

Women at work: An ergonomics perspective

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■ **ABSTRACT** : A woman is the nucleus around whom the family, the society and the whole community moves. Women now have multiple roles, being responsible not only for food production and processing but also domestic chores, income generation and care of dependants. Presently, they constitute one-third of the agricultural labour force and about 48 per cent of self-employed farmers. Furthermore, management and involvement of Indian women in farming enterprise has been on rise in recent years especially in better endowed rural regions (Praveena *et al.*, 2005). Women have to do jobs that are time and labour intensive. Women spend long hours with much labour in respective operations resulting in fatigue and drudgery. With scant availability of labour-saving technologies and poor working conditions, all these responsibilities significantly limit the time, which women can spend on productive activities. Therefore, the life of women is full of drudgery at every stage. Ergonomics matters particularly to women because they experience a high number of the musculo skeletal disorders (MSDs) and other health problems due to work that are the most severe and the most costly. This review summarizes the work drudgery in various aspects in which women are involved including the household work, farm and allied activities. The major concerns, risks and injuries to which women are exposed and possible strategies for the efficiency and improved health of women while at work.

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India is passing through a major socio-demographic, epidemiological, technological and media transition. The political, economic and social changes have altered the roles that women play. Women now have multiple roles; being responsible not only for food production and processing but also domestic chores, income generation and care of dependants. Due to the dual responsibility at home as well as at work places outside the home, there is a greater pressure for productivity enhancement, quality work and profitability. It is estimated that on an average, the Indian woman, especially in the poverty group spends above five hours per day more than the Indian man in work, including the visible burden of family. Their long periods of often repetitive work can be a source of fatigue and poor occupational health. Further, discrimination, low skills and family care obligations often mean that women's time commands a low return compared with that of men (Lewenhak, 1992).

The plight of poor rural women is rather worse. Every

dawn brings with it a long search of fuel fodder and water. It does not matter if the women are old, young or pregnant, crucial household needs have to be met after weary day. Among its principal causes in rural areas are poor working conditions, poor design of new technology and inadequate safety precautions. Women's physiological characteristics and reproductive requirements make them especially vulnerable to work-related illhealth. The energy spent on work, comprising of housework, livestock, farm work and self-employment increased significantly during the peak season. It is also estimated that on an average, the Indian woman, especially in the poverty group spends above five hours per day more than the Indian man in work, including the visible burden of family. Presently, they constitute one-third of the agricultural labour force and about 48 per cent of self employed farmers. Furthermore, management and involvement of Indian women in farming enterprise has been on rise recent years especially in better endowed rural regions (Praveena *et al.*, 2005).