

A Case Study :

ERGONOMIC PROBLEMS IN HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

It is worth mentioning that household activities have their own worth and dignity as the means by which a comfortable and pleasant environment is created and maintained in addition to fulfilling the needs of family members for food, clothing and shelter. Therefore, it is necessary to give due attention to this area of household ergonomics and work out ways and means so as to make the life of homemakers healthy and comfortable. A survey was conducted in three selected villages from two agro climatic regions of Tamil Nadu State. The data were collected through a questionnaire prepared for this purpose and analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). It is suggested that investigations to determine the amount of physiological effort, the optimum dimensional accord between equipment and user, and the provision of satisfactory environmental conditions, are needed in order to assure that the housewife performs her tasks with the minimum of unnecessary effort and maximum satisfaction.

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In Indian homes, women spend a lot of time in various kitchen and domestic activities. Therefore, home ergonomics is becoming very important amongst home scientists, ergonomists, industrialists, builders and interior designers. Indian rural housewives spend 41.5 per cent of calories of energy for household activities (Saraswathy *et al.*, 1987). Studies (Varghese, 1994) indicated that Indian women spend about 5 to 7 hours a day in the kitchen for cooking and related activities which amounts to about ¼ of their life period. Their other activities include house cleaning, washing clothes, arranging things in house properly and making the home environment comfortable and lively. It is estimated that about 1.5 lakh minor or major accidents occur every year in these activities. Most of these accidents occur due to improper handling of knives and other household equipment, electric shocks, faulty flooring, improper storage and also due to gas leakage. The storage area and work counters were not within the normal reaches of homemakers and that was one of the major reasons for discomfort (Oberoi *et al.*, 1996). In view of the above, a study was undertaken in Namakkal, Salem and Nilgris Districts of Tamil Nadu state to identify the ergonomical problems faced by the women during the household activities.

METHODOLOGY

Three villages were selected from two agro climatic

regions of Tamil Nadu State. In each village 25 homemakers were interviewed in person. The data were collected through a questionnaire prepared for this purpose.

The data on ergonomical problems during household activities were analyzed to get the overall view of various ergonomical parameters on the basis of responses received from all the homemakers from three villages. Percentage of total homemakers whose responses were affirmative to a particular ergonomical problem was calculated on the basis of total homemakers who have given their responses for a particular activity. The values thus obtained for different activities from different villages were averaged to get the mean value for those activities. All the data collected were coded and analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Study showed that most of the women spend about 4 to 6 hours a day in the kitchen for cooking and related activities. In addition to household work she was also engaged in agricultural activities to meet her family's food supply. The amount of time spent on various household tasks varied with the different socio-economic status of family. The type of family in the study area is shown in Fig.1. About 67 per cent of families were nuclear in nature.

All the respondents felt that washing clothes involves maximum drudgery followed by cleaning house and cattle shed cleaning as depicted in Fig.2. The commonly used