



AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN MANAGING CARE RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROMOTING MENTAL WELL-BEING AMONG RURAL WOMEN IN OKHALKANDA BLOCK OF NAINITAL DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the role of education in shaping the capacity of rural women to manage care responsibilities and maintain mental well-being, with specific reference to Okhalkanda Block. Women in rural households are expected to take on various duties, including childcare, household management, and agricultural activities. These responsibilities often involve significant physical and emotional stress, which can compromise their overall well-being. Within this context, education is regarded as a critical factor influencing how women perceive, interpret, and cope with their responsibilities. The primary objective of the research is to examine how education enhances women's awareness, decision-making abilities, and coping strategies in dealing with everyday challenges arising from caregiving responsibilities. It also investigates the relationship between educational attainment and key indicators of mental well-being, such as stress, emotional resilience, and life satisfaction. The study follows a field-based methodology, relying on primary data collected through fieldwork in selected villages of Okhalkanda Block. Standardized questionnaires and in-depth interviews were employed to collect data, enabling both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The study focuses on variables such as educational attainment, the nature and intensity of care responsibilities, access to support networks, and perceived mental well-being. The findings are expected to demonstrate that education has a significant effect on increasing awareness, developing coping strategies, and fostering self-confidence among rural women. Educated women are more likely to adopt proactive stress-management strategies and seek social and institutional support. However, the study also acknowledges the persistent influence of socio-cultural norms on women's lives. Within the broader framework of rural development, the study concludes by highlighting the importance of promoting education as a crucial tool for empowering rural women and enhancing their mental well-being.

Keywords: Education, Care Responsibilities, Mental Well-being, Stress Management, Rural Development

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is widely regarded as a major concern in the contemporary world, affecting individuals across all age groups. Despite the growing availability of resources and support systems, the level of stress and psychological pressure continues to increase (Hammoudi Halat, D., Soltani, A., Dalli, R., Alsarraj, L., & Malki, A., 2023), leading to observable changes in various aspects of life, including social, economic, political, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. Furthermore, individuals differ in their awareness and understanding of mental health. While some people are aware of its importance and adopt effective coping strategies, others remain unaware of mental health issues and their impact on overall well-being. This lack of awareness often results in prolonged struggles, preventing individuals from achieving a balanced and fulfilling life (Schneiderman, N., Ironson, G., & Siegel, S. D., 2005; Curtiss, J. E., Levine, D. S., Ander, I., & Baker, A. W., 2021). Moreover, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Reports represent that lack of awareness and stigma are significant barriers to mental health care in rural India (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare., 2014). According to the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, a large proportion of the population in India suffers from mental health issues and remains unaware of available treatment, particularly in rural areas (Gururaj, G., Varghese, M., Benegal, V., Rao, G. N., Pathak, K., Singh, L. K., Mehta, R. Y., Ram, D., Shibukumar, T. M., Kokane, A. M., & others., 2016).

In addition to the above, stress has become a growing concern and serious challenge in contemporary life, affecting individuals across different social contexts. Although it may not be possible to completely avoid stress, it is essential to adopt effective coping mechanisms. Stress management is influenced by several factors, including education, hobbies, personal interests, and physical activities such as sports, swimming, and exercise. Furthermore, the socio-spatial context in which individuals live significantly influences their experience of stress. Individuals in different settings

often face specific challenges such as limited access to healthcare, low levels of awareness, and socio-economic constraints (Marmot, M. (2005). In this context, the present study focuses on examining the role of education in managing stress among rural women. For this purpose, the researcher has selected Okhalkanda block, located in Nainital district of Uttarakhand, as the specific area of study.

Among the various factors influencing stress management, education emerges as a crucial determinant, as it enhances awareness, coping abilities, and overall resilience. Education is recognized as a basic necessity for the overall development of individuals and societies. Studies on the Indian education system highlight disparities in access, quality, and type of schooling, particularly between rural and urban areas and between public and private institutions, which further shape social and developmental outcomes (Kingdon, G. G., 2007). In urban areas, there has been a major increase in awareness regarding the importance of girls' education, with families increasingly encouraging their daughters to pursue higher education and achieve their aspirations. However, this scenario differs considerably in rural areas, where awareness regarding education, particularly girls' education, remains limited. In rural regions, parents are often discouraged from promoting their daughters' education due to socio-cultural norms, lack of awareness, and financial constraints. As a result, a large number of rural women remain illiterate or are able to complete only primary, secondary, or at most senior secondary levels of education. However, there are also families who actively encourage girls' education, enabling them to pursue higher education and fulfill their aspirations. The scenario is similar in Okhalkanda block, where women belong to a variety of educational categories, ranging from illiterate to graduates. This variation in educational attainment provides an important basis for examining the role of education in various aspects of life. The primary focus of this study is on homemakers, as they constitute a significant proportion of rural women, and their educational background may influence their ability to manage stress and overall well-being.

Rural women of the hilly region of Okhalkanda shoulder multiple responsibilities, including managing household duties, caring for children and the elderly, and actively participating in agricultural work. Many of them depend on physical labor for their livelihoods. These women work tirelessly and can be regarded as the strength of the hills. Scholars such as Vandana Shiva have highlighted the crucial role of women in sustaining hill economies; while also pointing out the disproportionate burden they carry (Vandana Shiva., 1988). This idea is also reflected in the literary expression of Harish Chandra Pandey, who suggests that “woman is just other name of hills” (Pandey, H. C. (n.d.). Rural settings, characterized by scarce resources, inadequate healthcare facilities, and fragile economic conditions, significantly influence their lives. These factors shape their lifestyles and adaptive capacities; however, coping with such challenges is often difficult and may lead to considerable mental and emotional stress.

Despite these challenges, it has been observed that rural women adopt various coping strategies to deal with stress in their everyday lives. In this regard, the present study seeks to examine how education contributes to stress management among rural women. Education is not merely about acquiring formal degrees or securing employment; rather, it plays a vital role in shaping an individual’s personality, enhancing life skills, and building resilience. This view aligns with the ideas of Paulo Friere, who emphasized education as a process of developing critical consciousness and human potential (Freire, P., 2000). It provides knowledge and awareness, which act as empowering tools, enabling individuals to handle life challenges more effectively. As famously stated by Francis Bacon, “Knowledge is Power,” highlighting the transformative potential of education in strengthening an individual’s capacity to lead a balanced and satisfying life.

Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on mental health and stress management, limited attention has been given to understanding the role of education in shaping stress management practices among rural

women, particularly in remote and hilly regions. Moreover, there is a lack of focused research on areas such as Okhalkanda, where variations in educational attainment and socio-economic conditions may significantly influence stress experiences and coping mechanisms. Therefore, the present study attempts to bridge this gap by examining the relationship between education and stress management among rural women in the selected study area.

Objectives

- To assess the level of stress among rural women in the selected study area.
- To examine the socio-economic and educational status of rural women.
- To identify the primary sources of stress and the coping strategies adopted by rural women.
- To examine the role of education in shaping stress management strategies and mental well-being.
- To compare the stress management practices of educated and uneducated rural women.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, to examine the role of education in stress management. The study is based on primary data collected from rural women in the Okhalkanda block. A structured questionnaire and interviews were designed to collect data. A total of 70 rural women with different educational levels—illiterate, primary, secondary, senior secondary, and graduate—were included in the study. The objective of the questionnaire was to gather information on how rural women manage stress, how education influences their coping strategies, and their overall mental well-being. In addition to primary data, secondary data was also collected from books, academic journals, research articles and credible online sources, which helped in providing theoretical support and contextual understanding of research problem.

The study employs multistage sampling combining purposive and random sampling methods to select respondents, ensuring representation of different educational categories. The methodology

was designed to cover all essential aspects of the study, enabling meaningful conclusions to be drawn from the collected data.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The subsequent section presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected from 70 rural women in the Okhalkanda block. The data has been analyzed with reference to educational attainment, stress levels, causes of stress, and coping strategies. The aim is to examine the relationship between education and stress management among rural women.

Table 1: Educational Attainment of Respondents

Educational Attainment	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Illiterate	15	21.42
Primary	20	28.57
Secondary	16	22.85
Senior Secondary	11	15.71
Graduation	8	11.42

Interpretation

The table illustrates the distribution of respondents according to their educational attainment. It is observed that the majority of respondents have primary education, followed by secondary education. A considerable proportion of women are illiterate, while a moderate number have attained senior secondary education, and only a small number are graduates. This variation in educational levels provides a suitable basis for examining the role of education in stress management among rural women.

Table 2: Level of Stress among Rural Women by Educational Attainment in Okhalkanda Block

Educational Attainment	High Stress Level (No. of respondents)	Moderate Stress Level (No. of respondents)	Low Stress Level (No. of respondents)
Illiterate	10	03	02
Primary	08	07	05
Secondary	03	06	07
Senior Secondary	02	03	06
Graduation	01	03	04

Interpretation

The data indicates that stress levels differ across

educational categories. It is observed that illiterate women experience higher levels of stress compared to educated women. As the level of education increases, fewer women report high levels of stress, while the number of women with moderate and low stress increases. This suggests that education plays a significant role in reducing stress and enhancing coping abilities among rural women.

Table3: Major Causes of Stress among Rural Women by Educational Status

Causes of Stress	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary	Graduation
Financial Problems	10	12	14	04	02
Household Responsibilities	15	11	16	06	03
Child/Elderly Care	12	10	12	07	01
Health Issues	07	09	11	08	04
Agricultural Workload	14	18	10	09	06
Lack of Family Support	13	10	08	02	00
Limited Resources	10	09	07	05	04
Lack of Awareness about Mental Health	15	06	03	01	00

Interpretation

The above table illustrates the most common causes of stress among rural women across different educational levels. It is observed that household responsibilities and agricultural workload are the most prominent sources of stress across all categories, indicating the heavy burden of domestic and economic duties on rural women. Financial problems also emerge as a significant factor, particularly among women with lower educational attainment. Illiterate women are more affected by lack of awareness, limited resources, and lack of family support, which further increases their stress levels. In contrast, women with higher educational attainment experience a relatively wider range of stress factors, including health-related issues and work-related responsibilities. This indicates that educational attainment influences not only the intensity of stress but also rural women's awareness and identification

of stressors. Educated women are better equipped to recognize and articulate different types of stress, whereas less educated women may be less aware of certain psychosocial challenges.

Table 4: Coping strategies for Stress Management among Rural women across Educational Categories

Coping Strategies	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary	Graduation
Communication with Family/Friends	11	13	11	08	06
Religious Practices	13	12	09	05	03
Physical Activities	09	11	10	07	05
Watching TV	05	08	09	06	04
Self-Reflection	03	05	08	07	06
Ignoring the problems	11	09	06	03	01

Interpretation

The table highlights the various coping strategies adopted by rural women to manage stress across different educational levels. It is observed that illiterate women are more inclined to adopt traditional and emotion-based coping strategies such as religious practices, communication with family and friends, and, in some cases, ignoring problems. In contrast, educated women are more likely to adopt constructive and proactive coping mechanisms such as self-reflection and physical activities. The use of such strategies reflects greater awareness, better decision-making capacity, and a more active approach to stress management. Overall, the findings indicate that education plays a significant role in enhancing the effectiveness and diversity of coping strategies among rural women.

Table 5: Comparison of Stress Levels and Coping Strategies across Educational Categories

Educational Attainment	High Stress Level (No. of Respondents)	Better Coping Strategies (Moderate & Low Stress Level)
Illiterate	10	05
Primary	08	12

Secondary	03	13
Senior Secondary	02	09
Graduation	01	07

Interpretation

The comparison demonstrates a significant relationship between educational attainment, stress levels, and coping strategies among rural women. It is evident that women with lower levels of education, particularly illiterate respondents, experience higher levels of stress and exhibit lower coping ability. In contrast, women with higher educational attainment show lower levels of high stress and a greater tendency toward effective coping strategies, as reflected in higher numbers within the moderate and low stress categories. This suggests that education enhances women's awareness, analytical thinking, and problem-solving skills, enabling them to manage stress more effectively. Therefore, the findings highlight the importance of education in improving stress management and overall mental well-being among rural women.

DISCUSSION

These findings align with Lazarus and Folkman's Psychological Stress and Coping Theory, which emphasizes that stress depends on individuals' perception and their ability to cope (Sen, A., 1999). Educated women are better able to appraise stressful situations and adopt problem-focused coping strategies, whereas less educated women tend to rely on emotion-focused approaches such as avoidance or religious practices.

Furthermore, these findings can also be understood through the Capability Approach proposed by Amartya Sen, which highlights that education enhances individuals' ability to make informed choices and effectively deal with life challenges.

Furthermore, the Human Capital Theory reinforces these findings by emphasizing that education enhances individuals' knowledge, skills, decision-making capacity, and overall productivity and socio-economic outcomes (Becker, G. S., 1964). This helps women manage challenges more effectively and reduce their stress levels.

CONCLUSION

This research focuses on the relationship among education, stress, and coping strategies among rural women in Okhalkanda block. The findings clearly reveal that educational attainment has a significant impact on both stress experience and the ability to manage it effectively.

According to the findings, women with minimal or no formal education report higher levels of stress and rely more on emotion-focused coping mechanisms. On the other hand, educated women show substantially lower stress levels and greater use of adaptive, problem-focused coping strategies to deal with everyday difficulties.

Taken together, the study concludes that education serves as an essential factor in improving psychological resilience and coping skills among rural women. Improving access to education and awareness in rural areas can therefore significantly contribute to enhanced mental well-being and stress management among rural women. The findings also emphasize the significance of targeted educational and mental health awareness programs in rural regions.

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