FROM STRESS TO MINDFULNESS: MENTAL WELL-BEING STRATEGIES FOR IT PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

In today's constantly evolving work environment, employees need more than merely a salary to sustain in any organization. The brains behind many technological systems and infrastructures are IT specialists. Undeniably, stress can significantly lower IT professional's productivity. Rising mental health issues and burnout are growing concerns for the IT industry workforce. Stress needs to be managed both on an individual level and organizational level. Organizations can reduce their employees' stress by identifying the sources of stress and providing creative physical, mental, emotional, and financial well-being strategies. However, this study specifically deals with the mental well-being of employees. The study employs a quantitative approach and primary data was gathered from IT professionals in Uttar Pradesh. Based on extant literature and primary data, this study reveals the sources of stress currently faced by the IT industry workforce. The findings emphasize the need for organizations to prioritize mental well-being, offering effective strategies to alleviate stress and foster a positive work environment. This study serves as a valuable guide for HR scholars, industry experts, and policymakers, providing actionable insights for building a happy, healthy, and mindful workforce for the growth of an organization.

Keywords: stress, mental health, well-being, IT professionals

1. INTRODUCTION

In the times of 'permacrisis', several studies and industry experts contend that Gen Z is the most stressed generation followed by Gen Y in the workplace. Generation Y known as Millennials are born between 1981 and 1996, while Generation Z called Zoomers is the generation born between 1997 and 2012. According to statistics, people between the ages of 18 and 25 are the least confident **(BBC Worklife, 2022)** and less engaged **(Gallup, 2022)** in their current job or career among all the generations. Compared to 59% of Gen Y, only 43% of Gen Z individuals feel extremely confident and proficient in every aspect of their position **(Carnegie, 2023).** There are

several causes for the increase in psychological problems among employees stemming from family, society, workplace dynamics, and individual mental, emotional, financial, and physical well-being. Employee burnout due to chronic stress was recognized as an illness by the World Health Organisation in 2019 **(WHO, 2019)**. In the past four years, there has been a significant shift in the landscape of workplace mental health, which the global pandemic has accelerated. Employees' mental health issues manifest in daily activities such as work, study, and social interactions, negatively impacting productivity, job stability, and societal harmony.

Ancient Greek philosophers were the first to explore the importance of well-being in their writings **(Diener *et al.* 1999)**. According to the Future Workplace 2021 HR sentiment poll, employee well-being and mental health were ranked as a key priority by 68% of senior HR leaders (of which 40% were CHROs). Companies that put their employees' health and wellbeing first will eventually have workers who do the same for the company's wellbeing. Employees are unable to use their strengths to contribute to the expansion of the company when they get exhausted and under stress. Employee well-being can be categorized into three aspects such as happiness, good health, and financial security of employees. If employee well-being is considered a fundamental right rather than just a means to improve performance, the organization's investment in human capital will fully maximize the potential of its workforce. **(Islam & Amin, 2021)**. Despite the necessity to prioritize a person's physical and nutritional health, mental health is one of the fundamental pillars of their performance yet is sometimes disregarded. On an individual level, employees can deal with stress by tracking their stressors, developing healthy habits (exercises, meditation, yoga, etc.), establishing work-life boundaries, switching off from work to get recharged, having open conversations with supervisors, and taking out time to just chill and relax. According to government statistics, the IT sector in India employs 4.5 million people and contributes 8% of the nation's GDP **(Bundhun, 2022)**.

After reviewing the existing literature, it was found that very few studies are focused on the stress faced by the young workforce, specifically Gen Y and Gen Z, in the IT industry based in Uttar Pradesh. To fill this research gap, this article outlines the current workplace stressors faced by millennials and post-millennial generations at the workplace. In addition, it describes how to cope with stress at work through creative mental well-being strategies. A list of creative mental well-being strategies has been provided for building a stress-free workforce in the IT Industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Salvagioni (2017) summarized the evidence of job burnout's consequences (physical, psychological, and occupational) through a systematic literature review. Chronic stress at work causes the condition of burnout, which has several negative effects on a person's health and well-being. Burnout has both personal and societal repercussions, which emphasize the necessity of early detection and preventive measures for this health condition in the workplace. **Chen *et al.* (2022)** examined the relationship between work stress, mental health, and performance of employees. They also analyzed the moderating role of servant leadership between work stress and the mental health of employees. The psychological well-being of employees can be defined as their ability to cope

with stress and their state of mental or emotional health. The increase in performance and target pressures leads to employee stress, burnout, and reduced productivity. Corporate employees' psychological well-being may be greatly impacted by goal pressure and performance. Therefore, employers need to create a work environment that is positive, upbeat, and supportive of a healthy work-life balance **(Priya *et al.,* 2023). Padmanabhan (2021)** found that work locus of control is positively correlated with workplace stress whereas job satisfaction is negatively correlated with workplace stress and work locus of control after analyzing the collected data using mean, S.D, Independent t-test, and Pearson's correlation coefficient. **Janssen *et al.* (2018)** explored the effects of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) on the mental health of employees. They observed that MBSR helps to improve the psychological functioning of employees. **Haddon (2018)** examined the impact of employee well-being on their performance at the workplace. He stated that employers should do more to safeguard the mental well-being of their employees because it is one of the major factors influencing productivity. A person's mental health can affect those around them in addition to themselves, which can have an impact on the productivity of a team or organization as a whole as well as the individual.

Su (2022) examined the correlation between income structure changes, consumption patterns, and employee mental health in an enterprise by calculating correlation cluster statistical results. He found that the normalization of epidemic prevention and control has had an impact on enterprise personnel's consumption psychology and mental health. **Dragano & Lunau (2020)** investigated whether the usage of digital technologies increases stress at work and further leads to mental health issues among employees. Workplace digitalization appears to have both benefits and drawbacks for workers' mental health. While the Millennial Generation and Gen Z share many characteristics, Gen Z also introduces new behavioural tendencies. Today's managers not only need to grasp how to handle young, inexperienced workers but also the distinct traits of the generation that have been moulded by their experiences. Every generation has concerns about the technologies and culture of the younger age. Better integrating new hires and achieving mutual success will result from understanding their behaviour and the unique demands they have at work **(Schroth, 2019). Panigrahi (2016)** stated the methods for managing stress such as getting enough sleep, engaging in sports, communicating with loved ones, developing relaxation routines, and giving up addictive substances. All of these must be utilized to reduce stress. The management can give the workers a forum to address their issues with stress by enabling proper training for them. Yoga, meditation, physical activity, and leisure pursuits can all improve the atmosphere where stress is managed. Even time management techniques are beneficial for reducing stress.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The study employs a descriptive design with a quantitative approach. Primary data were collected through a web-based structured questionnaire targeting employees in the IT industry located in Uttar Pradesh. 187 responses were obtained using convenience sampling combined with virtual snowball sampling techniques. Workplace stressors were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Not stressful at all") to 5 ("Extremely

stressful"). Additionally, coping mechanisms were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "Strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "Strongly agree". The scales of workplace stressors were adopted from the **American Psychological Association (2018)**, such as longer working hours, job insecurity, low salary, excessive and tiring commutes, increasing work demands, unrealistic deadlines, limited growth opportunities, challenging colleagues, excessive meetings, email overload, incompetent supervisors, meaningless targets, rapidly changing technology, lack of social support, insufficient job control, and conflicting demands. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and variance were employed to derive insights and present the findings.

4. WORKPLACE STRESS

Stress is typically defined as a divergence from the body's and mind's usual functioning. In the words of **(Arnod, 1960)**, "Stress is any condition that disturbs normal functioning". Workplace stress is the result of pressures being faced by employees exceeding their capacity to cope with them **(Neenan, 2018)**. Stress in the workplace can be categorized into internal and external causes. Internal causes are related to the mindset of an employee whereas external causes include job insecurity, long working hours, low salaries, autocratic managerial style, no control over work, etc. Stress is a state, not a disease. But it is a very potent illness-causing factor. It is well-recognized that prolonged, excessive stress can cause serious health issues. When under the proper amount of pressure, people can perform at their best. When the pressure is too severe, the performance declines **(Teasdale, 2006)**. A stressful situation is unpredictable, uncertain, ambiguous, or one that involves conflict, loss, or performance expectations. The pressure of work deadlines, excessive work demands, lack of emotional support, job insecurity, and lengthy commutes are some common causes of stress in the workplace. It can further cause behavioural changes in employees; they may behave indifferently showing short temperedness, irritation, and frustration in their behaviour. Stressed employees cannot learn new skills and competencies for the growth of an organization.

A stressful workplace can aggravate conditions like headaches, nausea, sleep disruptions, irritability, and difficulty concentrating. Chronic stress can lead to immune system deterioration, anxiety, sleeplessness, and high blood pressure. Additionally, it might aggravate existing medical issues like depression, obesity, and heart disease. People who feel extreme stress frequently respond to it in harmful ways, such as overeating, consuming unhealthy foods, smoking cigarettes, or abusing drugs and alcohol, which makes the issue worse **(APA, 2018)**. Unpaid overtime and "presenteeism" in the workplace create a stressful environment. On the other hand, a culture that involves employees in decision-making keeps them informed about what is going on within the business and offers top-notch amenities and recreational opportunities, which can help reduce the stress level of employees. Change within an organization is a major source of stress, particularly when inadequate consultation occurs. Individual contracts, relocation, restructuring or "downsizing," mergers, and redundancies within the company are a few examples of such changes.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1

Reliability Test Processing Summary

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	35	100.0
	Excludedª	0	.0
	Total	35	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Interpretation:

Table 1 shows that all 35 cases in the dataset were valid and included in the analysis, with no exclusions due to missing data. A listwise deletion method was used, which means that any case with missing data across the variables considered would have been excluded from the analysis. However, since no data was missing, the analysis utilized the full dataset, ensuring comprehensive results.

Table 2

Reliability Result

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.903	23

Interpretation:

Table 2 indicates that the scale used in the study, comprising 23 items, demonstrates excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.903. This high-reliability coefficient suggests that the items are strongly correlated and effectively measure the same underlying construct, ensuring dependable and consistent results for the analysis.

Table 3

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	131	70.1
	Female	54	28.9
	LGBTQIA+	2	1.1
Age	Under 27	74	39.6
	28-43	96	51.3
	44-59	10	5.3
	Above 59	7	3.7
Highest Qualification	Graduate	77	42.1
	Post-graduate	86	46.0
	Diploma	13	7.0
	others	11	5.9
Work Experience	Below 5 years	119	63.6
	5-10 years	46	24.6
	11-15 years	12	6.4
	Above 15 years	10	5.3

Source: Developed by Authors

Interpretation:

Table 3 reveals that most respondents in the study were male (70.1%), followed by females (28.9%), with 1.1% identifying as LGBTQIA+. Regarding age distribution, most respondents were between 28 and 43 years old (51.3%), followed by those under 27 (39.6%), while smaller proportions were aged 44–59 (5.3%) and above 59 (3.7%). In terms of educational qualifications, the highest proportion of respondents were post-graduates (46.0%), followed by graduates (42.1%), with diploma holders (7.0%) and others (5.9%) making up the rest. Work experience data indicates that the majority of respondents had less than 5 years of experience (63.6%), followed by those with 5–10 years (24.6%), while 11–15 years (6.4%) and above 15 years (5.3%) were less represented.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Workplace Stressors

Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Working Hours	187	2.41	1.167	1.362
Job insecurity	187	2.33	1.310	1.716
Excessive and tiring commutes	187	2.51	1.193	1.423
Low salary	187	2.53	1.250	1.562

Increasing work demands	187	2.74	1.210	1.463
Unrealistic Deadlines	187	2.55	1.304	1.701
Limited opportunities for growth	187	2.95	1.260	1.589
Challenging colleagues	187	2.41	1.272	1.619
Too many meetings	187	2.41	1.273	1.620
Email overload	187	2.22	1.305	1.702
Uncaring managers	187	2.24	1.130	1.278
Meaningless Targets	187	2.43	1.348	1.817
Constantly changing technology	187	2.56	1.452	2.108
Lack of social support	187	2.46	1.288	1.658
Insufficient control over job-related decisions	187	2.51	1.313	1.724
Unclear performance expectations	187	2.46	1.353	1.830
Valid N (listwise)	187			

Source: Developed by Authors

Interpretation:

Table 5 provides insights into the various stressors being faced by employees in the IT industry. The mean values represent the average perception of each stressor on a Likert scale, while the standard deviation and variance indicate the variability in responses. Limited Opportunities for Growth has the highest mean score (2.95), indicating it is perceived as the most significant stressor among employees. Increasing Work Demands (mean = 2.74) and Unrealistic Deadlines (mean = 2.55) also emerge as prominent stressors. On the other side, Email Overload (mean = 2.22) and Uncaring Managers (mean = 2.24) are the least impactful stressors based on their lower mean scores. The stressor with the highest variability in responses is Constantly Changing Technology (variance = 2.108), suggesting mixed opinions among employees. Conversely, Uncaring Managers (variance = 1.278) show the least variability, indicating greater consensus.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of Coping Mechanism and Support

Descriptive Statistics				
	N	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
My organization prioritizes my mental well-being.	187	3.24	1.227	1.506
The HR policies align with my mental well-being.	187	3.13	1.195	1.428
My organization provides effective support for work-related stressors.	187	3.16	1.201	1.444
I take informal support (ex: friends/family) to cope with work-related stress.	187	3.65	1.259	1.584

My supervisor/manager engages me in a discussion concerning my mental health.	187	3.06	1.277	1.630
Valid N (listwise)	187			

Source: Developed by Authors

Interpretation

Table 5 provides insights into respondents' perceptions regarding their organization's support for mental well-being and their coping mechanisms for work-related stressors. The analysis reveals a moderate level of agreement among employees regarding organizational efforts to prioritize mental well-being (mean = 3.24), align HR policies (mean = 3.13), and provide support for work-related stressors (mean = 3.16). Notably, reliance on informal support networks, such as friends and family, scored the highest (mean = 3.65), highlighting their importance in stress management, albeit with varied dependency levels. Conversely, managerial engagement in mental health received the lowest mean (3.06), coupled with the highest variability, indicating limited and inconsistent involvement from supervisors. This highlights a need for targeted improvements in organizational and managerial practices to enhance mental health support.

6. Findings:

The findings highlight that IT professionals in Uttar Pradesh face a range of workplace stressors, with limited growth opportunities, increasing work demands, and unrealistic deadlines emerging as the most significant contributors to stress. Conversely, stressors such as email overload and uncaring managers were perceived as less impactful. Additionally, significant variability was observed in perceptions of stressors like constantly changing technology, highlighting mixed responses among employees. Despite these challenges, the support mechanisms provided by organizations reveal mixed results. While employees moderately agree that their organization prioritizes mental well-being (mean = 3.24) and aligns HR policies to address mental health concerns (mean = 3.13), there is a gap in direct managerial engagement, as evidenced by a lower mean score for discussions about mental health with supervisors (mean = 3.06).

Interestingly, employees tend to rely more on informal support systems, such as friends and family, to cope with work-related stress (mean = 3.65), indicating the need for stronger formal organizational support. Furthermore, stressors like constantly changing technology and insufficient job control show considerable variability in employee responses, reflecting differing experiences across individuals. These findings suggest the importance of targeted interventions by organizations to enhance formal support systems and address specific stressors to foster a healthier and more productive work environment.

7. MENTAL WELL-BEING STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH STRESS

Prioritizing mental health will benefit the employee, employer, and society **(Pham, 2022)**. Figure 1 shows some common practices that any individual can follow to manage his/her stress level. Additionally, some creative strategies that organizations could implement to address employee stress have been presented. These will not only boost employees' mental health but also help the organisation attract and retain the brightest talent.

Figure:1

Managing Stress at the Workplace

*Source: Managing stress at the workplace **(Panigrahi, 2006)***

i.   **Volunteer Time off:** Volunteer time off is an employer-sponsored benefit that allows employees to give back to their communities without losing a day's pay for their work. 'Volunteer time off' can boost employees' mental health; teaching new skills and facilitating a sense of purpose within employees. Employees who volunteer can develop new relationships, acquire new skills, and perhaps feel happier and healthier. According to a UK study on the relationship between volunteering and wellbeing, people who volunteer more frequently report greater mental health, happiness, and life satisfaction than those who do not. Offering VTO can assist employees in forging a sense of connection with their communities, which can help counteract the isolation of working from home as more and more companies adopt remote work **(Test, 2023)**. Volunteering offers an excellent opportunity to develop new talents outside of the workplace. According to an Oxfam survey, hiring managers are more inclined to accept applications from volunteer candidates because they perceive them as more self-motivated and good team players.

ii.   **Mindfulness-based stress reduction programs:** The idea of mindfulness has been present in Buddhist practices for over 2,500 years. In the words of Marlatt and Kristeller, mindfulness is defined as "bringing one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis." A group therapy programme called mindfulness-based stress reduction was created by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the 1970s to help people who were dealing with physical and/or mental illnesses as well as the challenges of daily living **(Kabat-Zinn, 2013)**. It consists of two sessions: Meditation and Yoga. Organisations like Google, Target, and General Mills have promoted mindfulness programmes for their employees, wagering on the theory that a calmer workforce can lead to increased profitability.

The effectiveness of mindfulness therapies in lowering stress has also been repeatedly demonstrated by studies but how it will reduce the stress, is still being explored by the researchers.

iii. **Discounted Mental Wellness Apps**: Employee wellness apps are great tools for keeping employees happy and healthy so they can perform at their highest levels at work all the time. The idea of offering employees discounted mental wellness apps has emerged as a cutting-edge tactic in recent years. These applications, created expressly to improve mental health, include a variety of functions, such as guided meditation, stress-relieving exercises, cognitive behavioural therapy exercises, and mood-tracking tools.

iv. **Monday Meetings:** Managers can create a culture of weekly motivational meetings such as "Monday Meeting" for a fresh start. "Monday meetings" are already in existence in the company 'Whydonate'. Here, employees have to come live and share their experience with the entire team one by one. In this way, they all get the dual benefits of building social relationships and coping with loneliness for a stress-free life. This strategy can be followed by other organizations specifically consisting of remote workers; employees who cannot meet their colleagues in person can interact through virtual meetings.

v. **Open communication:** Talking about mental health issues at work is the best way to start. Employers should promote open communication between employees and superiors. Performance evaluations, team meetings, and regular check-ins are a few examples of this. Employers can aid in identifying and dealing with potential sources of stress and fostering a more supportive work environment by encouraging open communication. Employers should think about requesting employee participation in both personal and workplace well-being surveys. It demonstrates the care and concern of the leadership to gauge how the company manages mental health and how the employees are feeling **(Fleming, 2022)**.

vi. **Mental Health Days:** As companies observed the effects of mental health on productivity, mental health days are becoming more and more prevalent. Employees may take unpaid or paid time off for mental health concerns. While there are many uses for mental health days, their primary goal is to boost an employee's productivity and retention by promoting self-care. The benefits of offering mental health days are preventing burnout, improving productivity, and improving employees' overall health. Some signs that employees need mental health days off are exhaustion, poor dress sense, sickness, feeling unappreciated, etc. LinkedIn, Starbucks, Mozilla, and Bumble are some companies already offering mental health days for the well-being of their employees.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has both theoretical and practical implications for the current complex world of work. Stress management is essential in any organization for a positive and productive workforce. This study will provide new insights into theoretical literature by focusing on the stress faced by Gen Y and Gen Z employees in the IT Industry located in Uttar Pradesh. In the practical world, stress cannot be eliminated permanently though it can be managed or alleviated. The findings of this study will help IT companies to keep their employees happy and mentally healthy in the long run.

9. CONCLUSION

The study underscores the varying levels of stress experienced by employees in IT companies, influenced by factors such as age, gender, job roles, and work demands. Millennials and post-millennials are particularly vulnerable to high workplace stress, often due to limited opportunities for growth, increasing demands, and unrealistic deadlines. While organizations have taken steps to address these stressors, such as aligning HR policies with mental well-being, there remains a need for more proactive and personalized interventions. Employees often rely more on informal support systems like friends and family, highlighting gaps in formal organizational support for mental health. To foster a healthier workplace, IT companies should prioritize creating a culture that openly addresses mental health and encourages conversations about stress between employees and management. By prioritizing employee mental well-being through targeted support, customized solutions, and mindfulness practices, organizations can ensure a happier, healthier, and more resilient workforce, ultimately driving long-term growth and success for both employees and the organization.

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