

A STUDY ON STRESS AND ITS EFFECTS AT WORKPLACE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Anushka Sharma, Dr. Roshita Jain

Student, Grade XII, Professor, Department of Management,
Neerja Modi School, Jaipur, India
Aishwarya College, Udaipur,

Abstract : *The term stress is an imbalance between the mental and emotional levels of a person. Stress is generated when both the internal and external pressures exceeds the individual's resources to cope up with their situation. Recently, it has been observed that the level of stress is growing in the organizational work frame. Researchers are very eager to identify the various parameters that results in generation of various types of stress among the employees of the organization and along with this, they are also finding various solutions to lower the stress levels so as to enhance the organizational productivity.*

The present paper is an attempt to elaborate and explain the reviews of the various stress and its effects at workplace. The study will be able to give a screenshot of the various factors responsible for the creation of stress and the techniques used to minimize the stress. Employees are very likely to experience some or many stressors which may test their ability to cope with adapting to a new environment, balancing a heavy work load, making new friends, becoming more independent, and dealing with other issues. Looking from a closer perspective, the college students encounters a number of challenges in his day to day life, therefore the whole idea of an existing and vibrant workplace is unveiled by these challenges which in turn contribute to stress and if not dealt with can only escalate and hamper their academic performance, emotional and social well-being.

The present paper examines the sources and effects of stress at the workplace. It is hoped that the findings of the given study will help the employees to deal with various types of stress and come up with enhanced organizational benefits.

IndexTerms - Stress, Work-related Stress, Workplace

I. INTRODUCTION

Work-related stress is a huge problem throughout the world that not only make impact on the physical and mental health of the employees, but it also produces negative impact on the growth of the organizations. The figure reported are very high that cannot be ignored. As per the survey, nearly three-quarters of American workers experienced physical symptoms of stress due to work. The main reason identified for the work-related stress arises is the mismatch between the capacity and the capability to cope with the growing stress. When the level of stress is tolerable, employee can cope up with his/her work effectively but as soon as the stress level increases, it directly start affecting the mental, physical and emotional health of the employee giving rise in the decreased organizational productivity and performance. It also starts affecting the employees public and private relationships[1]. A person can't control everything in his work environment, but it doesn't mean that he is inefficient and powerless, but he can take certain steps to protect himself from the adverse effects of stress and further improves the job satisfaction.

It is the time to take action if stress in the job is interfering with your work performance, physical and emotional health. Even if the employee has high stress level in his job, there are several ways to reduce your different stress levels and restore a better and healthy sense of control at work. Workers who are stressed today can be disabled tomorrow. 60 to 80 percent of accidents on the job is due to Stress-related distraction, as per the American Institute of Stress. Workers compensation claims for stress have increased substantially every year, threatening to bankrupt the system in several states[2].

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the causes and symptoms of various stress among employees.
2. To identify the sources and various effects of stress.
3. To find out the solution to cope up with various types of stress.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Stress is defined in terms of its physical and physiological effects on a person, and can be a mental, physical, or emotional strain. Stress occurs due to a demand that exceeds the individual's coping ability, disrupting his or her psychological equilibrium”. Hence, in the workplace environment stress occurs when the employee perceives a situation to be too difficult to handle, and is threatening to his or her well-being. Workplace stress is the result of the interaction of the worker and the conditions of work. There are different opinions on the importance of worker characteristics versus working conditions as the primary cause workplace stress. The difference in the viewpoints is the basis for existence of different strategies in preventing stress at work. Variations in individual characteristics such as personality and coping skills can be critical in predicting whether certain job conditions will result in stress. Specifically, a stressful condition for one person may not be a problem for another person. Stress-related disorders encompass a broad array of conditions, including psychological disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder) and other types of emotional strain (e.g., dissatisfaction, fatigue, tension), maladaptive behaviors (e.g., aggression, substance abuse), and cognitive impairment (e.g., concentration and memory problems). Workplace stress is also linked with various biological reactions that may ultimately lead to compromised health, such as cardiovascular disease or in extreme cases death [3].

Stress factor not only affects how you interact with others but also how you perform in daily life. All above is about negative stress and its consequences are negative to the individual as well as for organizations and society. There is another type of stress which is essential for every individual one not only to come into action but also to perform at the best. This type of stress is called eustress and it has positive

consequences on the individuals, organizations and society, that's why it is called positive stress as well. This is the positive stress which enables one to get up in the morning and force a student to prepare for the exam but it is positive at certain limit otherwise it will be negative and thus damaging [4].

People have different level of stress even in similar situations because of the various reasons. The intensity of job stress relies on the degree of the job demands and the ability of the individual to control these job demands or freedom to make decisions at the job[5].

We cannot avoid stress at workplace and in our personal lives. Some organizations have low stress and some have high stress which adversely affects the health of its employees. Justice in an organization is a circumstantial factor at work which creates positive low stress in an organizational environment. There is negative relationship between workplace stress and health of an employee. Long working hours and work burden are observed the most important stressors in this study[6].

The word stress is being daily used by most of the people but the meaning of stress is not clear to them. All the current definitions of stress state that people experience stress because of the demands or pressure, it is an individual experience and ability of the individual to manage the 96 things is effected by the stress. Job stress arises when there is imbalance between the job demands and abilities and skills of an employee to deal with these job demands [7].

Many researcher argue that stress at workplace has an impact to performance in one way or another. Occupational stress inadvertently consequences low organizational performance[8].

Job stress although has belittling impact on any organization and individual's performance but can shape dire consequences when related to health care[9].

The importance of stress is highlighted nowadays by the employers to manage and reduce stress through practical guidelines in public sector but not in private organizations[10].

"Stress is a combination of physical and psychological reactions to events that challenge or threaten us. In normal circumstances, the stress response is a powerful protective mechanism that allows us to deal with sudden changes, dangers or immediate demands. In abnormal circumstances, stress overwhelms our protective mechanisms, leading to serious negative health outcomes"[11].

Work plays an important role in the lives of most people. After all, a salaried job pays the bills and enables us to survive. Work, whether paid or unpaid, also helps us to shape our identity, gives a purpose to our existence, allows us – or forces us – to structure our time, gives us a useful way to spend our days, contributes to our social status, and finally, brings us into contact with others (Siegrist, 2010). When an employee is unable to meet the demands of work (within the time available), a work pressure problem arises that can lead to work stress. Work stress can eventually cause the employee to feel excessively tired, exhausted and depressed, as well as to suffer physical ailments. The employee can become overstrained or, if the situation persists for a lengthy period of time, start to suffer from burn-out[12]. Most of the literature examining reduced hour (or workload) arrangements, which involve a reduction in workload or hours with a commensurate pay reduction, focus on employer interest in retaining human capital, in particular top talent [13].

Even if, or when, there is no effect on employees work life balance, flextime are often associated with improved organizational performance [14].

A study in UK indicated that the majority of the workers were unhappy with the current culture where they were required to work extended hours and cope with large workloads while simultaneously meeting production targets and deadlines [15].

IV. CAUSES OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

The top reason of stress for people in the workplace, in top to down priority, are:

- Low salaries (44 percent)
- Heavy workloads (43 percent)
- Lack of opportunity for growth and advancement (42 percent)
- Unrealistic job expectations (40 percent)
- Job insecurity (34 percent)

The major causes of stress at workplace include : Fear of being terminated, overtime due to staff deficiency, Lack of autonomy, high expectations from top management, poor salary structure, unhealthy working environment, poor coordination between team members, Long working hours, Changes taking place within the organization, Tight deadlines meeting the projects, Changes to duties, work assigned is boring, Insufficient skills for the job, Over-supervision, Lack of proper resources and equipments, Few promotional opportunities, Harassment, Discrimination, Crisis incidents, meeting adequate Job content and demands, Physical work environment, Change in workplace management, Lack of back support[1][2].

V. SIGNS OF STRESS

The symptoms of work-related stress basically includes physical, psychological and behavioral.

- The main Physical symptoms are Headaches, Fatigue, Uneven Heartbeat, Muscular tension, insomnia, diarrhoea or constipation, Dermatological disorders.
- Psychological symptoms include Anxiety, Irritability, Depression, sense of being overwhelmed and unable to cope Cognitive difficulties, Discouragement, Pessimism.
- Behavioural symptoms include Isolation, Mood swings, frustration, Diminished creativity and initiative, Degrade performance, unhealthy interpersonal relationships, Absenteeism, and irritability, Disinterest, Trauma, Aggression and impatience,

The table below shows the Stress Survey of Employer , both Men and Women in a leading consulting firm:

Employee Survey on Stress				
Cause of Employee Stress	Employee who say stress affects business Performance		Employee taking strong actions	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Long hours, doing more with less	28%	20%	5%	2%
Work/life balance	12%	20%	16%	10%
Technologies that expand availability	20%	9%	6%	8%
Managers' inability to recognize stress	16%	12%	7%	3%
Managers' inability to find solutions for stress	12%	18%	14%	8%
Extra time, problems related to security	8%	12%	2%	3%
Safety fears	5%	12%	27%	18%

VI. ADVANTAGES OF STRESS MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE :

- Improved mental and physical health
- Reduced absenteeism
- Better work engagement
- Increased productivity
- Improved Inter-personal Relations
- Improved job satisfaction
- Overall costs to employer

VII. INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

Some companies have turned to “out-of-the-box” approaches for stress management. Here are few strategies:

- **Green workplaces :** In a recent study, it has been found that indoor plants have significant impact on job satisfaction of employees. “Green” elements reduce anxiety and frustration that ultimately enhance the workplace productivity.
- **In-house appreciation and recognition program :** A letter of appreciation, Incentive programs, job assurance and performance based salary hike plays a major role in reduced stress.
- **In-house art programs:** Burlington, Massachusetts-based Lightbridge, an e-commerce payment management company, established in-house art programs to help employees channel stress.
- **Ergonomically designed workplace :** The color in the office, sitting arrangement, nature oriented wallpapers, re-creation area are the important considerations while designing office space.
- **Pets in the office:** Study have found that pets can have calming effect on employees which reduce blood pressure.

VIII. CONCLUSION

It has been found in the study that the major sources of stress have a direct relation with the stress level of the employees. The reasons for stress vary according to employees psychology. The results of this study recommend adding stress management program specifically designed to address the needs of employees. Stress management workshops should be organized specifically gear to the stressors encountered by workplace. Stress in the workplace cannot be eliminated completely but we can better prepare employees to manage it. Organizational change and individual stress management can be pro-active measures to promote healthier and productive workplace and reduce the health care cost.

IX. SUGGESTIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) Suggestions for Top Management.

- Appreciation and incentives for even the small positive changes.
- Emphasis on both organizational and individual change.
- Identify employees stress and provide adequate support immediately.
- Realistic goals and targets.

- Emphasis on communications campaign.
- Long-range strategies customized to the employee population and company culture.

(2) Suggestions for employees

- Get involved with various activities other than your own profile to get diverted.
- Develop stress management abilities through Yoga and Meditation program.
- Increase stress management abilities and learn to seek support
- Involvement in various sports and cultural activities.
- Effectively manage emotions and develop an optimistic view towards life.
- Make use of family support and release stress-reduced emotions.

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