strains. In the present context, communication as a coping mechanism has been measured on seven items, viz, both spouses

discuss problems constructively, go to a friend/ colleague for advice, talk to elders, sit down and mutually discuss, go out for picnic and exchange gifts and compliments etc. as Klemmer & Smith (1975) states that some of the best communication takes place without the use of words at all, but with gestures. Data contained in Table with mean score of 18.47 (SD 3.97 range 6-28) indicates that this strategy was adopted by the dual earner couples at a considerable level. Further probing brings to fore that very few respondents preferred to go to a friend or colleague for advice or consultation though, they did not hesitate to talk to elders. Going out for a picnic, dinner, exchanging gifts/ compliments was not frequently adopted. Respondents preferred direct communication with their spouses rather than to others to meet their

occupational, familial and emotional needs. A considerable majority reported less use of exchanging gifts and compliments in this study too. Rick et al (1990); Srivastav (1995), Paden et al (1995), Friedman & Greenhaus (2000); Clark (2002)

3. Withdrawal

Withdrawal	No. of Respondents	Range of Score	Mean	Standard de***
Husbands	150	5-25	14.10	3.69
Wives	150	5-25	14.69	3.37
Both Husbands & Wives	300	5-25	14.40	3.46

Withdrawal is defined as temporarily avoiding stressful situations and responsibilities to reduce tension. Elman & Gilbert (1984). Withdrawal only provides temporary emotional relief to the person experiencing stress as problems causing strain remain un-attended and are allowed to compound and multiply Srivastav (2006). For the purpose of analysis, withdrawal was measured on five items namely withdrawing from the situation temporarily, accepting the view point of the spouse. Curtailing time with the spouse children, ignoring the issues putting under bid, postponing certain issues. Findings depict that the dual earner couples adopted withdrawal at a lower level. The mean score calculated was 14.40. Respondents admitted that accepting their spouse viewpoint helped them followed by ignoring the issues that result in confrontation between husband and wife. It becomes pertinent to mention that a very small proportion of the respondents reported stopping of normal communication between the spouses.

4. Cognitive Restructuration

Cognitive Restructuration	NO. of Respondents	Range of Score	Mean	Standard De ***
Husbands	150	4-20	12.43	2.89
Wives	150	4-20	12.60	2.98
Both Husbands & Wives	300	4-20	12.54	2.94

Cognitive Restructuration refers to an individual's attempt to redefine stressful, negative situation as neutral or positive experience, Elman & Gilbert (1984).

The process of replacing negative appraisals of stress with more positive ones is called cognitive restructuring. Glanz et al (2002) state that it is a mental process that allow the couples to view demands as a challenge, rather than as threat. The four items assessing the use of cognitive restructuring by the respondents include remembering that I have handled similar problems in the past, reminding myself advantages rather than disadvantages of being dual earner couples, Brainstorming all possible solutions, Day dreaming better times.

Data analysis reveals that cognitive restructuring has been adopted at a very considerable level. The mean score of 12.54 with SD 2.94 indicate limited use of this coping method by the dual earner couples. The respondents tried to review the past decisions about whether they were right. They also tried to scrutinize themselves too closely but denied day dreaming or recalling better times. Research findings of Koball et al (1991); Paden et al (1995); provided similar findings.

5. Limiting Responsibilities

Limiting responsibilities	No of Respondents	Range of Score	Mean	Standard Deviation
Husbands	150	7-34	16.68	5.57
Wives	150	7-34	16.71	5.07
Both Husbands & Wives	300	7-34	16.69	5.32

Limiting Responsibilities Cohen & Bianchi (1999), state that limiting responsibilities implies refusing to accept additional responsibilities in a role, pleading an overload of responsibilities already. In order to have more time available restricting participation in activities, changing work schedules. In the present study seven statements were used to assess the use of limiting responsibilities both at work as well as at home. These were Job sharing, delegating responsibilities, postponing certain, tasks, taking leave on particular days, saying no to some tasks, flextime and telecommuting, working part time.

Data contained in table 5 displays that a very few respondents made use of this coping mechanism. The most probable explanation for the lesser use of this strategy was the reluctance on the part of respondents to use excuses to keep away from familial and occupational assignments. All the respondents were working in formal sector, where they were governed by service rules that do not permit the use of flextime, part time etc. The strategies of structuring alternative schedule, flextime, telecommuting reported by Glass & Riley ,(1998); Garey (1999); Rochling & Moen (2001) and scaling back on work hours suggested by Becker & Moen (1999); Moen & Sweet (2003); did not seem fit in the Indian system.

6. Confrontation

Confrontation	No. of respondents	Score	Mean	SD
Husbands	150	6-30	11.59	3.94
Wives	150	6-30	12.44	4.78
Both Husbands & Wives	300	6-30	12.02	4.39

Confrontation Srivastav (2006); states that confrontation originates from aggression towards others and adversely influence individuals relationship with others. Anger and stress search for outlets, sometimes one cannot express stress, there is an unspoken hostility the other person becomes the scape goat. Confrontation as a coping mechanism to resolve stress though brings short terms benefits but some studies have found that it has a debilitating effect on one's Physical as well as psychological health. The items included in the present research were shouting at children, servant, spouse, elders, subordinates and colleagues etc. The lowest mean score of 12.02 obtained indicates that this strategy was least adopted by the dual earners under study. Results depict the moderate expression of confronting with children. Respondents confirmed denial of confrontation with elders. Wives reported that during stress they become aggressive towards servants / maids. However husbands accepted that under stress they sometimes shout at subordinates and wives.

7. Self – Enhancement

Self – Enhancement	No. of respondents	Score	Mean	SD
Husbands	150	9 -38	20.63	5.69
Wives	150	9-38	21.42	5.99
Both Husbands & Wives	300	9-38	21.03	5.84

Self – Enhancement methods are modern forward looking and multi dimensional in nature as they integrate managing quality of life with self regulatory system. Lawe & Lawe (1978); state that self enhancing endeavors such as yoga, meditation, Jogging, Poetry, Music and art bring inner peace and outer fitness. Self – Enhancement strategies gives people a sense of control over the bodies, plus a feeling of accomplishments. There are many ways one can achieve self renewal but in the present context eight items were selected . These ware doing yoga, meditation, going for a walk, writing poetry, art or music, religious discourse, regular medical checkup, going to club or join kitty parties, visit to a parlor, gym, supplement diet with vitamins and visit to a counselor.

Data analysis reflects that the respondents under study adopted self – enhancement also at a moderate level. The mean score calculated was 21.03. Both the spouses enhanced their self most frequently by going for a regular walk followed by religious discourse. Regular medical checkup and using diet supplements was used often, yoga, meditation and poetry were rarely used because of time constrain, visit to a counselor was denied by a vast majority of the respondents. Respondents confirmed that due to their hectic work schedules they could not adopt all the self -renewal activities on a regular basis.

Implications of the Study

Research finding reveal that all identified coping strategies were used to some

degree by the dual earner couples. Even though most often used strategy was planning. The findings provide empirical evidence of coping strategies adopted by dual earner couples even in India. They accept coping strategies as mediators that help, regulate their demands and expectations and serve as a buffer against the stress and strains that they experience due to their multiple and simultaneous role demands. So for maintaining work family balance, effective time management, effective communication skills, sharing of responsibilities and seeking social support are essential.

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