

STRESS AT WORK PLACE: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND REMEDIES

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INTRODUCTION:

Stress has become a very common phenomenon of routine life, and an unavoidable consequence of the ways in which society has changed. This change has occurred in terms of science and technology, industrial growth, urbanization, modernization, and automation on one hand; and an expanding population, unemployment, and stress on the other.

The stress is burning issue in modern society. The effect of stress is a deviation from the existing physical and psychological condition of human life. The stress is regarded as an inevitable consequence of employee functionality. The occupational stress adversely affects the health and performance of the employees of an organization. World's human activities changing speedily necessitate stable adjustment.

Technology is changing, so are social habits, values, social structures, and people. Everyone has to cope with those adjusts, not only individuals, but the organizations and governments as well. A lot of people are aware of positive values of those changes, but very few would think of the negative consequences that may ensue. According to Braaten Dan J., 'job stress is the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker'.

Stress occurs in a wide range of work circumstances but is often made worse when employees feel they have little support from supervisors and colleagues and where they can cope with its demands and pressures. There is often confusion between pressure or challenge and stress and sometimes it is used to excuse bad management practice. In the workplace and at home, stress and other difficult situation are at an all- time high. Factors such as job insecurity, long hours, continuous change and unrealistic deadlines can cause serious problem for workers.

Stress at workplace:

Stress at work can be a real problem to the organization as well as for its workers. Good management and good work organization are the best forms of stress prevention. If employees are already stressed, their managers should be aware of it and know to help. Work related stress is the response

people may have when present with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope. Workplace stress occurs when there is an imbalance the demands and perceived pressures of the work environment and an individual ability to cope. An individual's experience of stress at work is to a large extent affected by the level of control they have over their working condition or pressures, the degree of support they receive from others in the workplace and the strategies they use to respond to work pressures.

What is a healthy job?

A healthy job is likely to be one where the pressures on employees are appropriate in relation to their abilities and resources, to the amount of control they have over their work, and to the support they receive from people who matter to them. As health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity but a positive state of complete physical, mental and social well-being (WHO, 1986), a healthy working environment is one in which there is not only an absence of harmful conditions but an abundance of health-promoting ones.

These may include continuous assessment of risks to health, the provision of appropriate information and training on health issues and the availability of health promoting organizational support practices and structures. A healthy work environment is one in which staff have made health and health promotion a priority and part of their working lives.

What is work-related stress?

Work-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope.

Stress occurs in a wide range of work circumstances but is often made worse when employees feel they have little support from supervisors and colleagues, as well as little control over work processes.

There is often confusion between pressure or challenge and stress and sometimes it is used to excuse bad management practice.

Pressure at the workplace is unavoidable due to the demands of the contemporary work environment. Pressure perceived as acceptable by an individual, may even keep workers alert, motivated, able to work and learn, depending on the available resources and personal characteristics. However, when that pressure becomes excessive or otherwise unmanageable it leads to stress. Stress can damage an employees' health and the business performance.

Work-related stress can be caused by poor work organization (the way we design jobs and work systems, and the way we manage them), by poor work design (for example, lack of control over work processes), poor management, unsatisfactory working conditions, and lack of support from colleagues and supervisors.

Research findings show that the most stressful type of work is that which values excessive demands and pressures that are not matched to workers' knowledge and abilities, where there is little opportunity to exercise any choice or control, and where there is little support from others.

Employees are less likely to experience work-related stress when - demands and pressures of work are matched to their knowledge and abilities - control can be exercised over their work and the way they do it - support is received from supervisors and colleagues - participation in decisions that concern their jobs is provided.

Need and Importance of the Study in the Present Scenario:

Stress at work can be a real problem to the organization as well as for its workers. Good management and good work organization are the best forms of stress prevention. If employees are already stressed, their managers should be aware of it and know to help. Work related stress is the response people may have when present with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope.

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Workplace stress occurs when there is an imbalance the demands and perceived pressures of the work environment and an individual ability to cope. An individual's experience of stress at work is to a large extent affected by the level of control they have over their working conditions / pressures, the degree of support they receive from others in the workplace and the strategies they use to respond to work pressures.

In many countries, employers have a legal responsibility to recognize and deal with stress in the workplace so that employees do not become physically or mentally ill.

It is important to tackle the causes of stress in the workplace as stress at work can lead to problems for the individual, working relationships and the overall working environment. These issues may include lowered self-esteem and poor concentration skills for the employee. The employer may suffer from increasing customer complaints, staff turnover and days lost to sickness. Managing stress in the workplace is therefore an essential part of both individual and corporate. Hence, the present study is undertaken.

Objectives of the Study: The objectives of the study are:

To identify the various causes of stress that affect the employees' performance

- To know the consequences of stress among employees.
- To understand the different ways in which the employees manage stress.
- To suggest the measures to be taken by the employer for managing employees' stress.

Types of Stress and Their Symptoms

Stress factors broadly fall into four types or categories: physical stress, psychological stress, psychosocial stress, and psycho spiritual stress.

Physical stress: trauma (injury, infection, surgery), intense physical labor/over-exertion, environmental pollution (pesticides, herbicides, toxins, heavy metals, inadequate light, radiation, noise, electromagnetic fields), illness (viral, bacterial, or fungal agents), fatigue, inadequate oxygen supply, hypoglycemia I(low blood sugar), hormonal and/or biochemical imbalances, dietary stress (nutritional deficiencies, food allergies and sensitivities, unhealthy eating habits), dehydration, substance abuse, dental challenges, and musculoskeletal misalignments/imbances.

Psychological stress: emotional stress (resentments, fears, frustration, sadness, anger, grief/bereavement), cognitive stress (information overload, accelerated sense of time, worry, guilt, shame, jealousy, resistance, attachments, self-criticism, self-loathing, unworkable perfectionism, anxiety, panic attacks, not feeling like yourself, not feeling like things are real, and a sense of being out of control/not being in control), and perceptual stress (beliefs, roles, stories, attitudes, world view).

Psychosocial stress: relationship/marriage difficulties (partner, siblings, children, family, employer, co-workers, employer), lack of social support, lack of resources for adequate survival, loss of employment/investments/savings, loss of loved ones, bankruptcy, home foreclosure, and isolation.

Psycho-spiritual stress: A crisis of values, meaning, and purpose; joyless striving (instead of productive, satisfying, meaningful and fulfilling work; and a misalignment with in one's core spiritual beliefs.

Overall, improperly or ineffectively managed stress usually takes a toll on the body. When stress-related feelings, moods, emotions are pushed into the body, the soma, this is usually termed psychosomatic or psychogenic illness, including headaches, heart palpitations, physical/cognitive/emotional pain and suffering, constricted throat and shallow, constricted breathing, clammy palms, fatigue, nausea, anxiety, allergies, asthma, autoimmune syndromes related to an ineffective functioning of the immune system, hypertension (high blood pressure), and gastrointestinal disturbances such as diarrhea, upset stomach, duodenal ulcers and esophageal reflux syndrome.

Prolonged stress can result in suppressed immune function, increased susceptibility to infectious and immune-related diseases and cancer. Emotional stress can also result in hormonal imbalances (adrenal, pituitary, thyroid, etcetera) that further interfere with healthy immune functioning.

Cognitive: Anxious thoughts, fearful anticipation, poor concentration, difficulty with memory.

Emotional: Feelings of tension, irritability, restlessness, worries, inability to relax, depression.

Behavioral: Avoidance of tasks; sleep problems; difficulty in completing work assignments; fidgeting; tremors; strained face; clenching fists; crying; changes in drinking, eating, or smoking behaviors.

Physiological: Stiff or tense muscles, grinding teeth, sweating, tension headaches, faint feelings, choking feeling, difficulty in swallowing, stomachache, nausea, vomiting, loosening of bowels, constipation, frequency and urgency of urination, loss of interest in sex, tiredness, shakiness or tremors, weight loss or gain, awareness of heart beat.

Social: Some people in stressful times tend to seek out others to be with. Other people withdraw under stress. Also, the quality of relationships can change when a person is under stress.

Causes of Stress:

There are many factors which make an organization to be called unsecured work organization such as the inappropriate job design, poor management and ill-structured work systems. When the management of the organization puts excessive work pressure and unmanageable targets or deadlines to the employees then by this the employees face huge amount of stress over them. Under these conditions, the employees also face lack of control over their tasks and lack of cooperation from their colleagues and supervisors:

- Being unhappy in the job
- Having a heavy workload or too much responsibility
- Working long hours
- Having poor management, unclear expectations of your work, or no say in the decision-making process
- Working under dangerous conditions
- Being insecure about your chance for advancement or risk of termination
- Having to give speeches in front of colleagues
- Facing discrimination or harassment at work.

Life stresses can also have a big impact. Examples of life stresses are:

- The death of a loved one
- Divorce
- Loss of a job
- Increase in financial obligations
- Getting married
- Moving to a new home
- Chronic illness or injury
- Emotional problems (depression, anxiety, anger, grief, guilt, low self-esteem)
- Taking care of an elderly or sick family member
- Traumatic event, such as a natural disaster, theft, rape, or violence against you or a loved one
- Fear and uncertainty.
- Attitudes and perceptions.

- Unrealistic expectations.

The stress level differs based on one's personality and how he or she responds to situations. Some people let everything roll off their back. To them, work stresses and life stresses are just minor bumps in the road. Others literally worry themselves sick.

Symptoms of Stress:

Stress symptoms vary greatly from one person to the next, but the most universal sign of stress is a feeling of being pressured or overwhelmed. Other symptoms include:

- Physical complaints (stomachaches, headaches, chest pains, nausea, and diarrhea, and a sensation of numbness or tingling in your hands, arms, and face.)
- Problems getting along with family members, friends, and teachers.
- Changes in behavior at home (short temper, unexplained anger, crying for no reason).
- Regression -- behavior that is not age-appropriate.
- Dysfunctional sleep patterns, including nightmares, too little sleep, difficulty falling asleep, or even oversleeping.
- Communication difficulty or personality changes, such as becoming withdrawn or requiring much more attention than usual.
- Impatience.

Consequences of Stress:

If the consequences of work-related stress are observed then it is found that there are two types of consequences. One is the effect on individuals or employees and the other is the effect on organizations. If we analyze the effects on employees then it can be said that stress affects the different individuals in various different ways. This can cause the individuals with poor mental and physical health. The employees affected by work-related stress are also seen to have unusual behavior. If the stress persists for a longer period of time then in this way the employees can also have psychological problems. They can also face with the mental disorder which would consequently become the reason of absenteeism from the workplace. The possible consequences of job stress are given below:

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating
- Upset stomach
- Irritability

When stress becomes long-term and is not properly addressed, it can lead to a number of more serious health conditions, including:

- Depression
- High blood pressure
- Abnormal heartbeat (arrhythmia)

- Hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis)
- Heart disease
- Heart attack
- Heartburn, ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome
- Upset stomach -- cramps, constipation, and diarrhea
- Weight gain or loss
- Changes in sex drive
- Fertility problems
- Flare-ups of asthma or arthritis
- Skin problems such as acne, eczema, and psoriasis

How to Manage Stress?

One of the important techniques for managing stress is training. Training helps prevent stress through:

- becoming aware of the signs of stress
- using this to interrupt behavior patterns when the stress reaction is just beginning. Stress usually builds up gradually. The more stress builds up, the more difficult it is to deal with
- analyzing the situation and developing an active plan to minimize the stressors
- learning skills of active coping and relaxation, developing a lifestyle that creates a buffer against stress
- practicing the above in low stress situations first to maximize chances of early success and boost self-confidence and motivation to continue.

A wide variety of training courses may help in developing active coping techniques—for example, assertiveness, communications skills, time management, problem solving, and effective management.

However, there are many sources of stress that the individual is likely to perceive as outside his or her power to change, such as the structure, management style or culture of the organization. It is important to note that stress management approaches that concentrate on changing the individual without changing the sources of stress are of limited effectiveness, and may be counterproductive by masking these sources. For example, breathing deeply and thinking positively about a situation causing stress may make for a temporary feeling of well-being, but will allow a damaging situation to continue, causing persistent stress and, probably, stress to others. The primary aim of the individual approach should be to develop people's skills and confidence to change their situation, not to help them adapt to and accept a stressful situation.

Organizational Stress Management:

The prevention and management of workplace stress requires organizational level interventions, because it is the organization that creates the stress. An approach that is limited to helping those already experiencing stress is analogous to administering sticking plaster on wounds, rather than dealing with the causes of the damage. An alternative analogy is trying to run up an escalator that's

going down! Organizational interventions can be of many types, ranging from structural (for example, staffing levels, work schedules, physical environment) to psychological (for example, social support, control over work, participation).

Principles of preventing work stress:

- Working conditions are adapted to people's differing physical and mental aptitudes
- Employee is given the opportunity to participate in the design of his/her own work situation, and in the processes of change and development affecting his/her work
- Technology, work organization, and job content are designed so that the employee is not exposed to physical or mental strains that may lead to illness or accidents. Forms of remuneration and the distribution of working hours are taken into account
- Closely controlled or restricted work is avoided or limited
- Work should provide opportunities for variety, social contact, and cooperation as well as coherence between different working operations
- Working conditions should provide opportunities for personal and vocational development, as well as for self-determination and professional responsibility

Assessing the risk of stress within the workplace must take into account:

- the likelihood and the extent of ill health which could occur as a result of exposure to a particular hazard
- the extent to which an individual is exposed to the hazard
- the number of employees exposed to the hazard.

The analysis of stressful hazards at work should consider all aspects of its design and management, and its social and organizational context. Although the priority is prevention, protective measures can be introduced to control the risk and reduce the effects of a given hazard. A detailed account of how to assess and reduce risk associated with exposure to stressful hazards is given below:

Risk Assessment Strategy:

- **Hazard identification:**
Reliably identify the stressors which exist in relation to work and working conditions, for specified groups of employees, and make an assessment of the degree of exposure
- **Assessment of harm:**
Collect evidence that exposure to such stressors is associated with impaired health in the group being assessed or of the wider organization. This should include a wide range of health-related outcomes, including symptoms of general malaise and specific disorders, and of organizational and health related behaviors such as smoking and drinking, and sickness absence
- **Identification of likely risk factors:**

Explore the associations between exposure to stressors and measures of harm to identify likely risk factors at the group level, and to make some estimate of their size and/or significance

- **Description of underlying mechanisms:**

Understand and describe the possible mechanisms by which exposure to the stressors is associated with damage to the health of the assessment group or to the organization

- **Audit existing management control and employee support systems:**

Identify and assess all existing management systems both in relation to the control of stressors and the experience of work stress, and in relation to the provision of support for employees experiencing problems.

Conclusion:

Workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when there is a poor match between job demands and the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker as the competitive environment, technological advancements, HR Practices, economic development; social developments are taking place day by day. Even the employee is expected to work for long hours, perform multiple jobs in the organization which give a mentally as well as physical problems to the employees which ultimately leads to a pressure, strain, anxiety, tension to the employees and ultimately the productivity of the employee's. There are ways to lower the levels of stress in a company and they are as follows.

Employees with low job satisfaction often are poorly paid with few job promotion prospects. Company managers often fail to acknowledge their staff for their hard work which may lead to depression for the employee. If an employer recognizes their employees work more and offer more promotion prospects, even an increase in an employee's salary would help relieve stress in the office. Staff recognition is the key to every company, staff work better if their work is praised as they believe that they are a valued member of the company. Recognition may be verbal, where an employer simply praises their work verbally, or a promotion for the employee.

Redesigning jobs can also help, for example if employees take more breaks from the computer monitor to reduce headaches and eye strain, even performing other jobs away from the computer monitor every so often will minimize these health risks. Companies can also employ a stress counselor to help relieve stress from the employees, as this would not only benefit the employee health, but employees may perform better in their jobs, leading to better productivity and more profits for the company. If all or some of these suggestions were practiced in Terra Firma then the company would certainly benefit, leading to a smooth running company, with fewer problems and low stress levels.

Recognizing the early signs of stress and then paying attention to them can make an important difference in the quality of human life and may actually influence human survival in the long run. Both individual (he/she) and organization have the responsibility to manage stress; individual should manage his stress for his own benefit while the organization should help to manage individual stress for its own survival and to fulfill organizational objectives.

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