

Research Article



Email id

jessey.john@depaul.edu.in

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Educated Unemployed Women: A Major Concern in Kerala

Jessey L

Associate Professor, De Paul School of Social Work, Angamali, Kerala, India

Educated employment of women is a pressing problem globally. In Kerala, despite all social reforms, the culture-induced gender role expectation remains prevalent. It widens the gender gap in workforce participation in Kerala. Against this backdrop, this study compared the anxiety, depression and psychosocial well-being of educated employed and educated unemployed women in Kerala. A stratified multistage random sampling selected participants from the state. The sample size was 250, with equal representation of women from both categories compared. For data collection, this study used Beck Anxiety Inventory, Beck Depression Inventory and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. Data analysis was done using SPSS, and hypotheses testing was done using paired sample *t*-tests. This study confirmed better psychological well-being for employed women, although they are susceptible to higher levels of anxiety and depression. Therefore, this article recommends a conducive working environment for educated women to contribute constructively to nation-building.

INTRODUCTION

One of the burning issues facing India today is educated unemployment (EU) (Bhanushali, 2021). It is not getting a job in a particular industry despite having a relevant degree and being willing to work at industry-standard wages/salaries (Shah, 2023). Alternatively, the EU occurs when individuals with higher education and qualifications cannot find suitable employment opportunities. This phenomenon can occur for various reasons, including job market dynamics, the mismatch between skills and job requirements, lack of work experience, geographical limitations, poor education standards, economic factors, gender gap, and cultural factors. On the one hand, it is difficult for individuals with higher levels of education, both technical and non-technical, to find employment opportunities. On the other hand, companies are not getting the right kind of workforce despite repeated attempts at advertisements and recruitment processes (Bhanushali, 2021).

World Economic Forum (WEF) reported that 68.1% gender gap had been closed globally (WEF, 2022). Although no country has yet achieved full gender parity, among the 146 countries listed, India stands at 135, with a 37.1% gender gap yet to close. In contrast, Iceland stands

at position 1, with 90.1% of the gender gap closed (WEF, 2022). Regarding the four sub-indices of the Gender Gap Index, the portions that India filled are Economic Participation and Opportunity: 35%, Educational Attainment: 96.1%, Health and Survival: 93.7% and Political Empowerment: 26.7%, respectively (WEF, 2022). The gap between the first two sub-indices illustrates the severity of unemployment among educated Indian women.

Women are always at the centre of discussions regarding employment and unemployment in India. Despite educational gains and declining fertility, women in India remain conspicuously absent from the workforce (Fletcher *et al.*, 2017). Most women give up on the idea of taking on the responsibility of work after graduation (Shah, 2023), mainly for the sake of marriage and setting up families. Culture dynamically influences the social environment in which women are forced to conform to gender identities and role expectations (Bullough *et al.*, 2022). The predominance of women in unpaid domestic work keeps them away from economic activities (Singh and Pattanaik, 2020). Although most women want to build their careers, time constraints and family pressure keep them from taking good opportunities (Shah, 2023). The Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation's (MoSPI) latest

Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS), January–March 2023, revealed that the unemployment rate for men in urban areas of Kerala was 7.4% and women 15.0% (MoSPI, 2023). Furthermore, this survey showed that men’s labour force participation rate in Kerala was 49.3%, and women’s was 23.6% during this period (MoSPI, 2023). In this scenario, this article interprets the findings of a study on the psychosocial problems of educated unemployed women in Kerala.

METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive quantitative design and compared the anxiety, depression and psychosocial well-being of Educated Employed Women (EEW) and Educated Unemployed Women (EUW) in Kerala. EUW in this study were women between the age group of 20-45 years, leading marital lives and have qualified for any degree, post-graduation or professional courses and were residents of selected districts but were not employed in any of the public or private sectors, or self-employed and not having any earning of their own in terms of money.

It was a state-wide study which used stratified multilevel sampling. The study stratified the state geographically into three strata, North Kerala, Central Kerala and South Kerala, and then selected one district each from the strata for the study. In the next sampling step, the researcher randomly selected EEW samples from the government and non-government offices and EUW from households of the selected districts. The sample size set for this study was 250 (125 samples for EEW and EUW each). Tools for data collection included a questionnaire for measuring the socioeconomic status of respondents, Beck’s Anxiety Inventory (BAI) (Beck *et al.*, 1988), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck *et al.*, 1987), and Ryff’s Psychological Well-being Scale (RPWBS) (Ryff, 2014). The researcher translated all tools into native Malayalam and

back-translated them with the help of a bilingual expert. Tools were piloted among ten respondents (five from each group) and confirmed reliability by calculating Cronbach Alpha.

This study used 42-item RPWBS, a 7-point Likert scale with six subscales. In the analysis stage, the researcher reverse-coded all the negative statements. The tool used for data analysis was SPSS. So, this study compared all the sub-variables, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance of EEW and EUW, and finally, their total psychological well-being (PWB). The statistical test used to check the differences between the mean PWB scores of EEW and EUW was a paired-sample *t*-test, and the null hypotheses set were,

H(0)1: The difference between the mean scores for the autonomy of EEW and EUW is insignificant.

H(0)2: The difference between the mean scores for environmental mastery of EEW and EUW is insignificant.

H(0)3: The difference between the mean scores for EEW and EUW personal growth is insignificant.

H(0)4: The difference between the mean scores for positive relations of EEW and EUW is insignificant.

H(0)5: The difference between the mean scores for purpose in life of EEW and EUW is insignificant.

H(0)6: The difference between the mean scores for self-acceptance of EEW and EUW is insignificant.

H(0)7: The difference between the mean scores for the psychological well-being of EEW and EUW is insignificant.

BAI and BDI are 21-item 4-point scales with scoring ranging from 0 to 63. Figure 1 shows the classification model this study used for samples according to their score

Depression	Anxiety	Psychological well-being
• 0-10: Normal mood swings	• 0–7: Minimal anxiety	• 42-84: Vey Low
• 11-16: Mild mood disturbances	• 8-15: Mild anxiety	• 85-126: Low
• 17-20: Borderline clinical depression	• 16-25: Moderate anxiety	• 127-210: Medium
• 21-30: Moderate depression	• 26-63: Severe anxiety	• 211:252: High
• 31-40: severe depression		• 253-294: Very High
• 40-63: Extreme depression		

Figure 1: Classification of Scoring for Depression, Anxiety and Psychological Well-being

for depression, anxiety and PWB. All the samples were categorised based on this model and compared between the groups.

RESULT

All the participants in this study belonged to the 20–45 age group. Figure 2 shows the classification of participants (EEW and EUW) according to their scores for anxiety.

The result of this study illustrated that 43.2% of EUW belonged to the group of minimal anxiety, whereas only 27.2% of EEW were in this group. EEW representation was more in the higher-level anxiety classes than in participants in the EUW group. Mild and moderate anxiety categories had 8% more EEW than EUW. However, neither group had representation in the severe anxiety class.

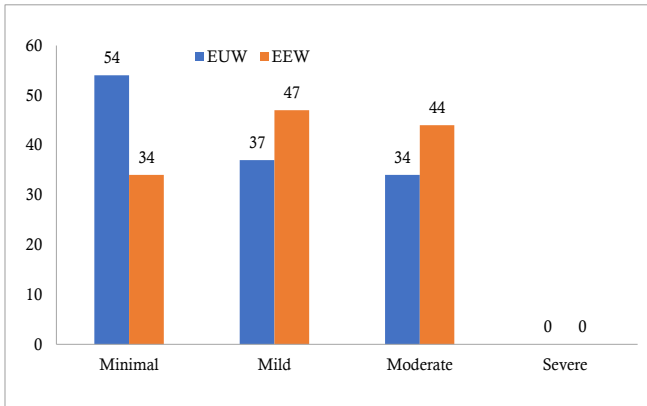


Figure 2: Anxiety Level of Participants

Figure 3 shows the grouping of participants according to their level of depression. Figure 3 shows that the mood swings of 49.6% of EUW were normal, while only 29.6% of EEW belonged to this category. In the category of mild mood disturbances, EEW and EUW had 24.8% and 19.2% representation, respectively. A noticeable 24.8% of EEW had borderline clinical depression, whereas only 23.2% of EUW were in this category. Respondents with moderate depression were 12.8% from EEW and 8% from the EUW group. The categories of severe depression and extreme depression had no representation from the study samples. Table 1 shows the paired sample *t*-test result.

Table 1 shows that the difference between the mean autonomy scores of EEW and EUW is significant; therefore, this study rejected H(0)1. Similarly, the paired sample *t*-test showed a significant difference between the mean scores for personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and overall PWB of EEW and EUW. Therefore the study rejected H(0)3, H(0)5, H(0)6 and H(0)7. On the contrary, the hypotheses testing proved that the difference between mean scores for environmental mastery and positive relations of EEW and EUW is insignificant; therefore, accepted H(0)2 and H(0)4.

Considering the significant difference between the mean scores for the PWB of EEW and EUW, this study categorised the PWB score of participants into five categories using the model shown in Figure 1, and Figure 4 shows this comparison.

Figure 3: Depression Level of Participants

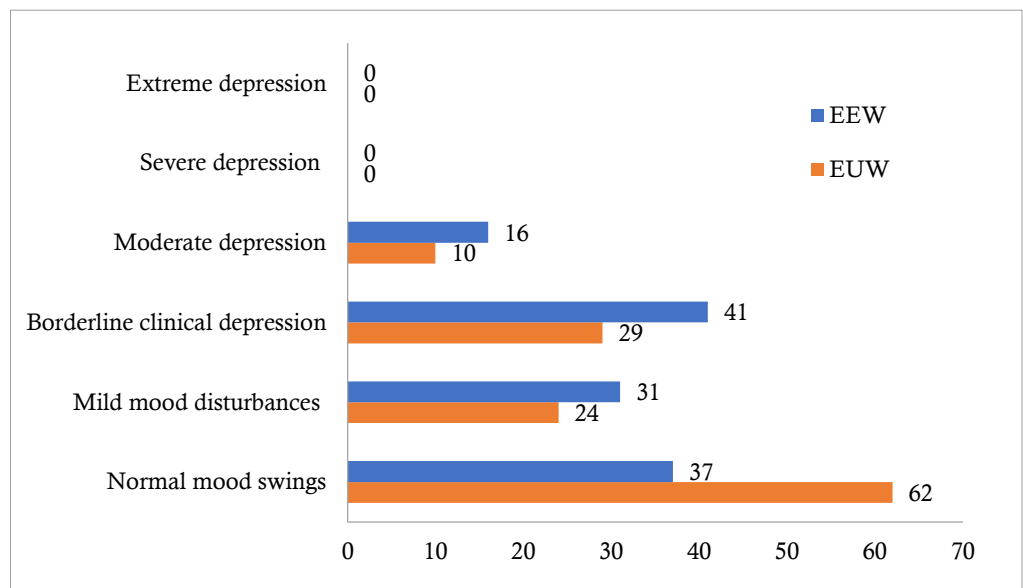


Table 1: Paired Sample t-test Results

	Paired Differences							Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	
				Lower	Upper			
EUW_Autonomy- EWW Autonomy	-20.10400	1.64525	.14716	-20.39526	-19.81274	-136.617	124	.000*
EUW EnvironmentalMastery - EWW EnvironmentalMastery	.02400	4.39660	.39324	-.75434	.80234	.061	124	.951
EUW_PersonalGrowth - EWW PersonalGrowth	-20.94400	3.61517	.32335	-21.58400	-20.30400	-64.772	124	.000*
EUW PositiveRelations - EWW PositiveRelations	.24000	3.72091	.33281	-.41872	.89872	.721	124	.472
EUW_PurposeInLife - EWW PurposeInLife	-5.95200	5.66235	.50646	-6.95442	-4.94958	-11.752	124	.000*
EUW SelfAcceptance - EWW SelfAcceptance	-7.88000	5.99677	.53637	-8.94162	-6.81838	-14.691	124	.000*
EUW_PsychologicalWellbeing - EWW PsychologicalWellbeing	-54.61600	11.26784	1.00783	-56.61077	-52.62123	-54.192	124	.000*

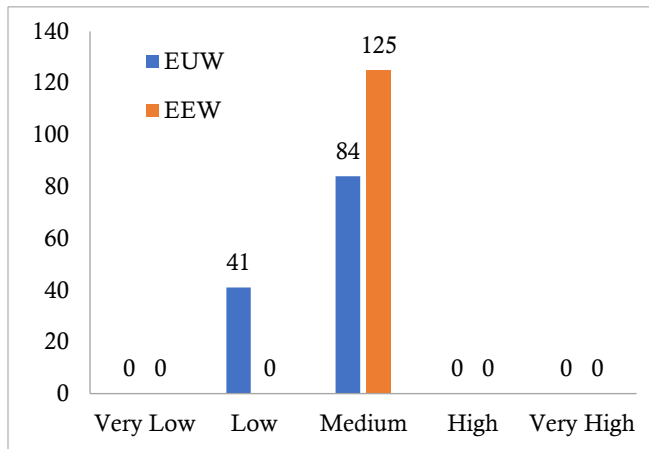


Figure 4: Psychological Well-being Levels of Participants

There was no representation of participants from either group in the very low, high and very high PWB categories. EUWs were in the Low (32.8%) and Medium (67.2%) categories. Whereas all EEWs remained in the medium category.

DISCUSSION

Unemployment among women is a significant challenge to the goal of sustainable social and economic development in developing countries (Savithiri and Valliammai, 2020). Moreover, the pandemic's

disproportionate impact on women's employment is predicted to persist despite narrowing the gap, with this disparity most pronounced in upper-middle-income countries (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022). In the Global South, women are subjected to practices that reinforce subjugation, and their employment is subject to the possibility of reservation (Jeffrey, 2009). EU is common in rural and urban areas, but it disproportionately affects women, a study in India's north-eastern states has shown (Jamatia and Gurumoorthy, 2023). Factors like a family burden, pressure from in-laws or male-dominance lead to the problem of EU among women in India (Dhingra, 2020). In this context, it is critical to analyse the psychosocial problems of educated unemployed women.

A 2014 study confirmed higher self-confidence, self-acceptance, sociability and competence among employed women, although there was no significant difference in the general self-concept of employed and unemployed (Maqbool, 2014). Similarly, this study also proved a significant difference in autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance and overall PWB of employed and unemployed women who were educated. However, in the case of anxiety and depression, unemployed women were more likely to have a lower level of experience than employed women. This

demonstrates the pressure of multitasking working women face due to society's gender role expectations. Acute anxiety or depression among working women makes them quit their jobs, raising the statistics of educated unemployed women. Therefore, creating a conducive working environment for women to contribute effectively to the country's economic development is crucial. In the current advancement of the gig economy in Kerala, it is recommended that women choose gigs matching their competence and schedules. On the other hand, to ensure women's participation in nation-building, it is imperative to uproot stereotypical gender role expectations in Kerala society.

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