

**UNDERSTANDING STRESS AMONG WOMEN IN THE
UNORGANISED WORKFORCE**

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at understanding the stress among women working in the unorganised sector is done on one hundred women working in the construction industry of Kollam district using a pre-designed self-administered questionnaire. The study findings reveal that a significant 40 per cent of them belong to the age group of 26 -35 years and 77 per cent of them reside in the rural areas. A majority of 71 per cent of women are from nuclear families and 79 per cent have small family size. The highest educational qualification of the women is Higher Secondary School education (15 per cent). A monthly family income between Rs.5001 and Rs.7500 was reported by 80 per cent of women. Half of the women have a work experience of less than 5 years (50 per cent). More than one third of them experience nervousness (38 per cent) headache and feeling of overwhelmness (35 per cent each). Increased work load is noticed to cause stress to all the women workers. Other major work related factors causing stress being lack of job security (80 per cent) and unsafe working conditions (71 per cent). Long hours of work are reported to cause stress by a majority of 88 per cent of women. Behavioural changes are induced by stress in the women workers with a majority of them experiencing feeling of constant unhappiness (79 per cent) and a sense of being worn out easily (78 per cent). Chi square statistics revealed that there is no statistically significant ($p \geq 0.05$) relation between the educational status of women workers and the behavioural changes induced by stress in them. A majority of 82 per cent of women report increased absenteeism from work and 88 per cent of women reported sleeping as the main strategy engaged to reduce stress Chi square test revealed that there is no statistically significant ($p \geq 0.05$) relation between the age of the women workers and the strategies employed by them for reducing stress.

Keywords: Working women, Unorganised work force, Stress, Behavioural changes, Job performance

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INTRODUCTION

The unorganised sector was defined by the first Indian National Commission on Labour (1966 - 1969) as that part of the work force which has been unable to organise in pursuit of a common goal due to restraints like casual nature of employment, ignorance, illiteracy, small size and dispersed nature of establishments. The unorganized sector often functions outside the purview of governmental control and comprises of enterprises characterized by the absence of job security, social security benefits, formal contracts and labour regulations [7]. A broad range of economic endeavours and positions that are distinguished by the lack of set working hours, official contracts and availability of social security benefits are covered in this sector which lacks clear and consistent working conditions having no laws or regulations enforced by the government. Lack of affiliation or certification requirements makes it comparatively easy to enter this sector for work [24].

The unorganised sector, comprises of the construction industry, match and beedi industries, tanneries and part-time assistants in households [2] and this sector in India employs about 86 per cent of the country's work-force [21]. Out of the total 397 million workers in India, 123.9 million are women. Ninety six percent of the women workers are in the unorganized sector [16]. Women in the informal sector consist of the most vulnerable working segments in the society and form an important segment of the work force doing arduous work as wage earners, piece rate workers and as casual labours [17]. These women from marginalized communities with miserable economic and social conditions are forced into the unorganized sector due to poverty and lack of other work opportunities. Their economic pressure compels them to accept any work by which they could get their livelihood [24].

Though the significance of women is gaining momentum in the world of work [20] and women hold a unique position by virtue of their multi - dimensional role at personal and professional domains of life, they belong to a deprived class of society owing to the various social barriers and impediments [15]. The largely patriarchal nature of the society we are in, imposes a lot of restrictions on women resulting in less freedom and causing them stress. Working women were observed by [25] to be experiencing more stress than non-working women. Women working in unorganized sectors, while engaged in low-skilled and precarious jobs [18] earn less, in spite of the labour intensive work delivered. These women do not possess bargaining power and are replaced frequently, in case of better wage demands, as they are in surplus in the market. To add to this, is her challenging responsibility of home making with the limited resources in hand.

Women workers in the unorganized sector are more vulnerable to unstable working conditions due to the absence of written contracts and employment benefits [24]. This in turn makes them stressful and compromise the quality of their lives. In view of these facts, it is important to understand the stress among women working in the unorganised sector.

OBJECTIVES

The study was designed with the following objectives.

1. To assess the personal and socio-economic profile of the women working in unorganized sectors.
2. To analyze stress faced by women workers of the unorganized sector.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The hypothesis formulated for the study are,

H₀₁: There is no association between the educational status of women workers and the behavioural changes induced by stress in them.

H₀₂: There is no association between the age of the women workers and the strategies employed by them for reducing stress.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Unorganised sector constitutes a pivotal part of the Indian economy [13] and is a larger source of employment for women. Construction work industry being a major segment in this sector employs significant proportion of women. Women working in this labour - intensive industry, if offered a conducive work environment would be more involved and committed in doing their jobs effectively resulting in good work satisfaction. Hindrances that stand in the way of their work satisfaction needs to be recognized and redressed immediately. Stress at the work place has been identified as one such counter-productive entity faced by workers. The present study aims to delve into the less- explored domain of stress among this women labour force and envisions to recognize the factors causing them stress. The findings from the study are expected to give useful insights to the significant authorities helping them design and deliver effective strategies to address them effectively.

METHODOLOGY

Kollam district of Kerala which was the fourth largest city in Kerala was selected as the area of study. One hundred women workers working in the construction industry, recognized as the largest unorganized segment employing women workers were selected as the samples of study. A pre-designed self-administered questionnaire was used for the collection of data. Consent from the women to participate in the study were obtained. They were assured that the data collected from them would be kept confidentially and it would be used for the purpose of research only. The collected data were analysed and interpreted using descriptive and statistical methods.



FIGURE 1: MAP OF KOLLAM DISTRICT

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Baseline characteristics of women workers

Baseline characteristics looks into the personal and socio-economic profile of the women workers, which helps in comprehensive understanding with respect to their age, locality of residence, type and size of family, educational status and monthly family income. The details are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
BASELINE CHARACTERISTICS

Baseline characteristics	Percentage of women (N=100)
Age in completed years	
26 -35	40
36 - 45	31
46 -55	25
56 - 65	4
Locality of residence	
Rural	77
Coastal	16
Urban	7
Type of family	
Nuclear	71
Joint	19
Size of family	
Small (1- 5 members)	79
Medium (6- 10 members)	21
Educational status	
Primary school	17
High school	25
Secondary school	43
Higher Secondary school	15
Monthly family income	
Rs. 5,000 and below	15
Rs. 5,001 - Rs. 75,00	80
Rs. 75,01 and above	5

The baseline characteristics of women as noticed from Table 1 revealed that a significant 40 per cent of them were in the age group of 26 -35 years and 4 percent were aged between 56-65 years. A huge majority of 77 percent of them resided in rural areas and 71 percent were from nuclear families. Small family size of less than 5 members were reported by 79 percent of women. The highest educational qualification of the women was noted as Higher Secondary School education reported by a meagre 15 percent of them. This result aligns with the observations made by [3] that people choose to work in the unorganised sectors because they don't have a basic level of education and skill, to get a job in formal or organised sectors. Similarly, [23] has also noted that women working in the unorganized sector have low educational level causing stress to them. The monthly family income of a majority of 80 per cent of them were between Rs.5001 and Rs.7500. In this regard, [8] observes that women enter the labour market with the financial motive of supplementing the family's income and expecting their labour to aid their families attain a better standard of living. In this context [9] has opined that workers in the unorganized sector are those belonging to the lowest income level.

2. Years of work experience

Work experience helps to gain practical wisdom making an individual more competent in delivering the work assigned to them. The years of work experience of the women is given in Table 2.

TABLE 2
YEARS OF WORK EXPERIENCE

Sl. No.	Years of work experience	Percentage of women (N=100)
1	Less than 5 years	50
2	6- 10 years	40
3	11- 15 years	10

With regard to the years of work experience, it was revealed from Table 2 that half of the women had less than 5 years of work experience (50 percent) whereas a significant 10 percent had work experience between 11-15 years. Work experience of 6 -10 years were reported by 40 percent of them.

3. Symptoms and frequency of experiencing stress

Stress being a natural reaction of the body while changes or challenges occur, results in different physical, emotional and behavioral responses that develop stress symptoms. Stress is subjective and so only the person experiencing it can determine whether it is present and how severe it feels. The symptoms and frequency of experiencing stress by the women is given in Table 3.

TABLE 3
SYMPTOMS AND FREQUENCY OF EXPERIENCING STRESS

Sl. No.	Symptoms of stress experienced *	Percentage of women (N=100)			
		Frequency of experiencing stress			
		Never	Rarely	Some time	Most of the time
1	Nervousness	-	10	52	38
2	Headache	-	17	48	35
3	Feeling overwhelmed	13	13	39	35
4	Anxiety	-	6	60	34
5	Restlessness	13	6	68	13
6	Memory issues	-	68	28	4
7	Moodiness	-	45	55	-
8	Irritability	-	45	55	-
9	Short temperedness	55	17	28	-

*Multiple responses

The symptoms of stress were manifested in various forms in women though their frequency of occurrence varied. It was revealed from Table 3 that more than one third of the women experienced nervousness most of the time (38 per cent). A significant 35 percent each of them experienced headache and feeling of being overwhelmed most of the time while 34 percent of

them experienced anxiety. A notable 13 per cent of them felt restlessness most of the time and 28 percent of them reported memory issues sometimes. More than half of the women experienced moodiness and irritability sometimes as reported by 55 percent each of them. A little more than one quarter of them experienced short temperedness sometimes (28 per cent). This results is in line with the findings of [14] that stress is experienced significantly by construction labourers.

4. Work related factors causing stress

Work related stress is a major challenge to workers and an increasingly important health problem. Work related factors causing stress in women workers is given in Figure 2.

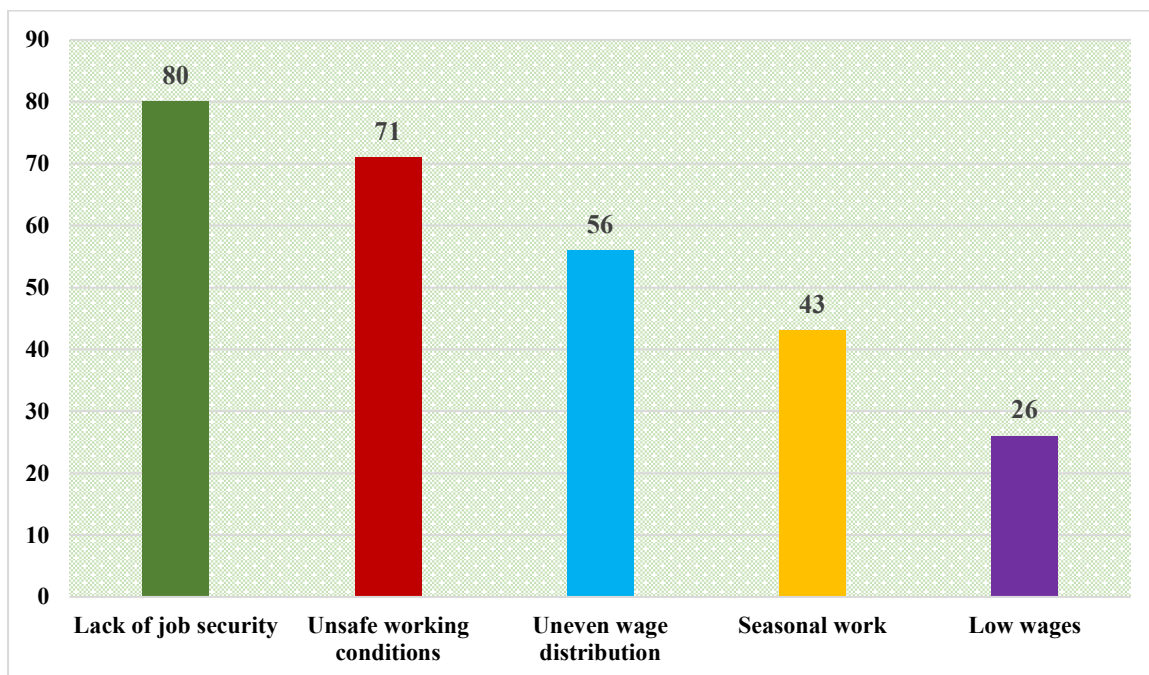


FIGURE 2

WORK RELATED FACTORS CAUSING STRESS

The factors causing stress to women in the workplace were many and varied. The work related factors causing stress, as noted from Figure 2 revealed that increased work load caused stress to all the women workers. More than three quarter of them reported lack of job security (80 per cent) as the cause of stress. On similar lines [1] has reported that heavy work load and job insecurity serves as stressors among workers. This finding aligns with the observation of [4] that high level of job insecurity is a common phenomenon in unorganized sectors. A huge 71 percent of them reported unsafe working condition causing them stress. In this regard, [7] has

stated that women working in the unorganized sectors of developing nations lack protection. More than half of them reported uneven wage distribution causing them stress (56 per cent). On similar lines, [24] has observed that unequal pay and job opportunities are among the difficulties faced by women employed in the unorganized sector. Our society needs to be educated to exercise a positive attitude so as to transform the unorganized sector into an inclusive workplace for women. A significant 43 percent of them reported seasonal nature of work as the cause of stress. In this regard, [17] has stated that women workers in the informal economy suffer from recurrent periodic spells of unemployment, contributing to high degree vulnerability, further impeding the prospects of economic and social mobility. It was observed by [11] that workers of unorganized sector need to fetch for alternate employments during the off season times, owing to the seasonal intermittent nature of their work. More than one quarter of the women reported low wages as the cause of stress (26 per cent). This result conforms with the findings of [23] that women working in the unorganised sector are dissatisfied with their earnings and their financial hardships cause them stress.

5. Work setting

The work setting of unorganized sectors are established by the Management which is largely informal in nature. The work setting causing stress in women is given in Figure 3.

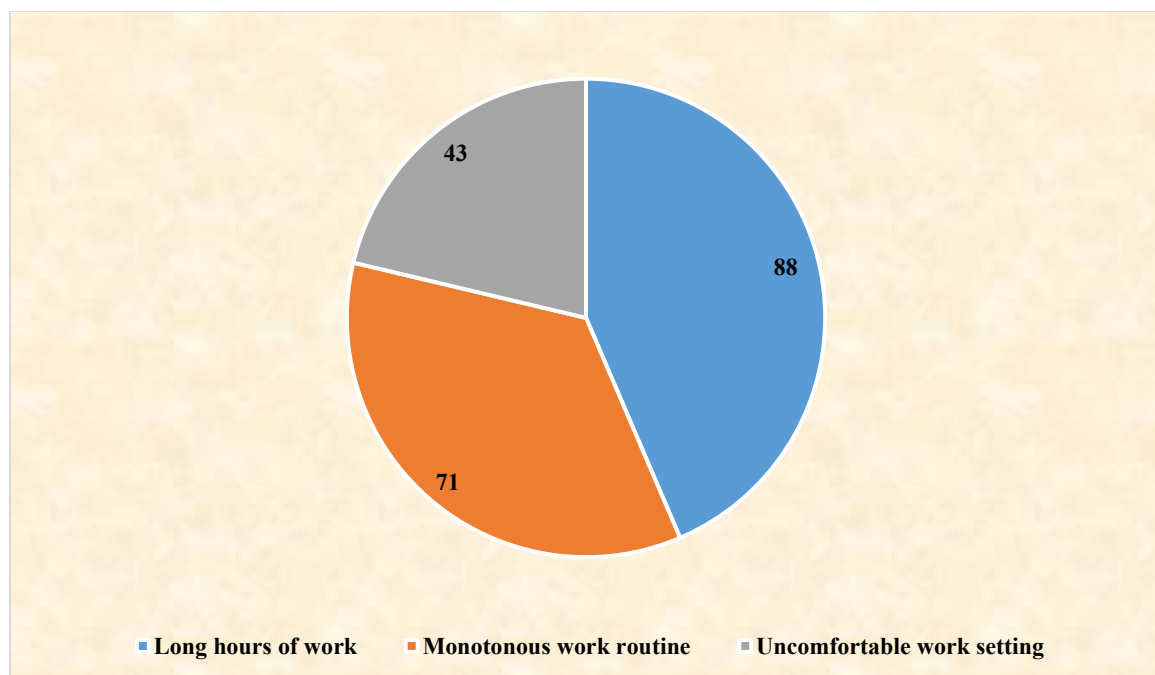


FIGURE 3
WORK SETTING

Regarding the work setting leading to stress, it was revealed from Figure 3 that long hours of work were reported by a majority of 88 per cent of women as the cause of stress. This result conforms with the observations made by [22] that workers of unorganized sectors are often exploited by long and intense hours of work and are forced to work for more than 8 hours a day. On similar lines, [10] has reported that females working in the unorganized sectors face many problems including long working hours and low wages. Monotonous work routine was reported by 71 percent causing stress. A significant 43 per cent of women had the uncomfortable work setting causing stress. In this regard, [5] has reported that women workers are involved in hard manual labour in uncomfortable work settings, which subsequently takes its toll on their health.

6. Impact of stress on health

It was disheartening to note that all the women reported stress impacting their health negatively. In this regard, [2] has opined that a woman's health impacts the financial stability of her home adversely as her compromised health makes her less productive.

7. Behavioural changes induced by stress

Stress causes psychological or behavioural symptoms. The behavioural changes induced by stress on the women is given in Figure 4.

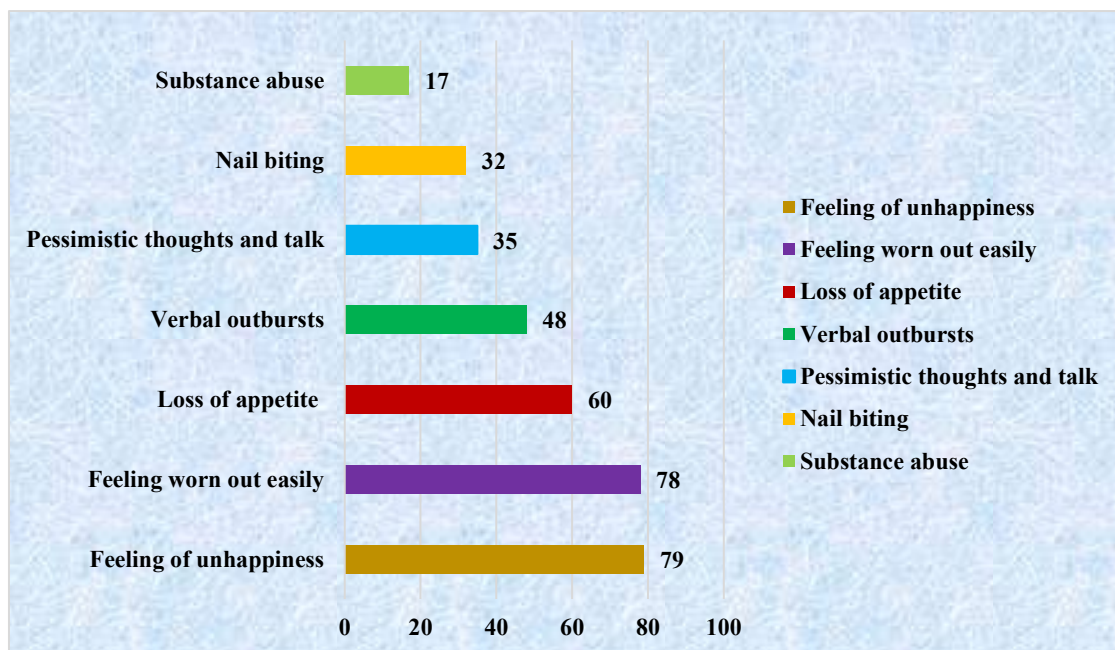


FIGURE 4
BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES INDUCED BY STRESS

Regarding the behavioural changes of the women due to stress, it was revealed from Figure 4, that a majority of 79 percent of them experienced feeling of constant unhappiness. A huge 78 percent of women reported a sense of being worn out easily and 60 percent reported loss of appetite. Less than a half of them reported verbal outbursts (48 per cent). Pessimistic thoughts and talk were noticed in more than one third of them (35 per cent). Nail biting was noted among 32 per cent of women and 17 percent of them were prone to substance abuse.

Statistical analysis was done employing the Pearson's Chi square test to verify the relation between the educational status of women workers and the behavioural changes induced by stress in them. It was revealed that there is no statistically significant $p \leq 0.05$ relation between these two variables ($\chi^2 = 14.526$, $p = 0.6942$, $df = 18$). Hence, the hypothesis,

H₀₁ : *There is no association between the educational status of women workers and the behavioural changes induced by stress in them* is accepted.

8. Effect of stress on job performance

The effect of stress on the job performance of women is given in Figure 5.

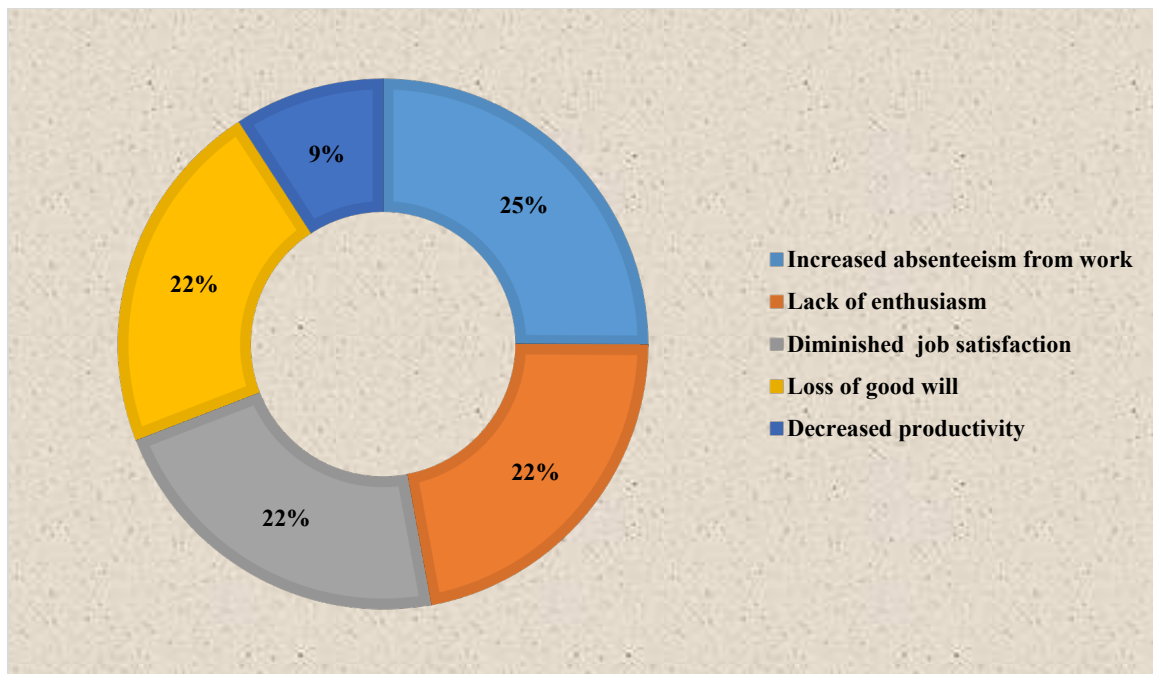


FIGURE 5
EFFECT OF STRESS ON JOB PERFORMANCE

With regard to the effect of stress on the job performance of women, it was revealed from Figure 5 that a majority of 82 per cent of women reported increased absenteeism from work,

72 per cent each of them had lack of enthusiasm and diminished job satisfaction. The result conforms with the findings of [1] that stress manifests as decreased job satisfaction. A significant 71 per cent of women reported loss of good will and 30 per cent of them had decreased productivity.

9. Strategies employed for reducing stress

Stress cannot be avoided totally, but could be managed by practicing stress relief strategies. The strategies employed by women for reducing stress is given in Figure 6.

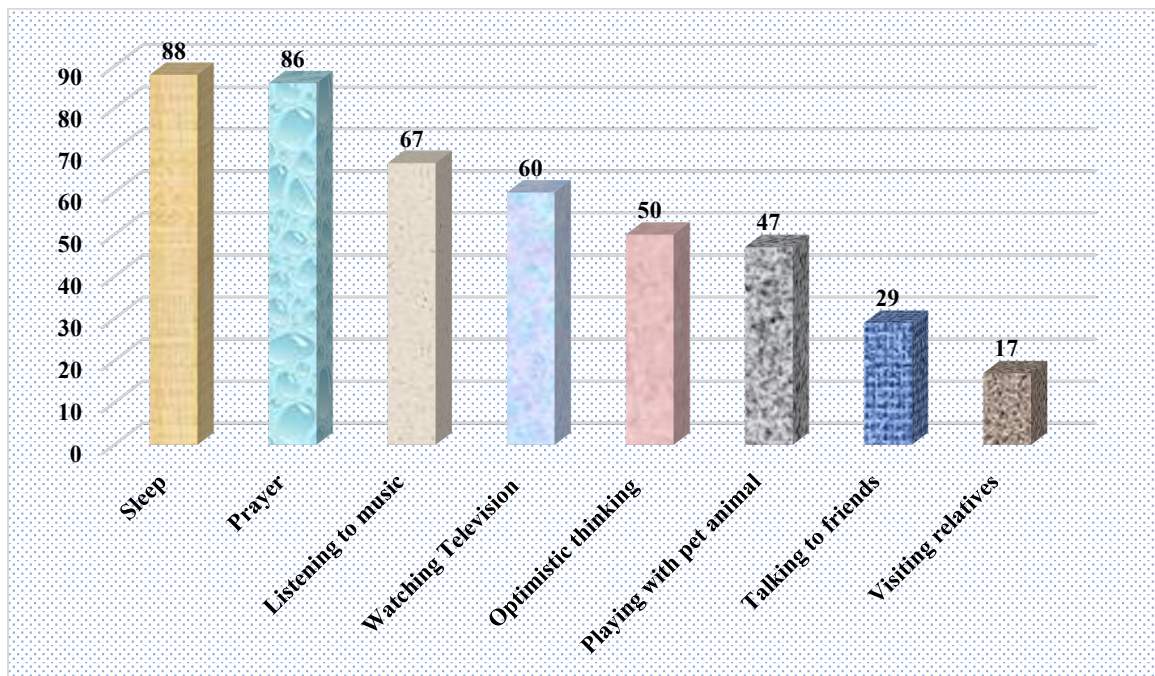


FIGURE 6

STRATEGIES EMPLOYED FOR REDUCING STRESS

Various strategies were engaged by the women to reduce stress and make it manageable. It was revealed from Figure 6, that a huge majority of 88 per cent of them resorted to sleep and 86 per cent of them turned to prayer as a means of reducing stress. Listening to music and watching Television were employed by a significant 67 per cent and 60 per cent of them respectively. Half of them practiced optimistic thinking consciously (50 per cent). A notable 47 percent played with their pet animals as a means of reducing stress. A notable 29 per cent reported talking to friends while 17 per cent visited relatives to reduce their stress.

Pearson's Chi square test was done to analyze the statistical association between the age of women workers and the strategies employed by them for reducing stress. It was revealed that these two variables were not significantly associated statistically, $p \leq 0.05$ ($\chi^2 = 16.76$ $p = 0.7255$ $df = 21$). Hence the hypothesis,

H₀₂ : *There is no association between the age of the women workers and the strategies employed by them for reducing stress* is accepted.

CONCLUSION

Women working in the unorganized sector of construction industry face many challenges and constraints that leads to stress. The factors causing stress to them may be rightly recognized and addressed effectively so as to provide a safe and satisfying work environment to them. The physical and emotional well-being of women workforce that form a valuable human capital may go a long way in helping our society and nation reap rich dividends. The findings of the study may serve as a pivotal to policy initiatives in addressing the issue of stress among the unorganized workers.

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Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest

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