



MANAGING STRESS AT WORKPLACE – A STUDY ON MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract:

The success of an organisation depends not only on the capital investment, production rate, and profits but also on the human resources that work tirelessly to earn those profits. While the holy books of all religions and all walks of life say that man needs to rest at least one day a week, for a better productive life, organisations not only must concentrate on their production rates but also on the welfare of their human resources. Stress in the workplace is an important aspect that employees face most of their work time. Stress at work can be a result of various factors in the environment.

This paper attempts to identify a few of these factors and try to find and understand the intensity with which these factors affect the employees from the medical profession on his / her performance and the organisational performance as a whole.

Human resources all over the globe have been facing some challenges in the workplace. Important among all of them is managing stress due to the complex nature of the job, the competitive work environment, technological changes, and changes in human attitude. The word Stress is so widely used today that its reach and meaning remain unclear. “Stress” is the general term used to represent the pressures of life and work-related stress arises when there is a conflict between the demands of the job and the resources and the competencies, skills, and knowledge of an individual worker. Excessive work-related stress can compromise

an individual's capacity to manage their surroundings, which can ultimately impact job performance and organizational productivity.

Stress, according to Hans Selye¹, is the body's general reaction to any demand. According to a different source, stress is a state of strain on one's feelings, cognitive abilities, and physical state. The history of the existence of Stress in man's life is very long and is certainly beyond the scope of this paper to consider in detail. Usually, Stress is seen as having three main elements at all times says the European Agency for Safety & Health at Work³. Upon closer inspection, these components are identified as follows: risk causes (stressors); mental and physical responses to these risk factors (strain); and the psychosocial fallout from these responses (stress outcomes). The reaction an individual gives to various factors is an appropriate means to conceptualize work-related stress because it recognizes the interaction between the individual employee and their work environment. It is often specifically used in official definitions of stress. For example, the European Commission⁴ defined stress as “.... a pattern of emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and psychological reactions to adverse and noxious aspects of work content, work organization, and work environment. It further states that it is a state characterized by high levels of arousal and distress and after by feelings of not coping”.

Employers should take reasonable measures to control the well-known workplace stressors that currently exist, even though it may not be possible to completely eradicate all negative stress from the workplace. Effective management of stress at work makes a good business strategy. It means reducing sources causing stress and controlling its negative consequences helps the business to run smoothly for a long period. Besides the financial loss aspects at the workplace, employers also have to carry out specific responsibilities to reduce stress under workplace health and safety legislation. This law mandates that companies protect each employee's physical, mental, and emotional well-being while they are at work.

The rapidly growing economy in India has come to a stage where its future stability lies in the hands of business entrepreneurs. It is strengthened by understanding work behaviour and various problems that revolve around the place where people work. One of the major problems that pose the industry today is the Stress at workplace. The Indian Government has adopted The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 which came into effect on May 29, 2018. Understanding the employee's rights given under such Acts in different countries will help organizations to provide a better environment at the workplace for their employees. Creating awareness among employees regarding the rights under these Acts is better than silencing them as these Acts are established for the good of the organizations too.

The Indian Economy when compared to the past 10 years has seen tremendous changes concerning the work environment resulting in dynamic shifts in the functioning of the Human Resources. The global impact which includes Technological, Economic, demographic, and other factors brought about profound changes in how employers now treat their employees at work.

Theories of Stress

NIOSH⁵ (National Institute of Safety and Health) explained the concept of stress through two theories – The biological theory of Stress and the Psychological theory of stress. The biological Theory of stress is further explained through somatic-weakness theory and specific-reaction theory. the second theory is Psychological Theory.

According to the biological theories of stress, psychiatric problems can be explained by the unique vulnerabilities or hyperactivity of a certain organic system after a stressful event. The stress is interpreted as a reaction to the necessary quantum of biological material, which may be abundant or insufficient. The Somatic weakness theory and Specific reaction theory are briefly explained as follows:

Somatic-weakness Theory

Somatic weakness theory's fundamental premise is that certain physiological disorders are caused by weak body parts that are more likely to produce a particular type of stress. Certain organ systems may continue to be weak due to a variety of circumstances, such as inherited deficiencies, undiagnosed childhood illnesses, or dietary imbalances. When several causes come together, they might weaken and make an organ system more susceptible to stress.

Specific-reaction Theory

Specific-reaction theory states that there is no one definitive reason that can be identified as the primary cause of stress. Individuals react to stress in different ways, and each organic system has a mechanism for handling constant stresses from the environment. According to the specific-reaction theory, a given psycho-physiological condition is likely to center around the body system that responds the most.

Psychoanalytic theory explains how stress diminishes the significance of conscious-emotional states unique to each disorder, while psychological theories explain how different psycho-physiological disorders develop in terms of elements like personality traits, unconscious emotional states, cognitive appraisal, and particular coping mechanisms. "Because of the pronounced degree of inhibition, the damming up of such hostile impulses, if it persists, may generate stronger defense mechanisms to keep pent-up aggressiveness in

control. These patients typically perform worse at their jobs, which makes them less likely to succeed in competition and fosters even stronger animosity against less restrained, more successful rivals."

In contrast to psychoanalytic theory, behavioral and cognitive theories explain stress in terms of behavioral and cognitive components. The sympathetic nervous system is activated by the experiences and perceptions. But psychological regrets and resentments are too deeply ingrained to be simply shaken out of the system. Compared to perceived or actual external threats, they are more difficult to flee. Furthermore, they are difficult to ignore because they frequently excite our sympathetic nervous system. An arousal of this kind maintains the body in a constant state of emergency. Maintaining a stable behavioral pattern in these situations is intolerable. The daily challenge is to maintain the proper balance between parasympathetic and sympathetic activity. More often than not, one loses their balance and becomes overwhelmed by distress. Such physiological alterations may persist longer than intended. This adds to the already existing imbalance in our system between sympathetic and parasympathetic activity. According to certain psychologists, man's higher cerebral functions surpass his physical capabilities. This is the natural contrast that exists in humans, albeit very quietly and softly. At very high or deeper levels of awareness, moral, valuation, or attitude shifts may be experienced, and our body may not be easily and immediately adjusted to such experiences. It is noted that the external demands of our higher mental capacities are too much for our bodies to handle. They are not made to weather the storms that our minds can produce. Therefore, it appears that human experiences are always greater than their ability to handle them.

Causes of Stress:

There are many factors that contribute to employee stress, but most research has focused on the relationship between an employee's physical and mental health and the working conditions of a specific job. Korn Hauser⁷ discovered, for instance, that long and uncomfortable hours, the need to work quickly and physically demanding jobs, and unpleasant working environments are all strongly associated with poor mental health. For managers, workload is a bigger source of stress than working circumstances. Workloads have been distinguished into quantitative and qualitative loads by French and Caplan⁸. Too much work is said to as quantitative, whereas too hard work is referred to as qualitative.

Role ambiguity: Ambiguity, which is defined as a lack of clarity, arises when a person is not fully informed about their job function. Role ambiguity arises when there is a lack of understanding regarding the goals of the work role, the coworkers, management expectations, and the extent and responsibilities of the position.

Role conflict: When someone in a certain job role is pulled in different directions by competing demands and is performing tasks they do not want to perform or do not believe are necessary for the position, role conflict arises.

According to Maslach and Leiter (1997)⁹ in their research paper, "The truth about burnout-How organizations cause personal stress and what to do about it," the regular occurrence of role stressors prevents an employee from meeting organizational expectations and can result in a variety of consequences commonly recognized as symptoms of role strain. The authors further say that these symptoms include lower organizational commitment, decreased job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, poorer work performance, negative attitude towards work, tension at work, and anxiety. They claim that there is a high correlation between these role strain signs and burnout symptoms.

Senior employees in any organization frequently have their job profiles expanded. This is because having more responsibilities often requires them to spend more time working alone, attending meetings, and interacting with others. As a result, they must also spend more time trying to meet deadlines and other schedule constraints.

In addition to the more obvious causes such as stress, competitiveness among coworkers, and workplace politics, relationship pressure can also have the opposite effect on social support. Problem sharing will probably be discouraged at highly competitive managerial levels out of a concern of coming across as weak, and numerous studies specifically note the remote lifestyle of the top executive as an additional source of stress.

Medical professionals usually have to work beyond their working hours whenever it is required. It is the life of the patient that is the primary priority for every medical profession. Though long hours are inevitable, if the organization can have a sufficient amount of rest intervals for doctors and other supporting staff, they can work much more efficiently. Generally, working beyond the working time in any organization reflects the health of the organization. It either results so because of the inefficient performance of the individual employee or the improper planning and work control measures taken up by the management. It is also always not good to consider working for excessive hours in the organization as a symbol of loyalty and commitment by the employees towards the organization, but too many extra hours worked by the employees is not healthy for the organization in the long run.

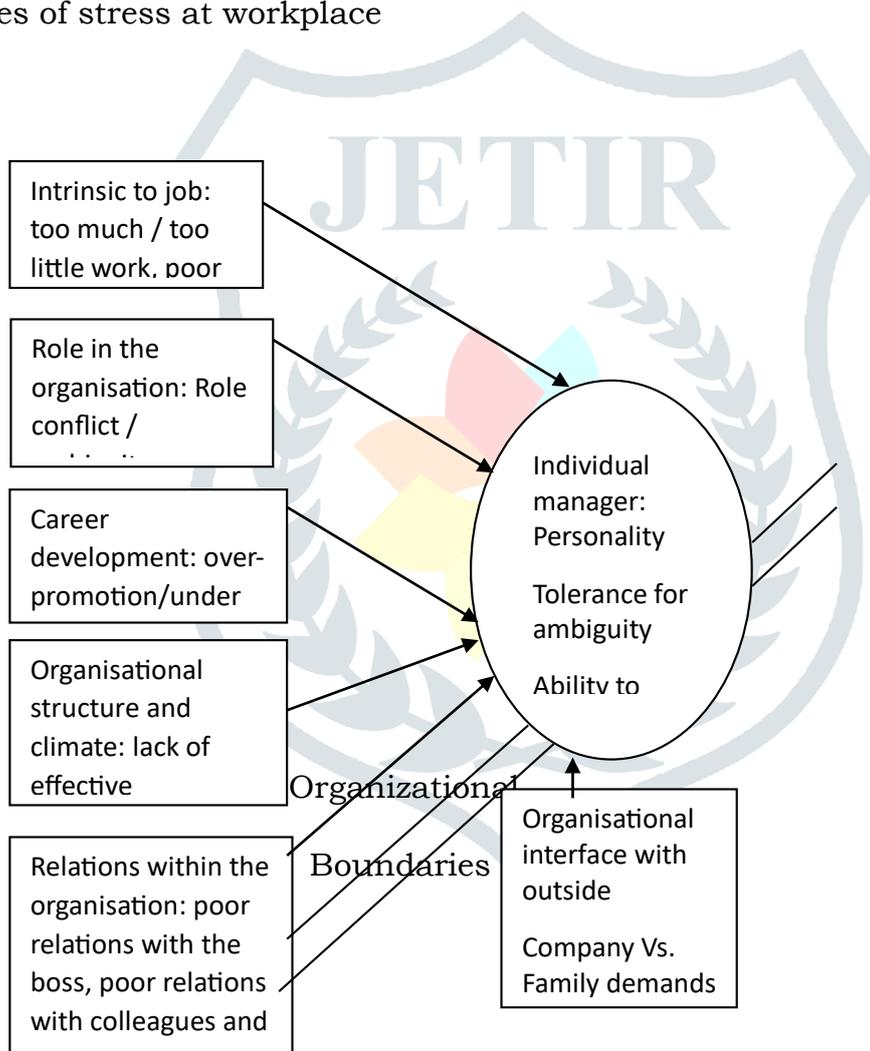
The constant risk-taking decisions made by a doctor or by a nurse in the absence of the doctor, by every other technical staff, mean life and death to the patient. Constant vital decisions taken by the physician might become routine to them but, the stress felt by the doctor can be understood only after he/she relaxes after the outcome of the decision. The

complete education of the physician will be judged by the type of decisions he makes at his workplace concerning his patient's health.

Every profession seeks an appreciation from its source of income or the workplace. Where there is appreciation there will also be motivation. Promising appreciation at the end of every motivated completed task will yield good results for the organisation. Therefore, motivation, when denied to the employees', might cause stress in this particular profession also. It is also found that the shift system at work constantly demands a change in the pattern of the lifestyle. Some days the employee is required to sleep during the day and work at night,

Sources of stress in the workplace are shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Sources of stress at workplace



Source: Cooper and Payne¹¹, (Eds) "Stress at work", Wiley and Sons, New York.

Consequences of Stress:

Stress at the workplace can bring about a whole range of unproductive behaviours as follows: Unnecessary interpersonal disputes that result in roadblocks and pointless territorial battles, digressions that obscure matters and perplex priorities, delays when making decisions and implementations, Chaotic activity and disorganization, lack of focus, Absenteeism, Absentmindedness, Drinking alcohol, High level of mistakes that might become fatal in the case of the patient's health, Facing emotional problems, Having work-life conflict which creates restlessness and impatience in the work life. With all the above unfavourable factors at the workplace, organizational growth is not possible, in addition to employee development.

Review on Stress and medical professionals:

Stress is felt and manifested in different forms in different professions. Though a small amount of stress is required to cause some positive energy in the individual, large amounts of stress will become fatal to both the organization and the individual. The medical field is also not exceptional. Doctors, Nurses, and other paramedical staff who work in hospitals feel stress at work. Doctors who treat patients, if put under stressful conditions, might cause serious problems to the patients that they treat harming their life itself. Therefore, individuals and organizations must strive to reduce the negative causes and consequences subsequently to have a healthy and safe society.

A cross-sectional study was conducted between 17th and 13th November 1993 to examine the stress, anxiety, and coping skills of 12 doctors at King Khalid University¹². This study consisted of a self-administered questionnaire distributed to all physicians working in various medical fields. The study shows a crisis among doctors at the hospital but not significantly high. Night calls are the most common form of stress, with two-thirds of people healthily coping with stress. Doctors who make mistakes or nearly miss are more likely to experience occupational stress, according to research published by the Society for Quality and Safety from San Jose Mercury News Reports¹³. According to the study, doctors involved in medical errors were most likely to report stress at work, but a third of doctors dealing with near misses also reported too much stress. Amy Waterman¹⁴, a psychologist at the University of Washington in her research findings said that hospitals should support doctors after medical errors that can lead to depression-causing smoking cessation or make other mistakes.

Surveys were conducted by Ali Khan Khuwaja, Riaz Qureshi, Marie Andrdes, Zafar Fatmi, and Nadya Khan Huwaja¹⁵ to gauge stress levels and work discontent among male and female doctors at Karachi Teaching Hospital. According to the study's findings, the

majority of the physicians employed by these Karachian institutions expressed discontent with their workplaces and significant levels of stress related to their jobs. This implies that immediate action is required to manage and control them.

In the first study of its sort conducted in Yemen on physicians and stress, Sana's University¹⁶ found that the majority of doctors reported experiencing both physical and psychological signs of stress. Only 405 Yemeni doctors who work in several public teaching hospitals in Sana'a the al-Thawra, ai_Gumhouri, al-Sab'een, and Kuwait were included in this study. There are about 1143 doctors working in these hospitals in various specialties and fields. The purpose of this study was to demonstrate Yemeni physicians' job pressures from several organizational, professional, and social angles. The release of this study coincided with a statement from Yemen's Minister of Public Health and Population stating that the country's infant mortality rates have decreased as a result of significant improvements in health service coverage and fortification rates, which have increased from 56% to 78% in recent years. Numerous doctors experience physical symptoms associated with stress, including back pain, upset stomach, and heartburn. This is according to the study. Among the symptoms reported by the doctors who took part in the poll were tapping fingers, difficulty focusing, difficulty getting out of bed in the morning, and easily distracted state.

Recent studies reveal that the causes and effects of occupational stress are gradually rising, maybe as a result of the quick changes in healthcare delivery systems and the quick advancement of science and technology in many medical specialties. Stress and financial standing were discovered to be strongly correlated by researchers. The study's findings suggest that medical professionals be hired, trained, and given additional opportunity to learn new skills and reduce work-related stress. Reducing stress can also be accomplished by ensuring that doctors work in a healthy atmosphere, meeting their social, economic, and psychological requirements, and offering them competitive compensation so they can do their tasks as effectively as possible.

Many other scholastic studies show that Employee Exhaustion caused due to stress at work can be fatal to the medical professionals and also their organizations. Emotional Exhaustion and stress have a strong influence on each other. Though many factors result in emotional exhaustion, work-related strain when it is not dealt with can result in emotional imbalance. Academy of Management, a reliable website suggests various other factors resulting in Emotional Exhaustion – Personal attributes of the worker, interpersonal milieu, as well as work itself, but is significantly impacted by the departmental environment, admin policies and practices, contradictory policies in the society, and so on.

Ms Shreedevi¹⁷ conducted a study in a corporate hospital in Hyderabad to understand the importance of stress management among medical professionals and found that emotional exhaustion and workload showed high stress at the workplace followed by working conditions.

In an empirical study conducted by a group of researchers in Ghana healthcare workers showed that stress at work has a significant impact on employees in the medical field¹⁸.

Medical workers suffer numerous pressures, including work overload, long work hours, lack of sleep, frequent exposure to emotionally charged situations, managing challenging patients, and staff conflicts, according to a study conducted by Ai Kakunje¹⁹. The primary factor contributing to the continuous burnout process among these professionals is their erratic social and familial lives, in addition to the stress they experience at work.

Need for the study:

Stress has become a common feature in most of the modern organisations due to several factors. As a result, various employees, especially women are facing several problems. The perceptions of employees on stress and some suggestions. Several studies revealed that stress leads to low productivity, low growth of employee's lack of work-life balance, psychological problems, and organizational ineffectiveness. This study is expected to bring about the causes and consequences of stress at the workplace, stressing different organisations.

Objectives of the study:

- To outline a brief review of the literature on workplace stress
- To present the causes and consequences of stress in the workplace
- To present the Stress model and perceptions of employees on stress management at the workplace.
- To understand the stressful conditions of health care service professionals.

Methodology:

The methodology adopted was on the basis of the primary as well as secondary data. The secondary source of data had been gathered from books, reports, records, and other literature available. Primary data was gathered from the employees and executives working in the medical profession. The data obtained is analysed and interpreted as under.

Results of the study:

S. No	Response	High Stress Per.	Low Stress Per.	Total Response Per.	Total Respondents
1	Physical working conditions	22	40	62	100
2	Workload	46	35	81	100
3	Role clarity	19	40	59	100
4	Responsibilities	38	22	60	100
5	Working for long hours	26	40	66	100
6	Decision-making at work	19	43	62	100
7	Motivation at work				100
8	Shift system at work	19	26	45	100
9	Performance Appraisal System	24	37	61	100
10	Pay Structure followed	22	38	60	100
11	Career development	23	31	54	100
12	Relationship with superiors	20	36	56	100
13	Relationship with colleagues	13	38	51	100
14	Rules and Regulations implement in the organization	12	38	50	100
15	While changes are implemented in the organization	9	38	47	100
19	Leadership in the organization	11	19	30	100
20	Organisations' efforts to reduce stress at work	11	33	44	100
21	Impact of stress on the quality of work	13	34	45	100
22	Impact of stress on individual health	55	45	100	100
23	Emotional stress felt due to stress at work	30	70	100	100
24	Absenteeism	24	70	94	100

Findings:

The percentage of low stress is found to be high among the respondents, but if those factors where the factor high stress is found at a significant level, can be reduced. Factors like workload which showed 46 % high stress, workplace responsibilities is about 38%, long hours of work at 26%, 50% on individual's health, 30 % on emotional balance, and 40 % on job performance is observed. Many studies have revealed that many doctors are dissatisfied with their jobs due to long working hours. Doctors are life givers but one has to remember that they are also humans who need to rest. A sufficient number of staff must be employed in hospitals to let doctors have a sufficient amount of rest through the shift system and to share their workload too. Though the percentage is lesser than the low-stress percentage, if organizations reduce the stress about these factors, the workforce in the organization can be more efficient.

Suggestions:

Stress adversely affects one's body's central nervous system. It also weakens the body's defenses thereby putting a person at a greater risk of coming down with various illnesses.

Stress reduction measures help to minimize various risks and improve the quality of life. To cope with tension, it is necessary to take recourse to physical exercise, change in lifestyle, improvement in quality of work life, yoga practice, and hobbies.

The following factors are to be borne in mind in any stress reduction program:

- Determine which management techniques are stressful and make an effort to alter them
- Maintaining physical fitness might help you maintain mental well-being.
- Apply the Indian notion of doing things apart from the desire to cause oneself sorrow.
- Create the concept of an executive group vacation as a stress-relieving technique.

The following methods help a lot in reduction of stress at the workplace:

A balanced diet, regular exercise, rearranging priorities, altering how one reacts to stress, and discovering coping and stress-reduction techniques Besides lunch breaks, employees can take regular short breaks from work by using relaxation techniques including deep breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, meditation, and vegetarianism, which lower

cholesterol levels in the body and lessen other complex effects of stress. Give medical professionals access to stress-reduction books in the hospital libraries so they can develop innovative methods for reducing workplace stress. Inexpensive management practices like humour at the workplace can also be used in hospitals and concerned institutions to reduce stress among their professionals. Though this practice is used in a very informal way, humour at work needs more promotion and awareness of its benefits. It needs to be understood that humour at work can lighten the situation and enhance the employee's efficiency, in this case, the medical professionals.

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