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Women with Multiple Roles: Perception of Psychological Factors and Marital Satisfaction

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In recent years, with the increased pace of urbanisation and modernisation, Indian women of all social classes have entered professional occupations. While the entry of unmarried women into professional occupations may be relatively less problematic, the case of married working women who have multiple roles to fulfill, is different. For decades, the role of psychological factors in motivating women to aspire to ascendancy into positions of higher status and responsibility has received considerable attention. [1] Research on the subject has, by and large, focussed on the working woman's personality, intelligence, self-concept, sex role, demographic characteristics and job satisfaction. [1]

Despite accumulating evidence [2] that work and family life are interrelated, the available research literature, in the Indian context, is limited [3]. Even, in the area of alienation and locus of control, only a few studies have explored the interaction between these variables [4]. The present study investigates how women perceive selected psychological variables and how their perceptions affect marital satisfaction. Women in both professional and non-professional jobs were studied; the former because they are likely to view work as another primary role along with family responsibilities, and the latter, for purposes of comparison so as to throw further light on the subject. This study is probably the first of its kind that attempts to study the perceptions of women holding highly professional and non-professional women with respect to selected psychological variables and the interaction of these perceptions with marital satisfaction.

Concepts used in the Study

The concepts of alienation, locus of control, job satisfaction and marital satisfaction, used in the study, have been explained briefly in the following paragraphs.

Alienation

Social scientists and psychologists have interpreted the concept of alienation in different ways. Historically, Rousseau [5] was the first to give a sociological dimension to the concept of alienation. Later, Marx [6] defined alienation as a condition in which man, in his every day life denies part of his being in order to survive. According to Marx, the worker was alienated because of the multiple roles he had to play. In social contract theories, an alienated worker was one who gave up or surrendered personal rights, 'liberty', 'power' and 'controls' to the general will of the community or organisation [7]. Such alienation of the worker, however, was viewed as desirable because the long-term gains from a social contract would outweigh the personal loss of rights and liberties.

The psychological aspects of alienation refer to the state of self-alienation and to the awareness of the separateness from one's own inner reality. Hence, alienation is a conscious psychological state of the worker that can be measured empirically by assessing workers' beliefs and attitudes [7]. Seaman [8] is of the opinion that alienation has five components, namely, powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement. In fact, alienation can be understood as a multi-dimensional concept requiring specifications in respect of the alienating conditions on the one hand and the alienated state on the other.

Alienation has been studied in a variety of unskilled and semi-skilled settings, and it has been concluded that the consequent effect of powerlessness is dissatisfaction arising from work organisation and with the work itself [9], [10]. Alienation and security/insecurity examined in relation to two levels of occupational hierarchy has shown that blue-collar workers are highly alienated and insecure as compared to their supervisor's [11]. According to Naik, [12] female employees are more alienated than their male counterparts.

Locus of control

Locus of control or internal-external control of reinforcement is derived from Rother's social learning theory that most behaviours are learned or acquired in a social situation [13]. The scale provides a useful means for measuring individual differences, and is defined as a generalised expectancy that rewards, reinforcements or outcomes in life are controlled either by one's actions (internality) or by other forces (externality). The former (internal scorers) have been observed to report more job satisfaction and less job stress, to perceive more autonomy and control, and enjoy, longer job tenures. [14], [15] There is also

evidence that internal scorers are more capable at highly technological and professional jobs while external scorers are better in unspecialised, routine and clerical positions. [16] Naik [12] has reported a significant relationship between Rother's external score and the general alienation score of bank employees.

Job Satisfaction

Etymologically, job satisfaction is a combination of two words: job and satisfaction. The terms, 'work', 'occupation', 'job', and 'position' are used interchangeably. 'Job' refers to work roles and 'satisfaction' is related to fulfillment of needs. Thus, job satisfaction may be a resultant feeling of satisfaction, which the employee achieves by gaining from the job what he expects from it to satisfy his needs. Job satisfaction thus refers to an individual's complex reactions towards his/ her job [17]. Kapur [3] and Ridley [18] observed that job satisfaction promotes adjustment in marriage while Cleary and McChanic [19] in their study of employed married women and men, and housewives found few differences in satisfaction between marital, parental and employment roles. Although, theoretical work has suggested that a variety of job characteristics impact family life, Hughes and his co-workers [20] observed that the direct relationship between job characteristics and marital tensions and companionship was weak.

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction can be defined as the spouses' satisfaction with their marriages. The focus of most studies has been on predicting marital satisfaction due to social factors [21-23] and psychological factors such as attitudes, job satisfaction, and job characteristics. [2], [24-26] These studies have made practically no attempt to understand the relationship between marital satisfaction and psychological variables like alienation, locus of control and job satisfaction.

The present study then was designed with a view to look at differences in the perception of the three psychological variables explained above namely, alienation, locus of control and job satisfaction, by professional and non-professional women; and to study the relationship between these perceptions and marital satisfaction among these two groups of women.

Methods

The study was conducted in a fast-developing city namely Visakhapatnam in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The sample consisted of 150 women employed in Government offices and hospitals in the city i.e. 75 from each group of women in highly professional and non-professional. The former group included Class I and II officers such as doctors, Readers and Lecturers while the latter, non-professional group, included Class III employees such as clerks and other office employees. A total of 18 women (17 from the professional and one from the non-professional groups) was dropped, as complete data about them was not available. Thus, for the final analysis, there were 58 women in professional and 74 in non-professional jobs. The sample was studied randomly to obtain an even distribution of women from all organisations.

Alienation was assessed by administering the alienation scale of Ray [27]. The scale consisted of 20 questions with 'yes' or 'no' responses, on the basis of which scores were given. The locus of control of the respondents was assessed by a social reaction inventory [13] consisting of 29 paired choices in which the respondent selects one of the two-paired items. Internal statements are paired with external statements and the maximum possible score is 23 (most external) and the minimum zero (most internal). For convergent validity, over 50 percent of the internal-external locus of control investigations reported in the literature have employed the Rathoe scale [28].

An eleven-item scale was used to measure job satisfaction [29], scoring on a five-point rating scale ranging from 'poorly satisfied' to 'totally satisfied'. A woman's satisfaction with her marriage was assessed by a scale constructed with the help of the scales devised by Kapur [3] and Spanier. [29] The scale consisted of 25 questions, each with five response categories ranging from 'most favourable to 'least favourable'.

Results and Discussion

The scores obtained by employing the alienation, locus of control, job satisfaction and marital satisfaction scales were statistically treated to obtain the mean, standard deviation, and Pearsonian and multiple regression coefficients. Table 1 presents the test values for alienation, locus of control and job satisfaction among women in highly professional and non-professional jobs.

Table 1 : Scores of psychological variables of women in professional and non-professional jobs

Psychological variables	Category of work	Mean	S.D.	t-value
Alienation	Professional	12.52	2.34	4.13*
	Non-professional	9.22	3.77	
Locus of control	Professional	9.26	4.55	3.02*
	a) Internal	6.29	5.01	
	b) External	2.18	7.37	
	Non-professional	2.24	5.79	
Job satisfaction	Professional	35.76	5.67	
	Non-professional	34.27	8.19	

* = P < 0.01

There was a significant difference between the t-values of the alienation scores of the two groups of women; the scores increased with an increase in the job level suggesting that highly professional women are more alienated than their non-professional counterparts. In other words, a higher occupational level appears to create a greater feeling of isolation, powerlessness and normlessness; the rapid social change resulting from educated middle class women entering into gainful employment) gives rise to a feeling of moral void helplessness and loneliness resulting in a high degree of alienation among white collar workers.

Sinha [17] has reported that officers are more alienated than clerks whereas subordinate staff seems to be least alienated. Naik [12] observed female employees to exhibit greater alienation than their male counterparts. The mean alienation scores for both the groups of women studied by us were higher because of their lower job involvement and a configuration that included parenthood more predominantly as compared to employment. Buddhapriya and Khandelwal [30] have noted that many basically intelligent women unfortunately act empty-headed in order to fulfill the expectations of their male superiors. In addition, the women in our study were working in Government organisations where sincere and efficient job performance is not usually rewarded proportionately due to various formalities and restrictions.

With respect to the locus of control, the results showed a significant relationship between occupational level and internal control, that is, as the women moved higher on the occupational ladder, they tended to become internal-oriented (t-value = 3.02; significant at 0.01 percent level). Women in higher professions were inclined to believe that their actions can affect the course of their lives whereas non-professional women lacked such internal control.

An examination of external scores and occupational level did not show any significant difference between the two groups. As a group, working women showed a low level of external control. In other words, they did not believe that their lives are determined by chance or luck or any other external systems. Again, the relationship between job satisfaction and occupational level was not significantly different between the two groups of women though the mean scores indicated a slightly higher job satisfaction in the case of women in the high profession category.

The correlation between marital satisfaction scores and the scores of psychological variables is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 : Correlation and multiple regression co-efficients between marital satisfaction and psychological variables

Variables	Professional women	Non-professional women	Total Sample	Multiple regression coefficient
Social alienation	.379**	.076	.117	1.69
Internal control	.095	.095	.119	.495
External control	.013	.122	.062	.246
Job satisfaction	.130	.108	.021	.029

** P < 0.01

Social alienation, as evident from the results, showed a strong relationship with marital satisfaction; the correlation coefficient of 'professional' women was significant at a 0.01 percent level. This was the only single dominating and

significant variable in this group of women all the other variables hardly showed any relationship with marital satisfaction among the two groups.

These findings lead us to believe that though the women are in professional occupations, they perceive their jobs as secondary to the family, which takes the primary role. That is, although these women had taken up jobs, and perceived them as providing financial resources, they failed to achieve a high sense of involvement and self-expression, though they were loyal and sincere in their work.

Locus of control (both internal and external) did not seem to be related in any way with marital satisfaction in both the groups. Although the correlation coefficients for internal control remained relatively constant for both groups, the external scores showed a slight difference. However, if the total sample is considered, internality of the women rather than external control was observed to be more closely associated with marital satisfaction. This leads to the conclusion that women who believe that their lives are shaped mainly by their own actions will achieve more marital harmony than those who believe that their lives are controlled by outside agents.

Unfortunately, the signs of the correlation coefficients were not adequate for determining the magnitude of the relationship between job satisfaction and marital satisfaction among the two groups. In contrast to popular speculation, the present study showed a negligible association between job satisfaction and marital satisfaction of working women as compared to the other variables studied. The variables were further examined by using multiple regression analysis in order to obtain greater validity of the measures employed. Both correlation coefficients and multiple regression coefficients exhibited the same magnitude of association between marital satisfaction and the variables that were examined. These findings thus, on the whole, substantiate empirically that social alienation is linked with the marital satisfaction of working women in general and specifically with that of women in highly professional jobs.

Summary and Conclusion

Recent empirical and conceptual work in family studies has highlighted the need to consider the role of psychological factors in motivating women to aspire for higher level occupations. The need today is not just for measures of each psychological factor but the linkages of these factors with marital or family life. The present study therefore investigated how working women perceive

alienation, locus of control and job satisfaction (psychological variables) and whether these perceptions affected marital satisfaction.

The findings indicated a substantial and significant increase in alienation and internal control scores of professional women but not much of a difference between job satisfaction scores and external control in both the professional and non-professional groups of working women. The correlation coefficient scores indicated that in women with highly professional jobs, social alienation and marital satisfaction go side by side. Other factors such as internal-external control and job satisfaction however, bore a negligible association with marital satisfaction in both groups of women. The coefficients of multiple regression also showed the same magnitude of association between the variables studied and marital satisfaction. These analyses suggest that social alienation is one of the strongest psychological variables, which promotes marital satisfaction of working women in general, but has a specific influence on the marital satisfaction of women in highly professional occupations.

The most significant limitation of the present study was the highly specific sample that was utilised; female professionals and non-professionals with children. The results reported here may be true for female employees only. In order to understand women's motivation for pursuing work in professional and non-professional occupations, future research will need to explore more psychological variables among women of heterogeneous occupations. It will also be necessary to include men for comparison and to understand more clearly the role of psychological factors and the interaction of these factors in their lives.

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