

Indian Women at Workplace: Coping with “Role boundedness” through “Hardiness”

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ABSTRACT: Stress has become a matter of concern in the present post-globalization world which has brought in enormous changes in the ways organizations work, the professionals' work-style and pattern, extended working hours, meeting deadlines, added roles and responsibilities, role overload and ambiguities; and cultural and technological changes. Researchers have demonstrated a gender variation with respect to coping with role stressors or stressful life events. Golpelwar [1] finds that Indian women professionals suffer from a role stress typically termed as “Role boundedness”, a result of wanting “to be everything for everybody”. The present descriptive research work, probably one of the first on the issue, highlights the importance of “hardiness” - a stress resilient personality disposition [2] - in coping with “role boundedness” and shows a relationship between role boundedness and hardiness in women professionals indicative of the protective mechanism of hardiness in coping with role boundedness.

Keywords: Role stress, Role boundedness, Kobasa, Hardiness, Indian women corporate professionals

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1. INTRODUCTION

Stress generally refers to a state of mental and emotional tension or strain resulting out of adverse and stressful life events. The 21st century has been popularly known as the “age of stress”. Stress has also been dubbed the “Health Epidemic of the 21st Century” by the World Health Organization and is estimated to cost American businesses up to \$300 billion a year [3]. The effect of stress on our emotional and physical health can be devastating. This might also affect the productivity and performance of professionals at workplace. Therefore, it is more necessary to control stress among professionals.

Controlling stress would be possible if one knows the root cause of it. Stress can be triggered by many sources. As the sources are varied in nature, so are the types of stresses. One such type of stress is “role stress” which is experienced by a person due to the conflicts arising out of meeting the needs and expectations of the various role senders around him/her. Earlier researches have recognized variety of role stressors in the corporate sector that individuals experience in their lives, to name a few - role overload, personal inadequacy, self-role distance and inter role distance [4]. Udai Pareek [5] identified a significant role stress typical to the Indian context called “role boundedness”. It is a conflict that a person experiences between his/her tendency to live as a person and as a role occupant. For example, in traditional Indian homes, boys may experience a conflict between their role as sons and their role

as individuals.

Women, in India particularly, feel more role bounded as our culture inculcates such huge expectations in them. Indian women experience more stressful situations as compared to men because the major cause of role stress among working women in India is the societal pressure to conform to the traditional norms inculcated in our culture. The clash between the normatively prescribed roles for women and those demanded by the modern work environment has resulted in role conflicts of various kinds amongst all working women [1]. But hardiness [2], a stress resilient personality disposition, can help withstand role boundedness and its negative outcomes to a great extent. The current descriptive research identifies the protective mechanism of hardiness in reducing the adverse effects of role stress, i.e., role boundedness in a sample of 234 chosen Indian corporate professionals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of researches clearly suggest that employees in an organization face various role stressors. One such recent research was conducted on a sample of 220 faculty members drawn randomly from different public and private universities with more than one year of experience in the same department of the university. The result showed that the faculty members of private and public universities were suffering with organizational role stress and had low level of organizational commitments. The dominant stressors were role erosion; inter role distance, role isolation, self-role distance and personal inadequacy [6].

The analysis of the data investigated by Satyanarayana [7] for stressors among executives and supervisors revealed that role erosion, personal inadequacy, resource inadequacy, and role stagnation were identified as dominant contributors of role stress in executives and supervisors. Kumar [8] studied the relationship between role-stress, role-satisfaction and role efficacy using a sample of lower and middle level executives

from different functional areas of an oil company. The major findings indicated that marketing executives experienced maximum role stress in comparison to finance, production and personnel executives. Personnel executives obtained lowest scores on total role stress.

A gender-based study conducted by Patwardhan, et al. [9] investigated the intensity of organizational role stress among 45 women managers of five-star luxury hotels in Indian hospitality industry. The findings indicated that role stress was experienced at moderate to high levels among women managers in comparison to male managers and the major stressors were inter role distance, role erosion, role stagnation and role overload.

From the above literature, we can infer that organizational role stress is one of the major causes of stress among professionals. There might also be some intrinsic factors such as fear and uncertainty about the future, an individual's attitudes and perceptions about the world, unrealistic expectations, or any major life change which can also be stressful. Prolonged stress that arises out of these internal and external factors can lead to severe physical and psychological problems in individuals.

Both work and non-work life stressors contribute to the development of physical illnesses [10, 11]. However, it is also true that each individual responds differently to stress, and many remain healthy even under high stress conditions [12].

While most researchers were engaged in the study of the causes and effects of stress and roles stress, there were a few who were more concerned about preventing individuals from the negative consequences of stress. This group of researchers diverted the focus from pathological and psychological effects of stress to factors of resiliency in individuals which can help them cope with high levels of stress.

During this time, Dr Suzanne C. Kobasa introduced the concept of hardiness in 1979, a stress resilient personality disposition which moderates the relationship between stressful life events and illness. According to Kobasa, individuals high in hardiness are hypothesized to be better able to withstand the negative effects of life stressors and, consequently, are less likely to become ill than individuals low in hardiness [2, 13].

Kobasa characterizes hardiness as being constituted of three main components – Commitment, Control and Challenge. Commitment is the ability to find meaning and fulfilment during a stressful encounter [2, 14]. Control is the belief that one influences the outcome of a stressful encounter no matter how many obstacles block one's path [2, 14]. Challenge is the ability to view change as a normal part of life instead of a threatening encounter [2, 14].

Dr Salvatore R. Maddi, a pioneer in the research of hardiness states "conceptually, all three Cs of hardy attitudes need to be strong, in order to provide the existential courage and motivation to do the hard work of turning stresses to advantage; that hard work involves hardy coping, hardy social interaction, and hardy self-care [16].

A few researches done on hardiness with respect to role stress usually indicate a positive relationship of hardiness with various organizational role stresses that any professional would come across during their tenure. One such study was done by Syed and Syed [17] which investigated the influence of organizational role stress and personality hardiness on university teachers' stress burnout. About 300 teachers were randomly selected from one of the central universities in India and divided equally into three groups based on the university ranks (lecturer, reader and professor). The results indicated that all the three groups were not found significantly different on hardiness but the dimensions of hardiness like commitment, control and challenge were found to be positively correlated with stress burnout and its dimensions. This means as and when the teachers experienced burnout in stress, they were found to have used hardy coping styles to overcome its adverse effects.

There is hardly any study related to the General Role Stress of Uday Pareek - role boundedness, to be specific - with hardiness. That is why we do not have any literature to support our findings. The current research is probably one of the first studies which attempts to show a relationship between role boundedness and hardiness among Indian women corporate professionals using the GRS scale of Uday Pareek [5].

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research problem of this study was to investigate the protective mechanism of hardiness on reducing the adverse effects of role boundedness on female professionals from a sample of corporate professionals belonging to IT and banking sectors. The main objective of the study therefore was to assess the importance of hardiness in coping with role boundedness of selected Indian women corporate professionals. The other important objectives of the study were as follows:

- To assess whether female professionals are more role bounded than male professionals.
- To assess whether female professionals are harder than their male counterparts.
- To measure the impact of role boundedness on hardiness of women employees.

To achieve the research objectives, this study followed the descriptive design as the focus was to learn the relationship between the two major variables: Role boundedness and Hardiness. The sample for this study was drawn through purposive sampling technique as it included professionals from two corporate sectors, mainly banking and IT sectors belonging to two different cities – Bengaluru and Bhubaneswar in India. The respondents were given a predetermined set of questions that were related to the specific domain and related aspects of the research. The composite questionnaire was e-mailed to 320 professionals who were purposively selected (160 professionals from each sector – banking and IT sectors) including both men and women. The final sample obtained (after removing incomplete and incorrect questionnaires) was 234 professionals (120 from

banking sector and 114 from IT). The city-wise distribution had 123 professionals belonging to Bengaluru and 111 belonging to Bhubaneswar city. Based on gender, the total sample consisted of 51 per cent males and about 49 per cent females (Table 1).

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	120	51.3	51.3	51.3
	Female	114	48.7	48.7	100.0
	Total	234	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: Frequency of gender.

The data for the present study was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Measurement of role stress was done using the standardized scale of General Role Stress (GRS) which was developed and tested by Udai Pareek [5]. This scale gives a general index of an individual's role stress, focusing on his role space stresses. The main stresses in this category are self-role distance (SRD), inter-role distance (IRD), role boundedness (RB) and personal inadequacy (PIn). SRD is

essentially a conflict arising out of a mismatch between the person and his/her job. IRD is a conflict between organizational and non-organisational roles. PIn arises when the role occupant feels that he/she does not have the necessary skills and training for effectively performing the functions expected from his/her role. This is bound to happen when the organizations do not impart periodic training to enable the professionals to cope with the fast changes both within and outside the organization. Finally, RB arises when a person may experience a conflict between his/her tendency to live as a person and as a role occupant. Our focus here would be more on the results related to Role boundedness, in particular.

Paul T Bartone's [18] Dispositional Resilience Scale-15 (DRS-15) was used to measure the hardiness and its various components. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.0 has been used to analyse the data of this study.

4. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

To meet the first objective of assessing whether women professionals are more role bounded than their male counterparts, the descriptive statistics and ANOVA test was used. The Table No. 2 below shows the mean, standard deviation and significance values of role stressors in relation to gender.

Stress / Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
SRD	Male	120	2.5333	.85602	.288	.592
	Female	114	2.5936	.86077		
	Total	234	2.5627	.85702		
IRD	Male	120	2.2028	.89013	.002	.968
	Female	114	2.2076	.95770		
	Total	234	2.2051	.92168		
RB	Male	120	2.4250	.86962	32.377	.000
	Female	114	3.0906	.91988		
	Total	234	2.7493	.95278		
PIn	Male	120	2.3500	1.01239	.023	.879
	Female	114	2.3304	.95369		
	Total	234	2.3405	.98217		

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and ANOVA – role stress and gender.

From the above table 2, we can infer that the sample mean for the male professionals for the four role stresses - SRD, IRD, RB and PIn - is 2.53, 2.20, 2.42 and 2.35 respectively and SD for the same is 0.85, 0.89, 0.86 and 1.01 respectively. The sample mean for the female professionals for the four role stresses - SRD, IRD, RB and PIn - is 2.59, 2.20, 3.09 and 2.33 respectively with SD for the same is 0.86, 0.95, 0.91 and 0.95 respectively.

Except PIn, the mean is higher for three role stresses: mainly, SRD, IRD and RB for female professionals than their male counterparts. In general, working women experience a greater variety of role stresses than working men in India. In a study done by Nowack [19] on professional employees attending management training workshops from a variety of

organizations in the Los Angeles area, female professionals reported significantly more work and life stress than males. Yet another study by Dale Alan Snow [20] showed that females reported higher stressor experiences, higher anxiety than males. Similar findings were obtained from Cronkite and Moos's study [21] where women were more responsive to stressors than men.

The ANOVA result shows no significant difference of SRD, IRD and PIN in relation to gender. However, there is a significant relationship between RB and gender at $p < 0.01$, $p = 0.000$. From the descriptive table, it was clear that the mean is higher for SRD, IRD and RB for female professionals than male professionals. This explains that females are more stressed out than males and it is more so due to role

boundedness than any other role stresses. The socialized values of being duty bound towards every additional role that an individual has to perform in the Indian tradition contributes to high levels of Role Boundedness [22]. Role boundedness is seen more in females in India because they are bounded by the expectations arising out of various roles that they play as daughter-in-law, mother, wife as well as a working woman. While fulfilling these expectations from the various role senders, they keep sacrificing their own interests, desires and values.

Although there have been conflicting outcomes in the literature examining the relation between gender and stress, several authors have agreed that women find themselves in stressful circumstances more often than men which support our findings [23, 24]. Another study also found that females experienced more work-related stress in general [25]. Women are also more likely to report home and family life events as stressful [26] and are exposed to more daily stress associated with their routine role functioning [27].

To meet the second objective of assessing whether women professionals are harder than male professionals and better able to cope than their male counterparts, the descriptive statistics and ANOVA test was used. The table No. 3 below shows the mean, standard deviation and significance values of hardiness and its components in relation to gender.

From the below table 3, the sample descriptive shows that there were 120 males and 114 female professionals. The sample mean for total hardiness of male professionals is 3.51

and SD is 0.70, whereas the mean for total hardiness for female professionals is 4.23 and SD is 0.51. The mean hardiness total score is greater than 3 for both males and females which suggest that the participants of this study were, on an average, relatively high on hardiness. The mean for the dimension of Commitment, Control and Challenge for male professionals is 3.55, 2.87 and 3.64 respectively and SD is 0.69, 1.06 and 0.82 respectively. The sample mean for the female professionals for the dimension of Commitment, Control and Challenge is 4.19, 3.64 and 3.66 respectively and SD is 0.71, 0.95 and 0.85 respectively.

It is evident from the above result table that the mean is higher for females for all the dimensions of hardiness in comparison to their male counterparts. The mean of overall hardiness for female professionals is also higher in contrast to male professionals. This explains that hardiness is observed more in working women than men in this sample. It might be due to the different coping strategies both hardy men and women employ in stress management. Perceiving or appraising a particular stressor as stressful is also a reason why we find differences in hardiness across gender. For example, a particular stressor might be appraised as stressful for a woman but not for a man. One of the first few studies on the effects of gender on hardiness was done by Barbara Tiller Sanford [28], who found that high hardy males had higher self-appraisals and reflected more self-confidence than high hardy females who showed comparatively lower self-appraisals and self-confidence.

Hardiness, 3Cs, Stress / Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Commitment	Male	120	3.5546	.69316	49.373	.000
	Female	114	4.1992	.71009		
	Total	234	3.8686	.77084		
Control	Male	120	2.8773	1.06858	33.499	.000
	Female	114	3.6471	.95971		
	Total	234	3.2523	1.08562		
Challenge	Male	120	3.6417	.82521	.052	.820
	Female	114	3.6667	.85099		
	Total	234	3.6538	.83616		
Hardiness	Male	120	3.5105	.70744	79.900	.000
	Female	114	4.2361	.51377		
	Total	234	3.8640	.71815		

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and ANOVA – hardiness, its 3Cs with gender.

We also see a significant relationship between gender and hardiness for Commitment and Control as well as for overall hardiness at $p < 0.01$, where $p = 0.000$ for both the dimensions and overall hardiness. However, there is no significant relationship or variance found for “Challenge” in relation to gender. This suggests that gender differences have an effect on hardiness. This significant difference is because of higher mean for all the dimensions of hardiness as well as overall hardiness for females as compared to males.

Relevant literature so far has sought for the probable reasons to account for the gender differences in hardiness. As mentioned earlier, one reason might be the differences in the coping strategies both men and women employ [29, 30]. Another reason might be the differences between men and women in appraising a particular stressor as stressful [28, 31]. Moreover, Klag and Bradley’s study has explained gender differences even when no differences in coping were present [30]. Thus, we can say that hardy female professionals in this sample used more beneficial cognitive and behavioral coping

strategies when compared to hardy male professionals, while encountering stressful situations.

To meet the third objective of measuring the impact of role boundedness on hardiness among women corporate

professionals, we used the regression analysis test. The tables - table 4, table 5 below shows the regression model summary, its significance, and collinearity diagnostics respectively.

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.516	.267	.250	.62175	16.570	.000
Predictors: (Constant), Gender, IRD, RB, Pin, SRD						
Dependent Variable: Hardiness						

Table 4: Regression model summary.

The Table 4 above shows the R Value as 0.516. Since the R value is greater than 0.5, the relationship between dependent and independent variable is strong. Which means that the

predictors (Gender, IRD, RB, Pin and SRD) do have an impact on the dependent variable (hardiness).

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.748	.182		15.123	.000		
	SRD	-.071	.068	-.085	-1.045	.297	.488	2.049
	IRD	-.012	.063	-.015	-.183	.855	.492	2.034
	RB	.016	.049	.021	.324	.746	.746	1.340
	Pin	.089	.054	.121	1.629	.105	.582	1.719
	Gender	.721	.088	.503	8.215	.000	.858	1.165
a. Dependent Variable: Hardiness								

Table 5: Coefficients/collinearity statistics.

From the above Table 5, it is evident that gender is a significant predictor of hardiness, $\beta = 0.721$, $t(8.215)$, at $p < 0.01$, where $p = 0.000$. The VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) assesses how much variance of an estimated regression coefficient increases if the predictors are correlated. A VIF between 5 and 10 indicates high correlation that may show high multicollinearity among the predictors. Our result shows correlations less than 5 which confirms that the predictors are not having multicollinearity effect. This reaffirms that role boundedness in women professionals is a clear predictor of developing hardy coping style to combat stress.

5. CONCLUSION

The results indicate that the mean is higher for a greater number of stresses like SRD, IRD and RB (except Pin) for female professionals. There is also a significant relationship between RB and gender at $p < 0.01$, where $p = 0.000$. This fulfils the first objective of this study where we find that women professionals are more role bounded.

It was also evident that the mean is higher for females for all the dimensions of hardiness in comparison to their male counterparts. The mean of overall hardiness for female professionals is also higher in contrast to male professionals.

We see a significant relationship between gender and hardiness for Commitment, Control as well as for overall hardiness at $p < 0.01$, $p = 0.000$. However, there is no significant variance found for Challenge in relation to gender. This fulfils the second objective of the study that females are harder than their male counterparts.

The regression analysis confirms that role boundedness predicts hardiness among women corporate professionals, thus fulfilling the third objective of the study. These results indicate the importance of hardiness as a protective mechanism in withstanding role boundedness in women corporate professionals, thereby fulfilling the main objective of this study. The findings are in alignment with several studies that support the protective resiliency effect of hardiness in coping with role stressors [13, 32-34].

I would like to mention here that this is perhaps one of the first studies that established a relationship between hardiness, its components and GRS scale (General Role Stressors – SRD, IRD, RB and PI) in Indian women corporate professionals. However, as the above findings are based on a sample which focuses only on selected Indian women corporate professionals, the results cannot be generalized across all samples and occupational groups. Further research can be

undertaken to study the effect of hardiness on Indian professionals, focussing on women professionals only, considering the well-defined societal multiple role-play as well as a well-established cultural background they are normally brought up with.

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