CASE STUDIES

The study is about stress among four different professional women namely doctors, engineers, lawyers and nurses. From among the 264 respondents two each from each profession were selected for a more descriptive case study.

Basically, a case study is an in depth study of a particular situation rather than a sweeping statistical survey. It is a method used to narrow down a very broad field of research into one easily researchable topic.

Case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). Case studies have been used in varied investigations, particularly in sociological studies.

Data collection and analysis methods may hide some details; case study on the other hand, is designed to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants.

Case study method was used to collect data because it emphasizes the total situation or combination of factors, the description of the process or consequences of events in which behavior occurs. This method enables the study of individual behavior in the total setting and the analysis and comparison of cases. This study makes possible a careful observation of a person's situation and also know the relationship of various factors. It enables an in-depth understanding of the social unit under study in all its aspects.
Case study method help us gain knowledge about the peculiarities and characteristics of individuals and group, the various factors that influence and determine the behavior of an individual. By this method it is possible to classify the individuals into different strata or groups on the basis of their Characteristics. This method enables the scope of analysis to be both quantitative and qualitative. Lazarsfeld, (1970), sort to unite the two methods by clarifying the unique functions of each and their potential support for one another leading to proper systematization. It enables valid generalizations and hence this method was thought to be ideal for the present study. The limitations of the Case Study were less as compared to the advantages of this method, hence this method was selected for the present study.

6.1 Case I - Work Interfering with Family

Suchitra (name changed) is working as a nurse in a government hospital in Trichy. She was very fond of the service rendered to the society and at a very young age decided firmly that she should take nursing as her career. Her mother was in the same profession and maybe the stories that she carried from the hospital supported her decision. As children, she and her brother missed their mom especially during exam times and other important occasions. Though their father was around, at times it used to be just her and her brother. But still the element of service hung largely over her head and she preferred to take up this profession.

Though her love for this profession has not reduced even a little, she says that she has to accept that this profession is stressful.
The greatest problem that she faces is working in night shifts. She adds that though she very well knew that it is something that this profession demands, and that night shifts are inevitable, still she feels that it is something that she is unable to compromise. Working night shifts has affected her personally and professionally. Personally, it becomes very difficult to manage her home and work in a balanced manner because at home she has to attend to her 2 yr old baby and responsibilities in the hospital are equally pressurizing. She feels guilty since she does not get time to spend with her family. She sometimes feels miserable that she is unable to spend quality time with her young one. The fear of future and how she is going to manage the coming years, when her child needs her importantly, haunts her all the time, she says.

Though she had a full time maid, she had some problems with her and now she does not have any help at home to manage the chores as well as the child. Her husband, who works as a Manager in a marketing company, is also unable to spend time with the child because of his extended work timings.

Night shifts disrupt the whole schedule due to which she encounters a lot of health problems such as fatigue, headaches and a lot of stress. There is often a spillover of tensions from home to work and work to home. Professionally, her health problems decreased her concentration at work. In the bargain she tends to forget things for which I am reprimanded by the doctors and the matron. She is in tears when she says that she is unable to give hundred percent to her job as well as her young one.

She is ridden with the guilt of not spending time with her young one, not enjoying the growth milestones that he crosses and not being a complete
mother to him. She is trying to figure a way out to spend adequate time with her child and to reorganize things. She says that she cannot give up her work since it is the outcome of her struggle from childhood and her family is her future. In a confused tone, she confesses that she just wants time to fly….

6.2 Case II - Sexual harassment at workplace

Mrs. Cynthia (name Changed) works as a senior nurse in the Government Hospital, Trichy. She is 42 years old and has quite an experience of nursing behind her.

She loves her job and has a very understanding family. Her husband has been the pillar of strength of her life, and though there have been many ups and downs in her personal life and career, she has been able to handle them with the great support from her husband. She is a proud mother of two teenage sons who adore her as well. Her parents and her in-laws have been of great support to her. Her family life has been one which others envy.

But the same cannot be said about her professional life. Though she has worked in a couple of Primary health centres and has had transfers, the present posting has caused much worry. The recent episode that happened in her life has taken away all the mental strength and jolted her.

Consoling patients by talking to them sweetly and holding their hands is very much a part of the nurses’ job. She says that as nurses, there can be no other motive in providing consoling words to the patients and their only aim is to see that the patients get well soon. Her extrovert nature and
her smiling face, she says, has always been her plus point, but not this time.

Recently, there was a notice that was put up at common places in the hospital which describes her as a person of immoral behavior by some anonymous person/s. This has shattered her as a lady and as a service provider. She is bewildered at the turn of things and is trying to fight against those who have tarnished her image as a woman. When the researcher met her and wanted her to spare some time to fill the interview schedule, she broke down and said that she was completely under stress and had just filed a complaint in the police station. This kind of sexual harassment has caused a very strong impact on her. The pressure and stress that this event in her life has created is something that she is struggling to overcome.

She unfolded the scene of the very next day she came in for work after the pamphlets had hit the walls of the hospital and nearby hostel. She had just parked her vehicle at the parking lot when she heard whispers around her. She turned around and found people mentioning her name and pointing fingers at her. As she walked down the corridor, the ward boys and others were talking loudly about her. Tears rolled down her cheeks and she did not just look up. As she walked into her room, even her colleagues/friends were whispering among themselves but did not come forward to enquire or console her. She headed straight into the hospital administrator’s room and just lost control of her emotions. She submitted an official complaint and informed him that she wanted to give a police complaint. He in turn asked her not to do so since it would tarnish the image of the hospital.
She made it clear to the hospital administration that it was a personal insult to her and wanted to go ahead with the filing of her report at the police station. This has caused a rift between her and the management as well.

It may take some time for the police to find out who has tarnished her image, but the stress and hardship that this event has produced may well haunt her for her lifetime.

6.3 Case III - Job satisfaction

Ms. Geetha (name changed) is from a large family. With two elder brothers and as the eldest sister of a family of six children, she had great responsibilities in her family. Her father worked at BHEL and her mother fell chronically sick at an early age.

But, Geetha had high aspirations. She looked at the NIT College yearningly as she passed the college on her way to school. When she expressed her wish to her father, he fully supported her and made her join a preparatory centre for enrolling in NIT. She finally landed at the NIT after a lot of hard-work and took up her graduation in Electronics and Communication. She went on to do her Masters in the same subject from the same college.

Once her education got over, she started applying for jobs and got offers from good companies. But she could not take up job outside Trichy because of her family pressures. She joined one of the manufacturing companies at Thuvakkudi in a position and profile un-matching her educational qualification.
On the family front, she is married to a person who is working as an Industrial Employee of the same company, which she now regrets but is hanging on for the sake of her two sons.

The most depressing factor is that her husband does not allow her change her company. Though she is getting many offers from teaching institutions and other companies from the industrial estate neighbourhood, she is not allowed by her husband to change her job.

She feels that apart from the low compensation and profile, her work is not appreciated by her boss. She reported “Constant clash with my boss made me lose interest in my work and as a result I am not able to give my 100% to my job”

She is highly dissatisfied with her profile and work and there is a nagging worry about this at the back of her mind. She keeps asking herself “What am I doing?” She has already had a course of medical treatment for depression and was away from work for about a year.

A feeling of insecurity and uncertainty regarding work has created a lot of anxiousness and stress in her. She is constantly bombarded with thoughts about her future in the organization. She feels that there is no balance between work and its rewards. She now lives in a state of hopelessness just doing the work at office with no real involvement and is waiting for some kind of miracle to take place in her life.
6.4 Case IV - Family interfering with work

Born in a farming family, it was a great challenge for Ms. Roopa (name changed) to convince her parents as well as her relatives from her village to pursue her graduation in engineering.

After a series of obstacles in her life, she is now an officer at the Ordnance Factories, Trichy, holding a prestigious position, compared to her relatively simple life style.

She has two children and is living with a husband who refuses to take up any kind of paid job. Hence she is now the sole bread winner of her family and head of all the responsibilities that go with it.

On the work front, she is faced with work pressure. The government has now reduced the intake of personnel with the result that where five staff used to work a few years ago, the same has to be managed by one- two people. This has put quite some pressure on her.

Her husband, who has a strong alcohol drinking habit, has been the cause for despair and disgust in her family life. This in turn causes lack of concentration at her work. She is responsible for a whole department and decision making is one important aspect of her job. Because of this, her colleagues do not respect her. She reported a spill-over of tensions from home to work and from work to home. This spill-over resulted in conflicts between her and her officer and colleagues. She is now a bundle of stress.

6.5 Case V - Work affecting Children

Dr. Vani (name changed) has worked hard to reach the position she is in now. She stood first in class right from the first standard and she found a
place in the prestigious Madras Medical College at Chennai. She was one of the outstanding students and registered for her MS Dermatology soon after finishing her under graduation.

She joined the government service to serve as a doctor. After having served in various government hospitals in Tamilnadu, presently she is working in the Government hospital, Trichy. Besides, she also works as a consultant at various hospitals in and around Trichy and is engaged for most of the day.

She believes that hard work is the way to success, though, of late, she says that the work load is very pressurizing. She is out of the house for work by 7 in the morning and reaches home only in the night by 9 pm. She works continuously for more than 12 hours a day. She feels guilty that she is unable to meet her grown up children’s expectation of being with them, spending time with them. Recently, her younger son aged 12 pleaded with her to attend his school annual day function. But because of her tight schedule she was unable to attend.

She is dependent on the variety of servants she has engaged to do the various works at home. She is not sure whether the maid is providing her sons good food though she insists to the cook that they be provided with healthy timely food.

She says she has to earn more to maintain the kind of life she is leading. She longs to be at home with her children and her husband and spend quality time with them but her work overload does not permit this which in turn causes stress. Even on Sundays she is away for consultancy. She is feeling lost and does not know how to sort out her problem.
6.6 Case VI - Role overload at work

Dr. Harini (name changed) is from an affluent family and took to this profession as advised by her father who always wanted her to become a doctor. She is married to a professional from a different profession and has a 5 year old daughter.

She is working for a private nursing home as a full timer. She took up this job with a view that she will be able to spend time at home with her daughter. But now she finds that her work usually extends to another 3-4 hours than the stipulated time.

She is posted at the casualty, which means that she has to deal with all the cases that come to the hospital and dispose accordingly. The high patient volume keeps her on her toes and she is tied up completely with her work. She also feels that senior’s pressure and high expectations by the patients and their relatives keeps her under pressure.

Being a junior at the hospital and at the casualty, she has to take instructions from senior doctors of different departments since the casualty is full of different types of patients and different specialists attend to these patients. She feels that she is overloaded with work. She has requested the management for recruiting another doctor to team with her but the management has not taken any action regarding this.

She expressed that she feels stressed when dealing with critical patients and convincing their attendants. She also has to attend to emergency calls when away at home which she says disturbs her responsibilities at home.
6.7 Case VII - Job demand

Coming from a family of educated parents, it was easy for Sudha (name changed) to decide on the profession that she wanted to pursue. Her father being a lawyer always wanted his daughter to become one too. She is a mother of two children.

Now she works for a legal agency and is part of a 10 member team reporting to the chief advocate.

She has to do long hours and is dealing with some difficult cases. She feels that she is over burdened with work. She reports that her agency and her boss is only concerned with keeping up to the number of cases flooding them, but has no mind to hire more staff. He went to the extent of telling her “Either you take it or leave it”. She is under constant pressure to meet deadlines and invariably, misses her lunch. Uncooperative subordinates also pose a problem for her and give an impression to her boss that she is unable to handle the subordinates.

Of late, Sudha is experiencing a feeling of exhaustion and has tremendous difficulty concentrating, even on the smallest tasks. By the time she reaches home she is tired and has no energy left to look into home matters. She brings case files and attends to work even at home. She ends up with tension headaches and has not had a good night’s sleep for quite some time now. She keeps wondering how she is going to meet the demands placed on her.

Her husband has been suggesting to her to start taking cases on her own, but she feels that she will not be able to compete with the males in this
field and she vouches that her field is male dominated and gender discrimination is highly prevalent.

6.8 Case VIII - Work load at home

Sunitha (name changed) pursued her law from the Law College, Trichy. Though this was not her favourite subject she took up law just because she had to do something. Compared to engineering, she thought studying law would be much easier.

Being the eldest from her family, her parents got her married even before she could complete her course. The problem started from the very day of her wedding. The man who she was supposed to marry her absconded in the wee hours on the wedding day, just a few hours before the muhurtham.

Fate took a turn when she had to marry a man, a far relative of their family, who came up to save the family prestige on the request of her father.

This has been the cause for the problems at home for the past eight years, from the time she got married.

The husband’s family feels that they have made a big sacrifice by accepting her father’s request and hence are not cordial with her.

She works as a legal assistant at one of the big manufacturing companies in Trichy. She lives in a joint family set up with her parents-in-law and her sister-in-law staying with them. She has a six year old daughter.
She is not given respect at home and is responsible for all the work at home. With no domestic help, she has to do the household chores, like washing clothes, cleaning vessels, mopping floor apart from cooking. She takes care of all daily purchases and payments to run the house. She has to rush to board the bus every morning as her husband does not allow her to use the vehicle which her father has gifted her.

She feels that though she comes home by six in the evening she does not have time to spend with her daughter as she is totally engaged with her work load at home. With no assistance from the other family members, she has to single handedly manage all the responsibilities at home which is pressurizing her and causing stress.

She is on the verge of a breakdown because of the mental and physical agonies at home and is contemplating of separating from her husband.