

# Psychological and physical well-being in working women

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## Abstract

**Background:** Many studies have established the adverse effects of job strain on the health status of women. In this study, we will try to compare the health status in working and nonworking women using standard Short Form (SF)-36 questionnaire. The SF-36 is a widely used questionnaire for measuring physical and mental health status. These are multidimensional measures of self-reported health status. At the end of this scientific study, working women will have some understanding about their physical and psychological well-being.

**Objective:** To study the health status in working women and nonworking women using SF-36 questionnaire.

**Materials and Methods:** SF-36 (1992 Medical Outcomes Trust) questionnaire was administered to collect data. The following 8 scales were measured and expressed as scores ranging from 0 to 100: physical functioning, role limitations because of physical health problems, role limitations because of emotional health problems, energy and fatigue, emotional well-being, social functioning, freedom from bodily pain, and general health.

**Result:** Working women showed less scores of emotional health when compared with nonworking women ( $p = 0.16$ ), which was statistically not significant. Overall, the general health scale was considerably less in working women when compared with nonworking women ( $p = 0.54$ ).

**Conclusion:** Working women revealed significantly less scores of mental health when compared with nonworking women.

**KEY WORDS:** SF-36 questionnaire, working women, health status

## Introduction

The global impact of stress-related conditions is expected to rise over this decade such that, by 2020, depression and anxiety disorders, including stress-related health conditions, will be second only to ischemic heart disease in prevalence.<sup>[1]</sup> Although stress can occur at home or after trauma, the most ubiquitous and studied form of stress is work-related. In this

context, stress has been defined as an emotional experience associated with nervousness, tension, and strain.<sup>[2,3]</sup>

The impact of job strain on health functioning and sense of well-being have been reported in only a few recent studies. There was study on the cumulative effects of job strain on health status in a large cohort of women in the United States, with repeated measures of job characteristics. They hypothesized that job strain not only predicts poor health status but also accelerates functional decline over time.<sup>[4-6]</sup>

Our aim is to study the health status in working women and nonworking women using sf-36 questionnaire.

## Materials and Methods

Study population consisted of women ( $N = 69$ ) from Mangalore, Karnataka, India. Among them 57 were working women and 12 were nonworking women. RAND 36-Item Health Survey (SF-36) questionnaire was filled after taking informed consent from them.

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The RAND 36-Item Health Survey (version 1.0) contains eight scales: physical functioning, bodily pain, role limitations because of physical health problems, role limitations because of personal or emotional problems, emotional well-being, social functioning, energy/fatigue, and general health perceptions. It also includes a single item that provides an indication of perceived change in health. These 36 items, presented here, are identical to the Medical Outcomes Study (MOS) SF-36 described in Ware and Sherbourne.<sup>[7]</sup> They were adapted from longer instruments completed by patients participating in the MOS, an observational study of variation in physician practice styles and patient outcomes in different systems of health-care delivery.<sup>[7-9]</sup>

### Scoring Rules for the RAND 36-Item Health Survey (Version 1.0)

Scoring the RAND SF-36 is a two-step process. First, precoded numeric values are recoded per the scoring key given in Table 1. Note that all items are scored so that a high score defines a more favorable health state. In addition, each item is scored on a 0 to 100 range so that the lowest and highest possible scores are set at 0 and 100, respectively. Scores represent the percentage of total possible score achieved. In step 2, items in the same scale are averaged together to create the eight scale scores. Table 2 lists the items averaged together to create each scale. Items that are left blank (missing data) are not taken into account when calculating the scale scores. Hence, scale scores represent the average for all items in the scale that the respondent answered.

### The RAND 36-Item Health Survey Standard Form (Version 1.0)

Mean and standard deviation for scores of individuals were determined and compared between the two groups. Statistical analysis was done by  $\chi^2$ -test and Student (unpaired) *t*-test. The values were considered statistically significant when *p* values were less than 0.05.

## Result

O 68 women there were 56 working women and 12 housewives. The difference in health scales was not statistically

significant in the two groups. The physical functioning and role limitations because of physical health problems and bodily pain scores are slightly less in housewives when compared with working women [Table 3].

## Discussion

None of the values are statistically significant in any scores of the two groups. The physical functioning and role limitations because of physical health problems and bodily pain scores are slightly less in housewives when compared with working women. Earlier studies have shown that women in the highest third of job demands and the lowest third of job control (reference group, "high-strain" job) revealed the worst health status, whereas those in jobs with the highest control and lowest demands ("low-strain" job) showed the best health status. When analyses were stratified by level of work-related social support, women reporting lower social support revealed lower scores in all the SF36 subscales when compared with women reporting higher social support.

## Conclusion

In working places, both men and women have to compete without any extra benefits given to women. Hence, women need to be given some benefits such as flexibility in timings while coming for jobs. If the work pressure reduces, then automatically their psychological well-being is taken care of. Further studies need to be conducted to establish the relation of stress in women with the jobs.

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**Table 1:** Averaging items to form scales

Scale	Number of items	Average the following items
Physical functioning	10	3-12
Role limitations because of physical health	4	13-16
Role limitations because of emotional problems	3	17-19
Energy/fatigue	4	23, 27, 29, 31
Emotional well-being	5	24-26, 28, 30
Social functioning	2	20, 32
Pain	2	21, 22
General health	5	1, 33-36

**Table 2:** Item groupings and abbreviated item content for the RAND 36-Item Health Survey

Health scale	Item	Abbreviated item content
Physical functioning (PF)	PF1	Vigorous activities, such as running, lifting heavy objects, and strenuous sports
	PF2	Moderate activities, such as moving a table, vacuuming, and bowling
	PF3	Lifting or carrying groceries
	PF4	Climbing several flights of stairs
	PF5	Climbing one flight of stairs
	PF6	Bending, kneeling, and stooping
	PF7	Walking more than a kilometer
	PF8	Walking half a kilometer
	PF9	Walking 100 m
	PF10	Bathing or dressing yourself
Role limitations because of emotional problems (RE)	RE1	Cut down the amount of time spent on work or other activities
	RE2	Accomplished less than would like
	RE3	Did not do work or other activities as carefully as usual
(Energy/fatigue) vitality (VT)	VT1	Feel full of life
	VT2	Have a lot of energy
	VT3	Feel worn out
	VT4	Feel tired
Mental health or emotional health (MH)	MH1	Been a very nervous person
	MH2	Felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up
	MH3	Felt calm and peaceful
	MH4	Felt down
	MH5	Been a happy person
Social functioning (SF)	SF1	Extent health problems interfered with normal social activities
	SF2	Frequent health problems interfered with social activities
Bodily pain (BP)	BP1	Intensity of bodily pain
	BP2	Extent pain interfered with normal work
General health (GH)	GH1	Is your health: excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor
	GH2	I seem to get sick a little easier than other people
	GH3	I am as healthy as anybody I know
	GH4	I expect my health to get worse
	GH5	My health is excellent

**Table 3:** Comparison of scores as measured by different scales

Scales	Group 1 (working women), N = 56 (mean ± SD)	Group 2 (nonworking women), N = 12 (mean ± SD)	p
1. Physical functioning	75.73 ± 23.46	64.58 ± 29.31	0.15*
2. Role limitations because of physical health problems	74.61 ± 31.67	70.83 ± 33.47	0.71
3. Role limitations because of emotional health problems	77.87 ± 31.5	77.58 ± 24.37	0.97
4. Energy/fatigue	60.04 ± 15.35	65.41 ± 12.98	0.26
5. Emotional health	71.58 ± 18.95	76.75 ± 13.72	0.32
6. Social functioning	77.68 ± 20.64	86.5 ± 12.6	0.16
7. Bodily pain	73.58 ± 20.59	70.16 ± 10.89	0.57
8. General health	64.26 ± 20.77	69.16 ± 14.55	0.54

Higher scores indicate better health status.

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