

SHILPA SHREE

**J**UGGLING office and home can be a daunting task. You have to manage work right from the time you make the first cup of tea, take all the workload and many other pressures at work to ensure that the utility bills are paid on time and you are still zipping ahead of time till you kiss good night to your children. Women in India are still unaware of the impact stress has on them. Here are some instances.

**PCOD:** For instance, take Sneha Katal, a Mumbai-based media professional who had to quit her work around 10 months ago due to severe stress which led to polycystic ovarian disease (PCOD), one of the most common infertility problems faced by working women. "Two in every five women who come for treatment of infertility suffer from PCOD," said Dr Suman Bijlani, a gynaecologist who runs a holistic healing centre in Mumbai.

"It has been four years since our marriage and I have been trying to conceive for over three years now, but in vain. I was gaining weight abnormally and had to do something about it. My doctor advised me that stress was the main cause and I knew my job was very stressful, so I decided to let go of it," said Sneha. Sneha used to work for about 10 hours a day and had to travel for two hours everyday

to get to work. Besides managing travel time and her tight deadline at her work place, she had to manage home, cooking and other household chores by herself.

**Fibroids:** Uterine fibroid is another common problem. It is a non-cancerous tumour in a womb. It causes severe pain in the lower abdomen and leads to heavy menstrual bleeding. "In my case, my menstrual cycles also got shorter. In a span of two months, I used to have it three to four times," said N Viji, a 48-year-old Hyderabad-based marketing executive whose fibroids were detected about two years ago. She is now under medication to reduce pain and regularise menstrual cycles. "My doctor advised me to go for a surgery to remove my uterus after my menstrual cycle is over. Right now I am able to manage without a surgery," she said. "Postponing child birth is the most common reason for fibroids in women. Growing costs and the need for both the partners to earn have begun showing effects on the health of working women," said Dr Jyothi Prakash, a Bangalore-based gynaecologist, who runs Be Positive clinic for women.

**Endometriosis:** This is another problem that is increasingly leading to infertility among women. Endometriosis is a condition where there is "inflammation in and around uterus," said Dr Bijlani.

**Miscarriages:** Stress is increasing miscarriages. "The risk of miscarriages is on the rise and a woman below 35 has about 15 to 20 per cent risk, which goes up with age. Lifestyle factors, including chronic and severe stress, have been implicated," said Dr Bijlani.

Take Madhumita Bhosale. The happiness of a conception did not last long because she had miscarriage in two months. "I was travelling to and from office in a crowded train

daily. Around the same time, I had to shift my residence as the tenancy got over. All this took a toll on my pregnancy," she said.

The first trimester is a delicate phase, "I would, in fact, advise all women to stop working through their pregnancy and get back to work if their employer hires them after a few months after pregnancy," said Dr Prakash. Dr Duru Shah, another Mumbai-based gynaecologist calls pregnancy a "biological function, which needs social support," and adds that "since only women can get pregnant and it is required for the future of mankind, I think everybody in the society, right from family to workplace make it easier for women to have a child."

Dr Bijlani and Dr Shah are of the opinion that when women have to get back to work after pregnancy, they should start with some sort of part-time work and slowly start doing full time. "All the while since the baby's birth she has been around. Imagine, if the mother goes for the whole day suddenly?" said Dr Bijlani.

**Menopausal difficulties:**

During menopause a woman's health could deteriorate much further if stress is not tackled. "There is nothing one can do to eradicate stress. We are in an economy which demands women to work; they will have to travel long distances to reach office; they have to take tremendous work pressure and it is bound to take a toll on their health," said Dr Prakash. ■

*Shilpa Shree is a freelance writer*

