Work Place Stress: Causes and Strategies to Overcome it

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Abstract

Stress is a sensation that's created when we retort to particular events. It's the body's way of rising to a challenge and preparing to meet a tough situation with focus, strength, stamina, and heightened alertness. All work has its different work pressures and we vary in our capability and ability to cope up with the different stress situations. One in five people suffers from workplace stress, with half a million people reporting they have become ill as a result. Stress is not a disease, but it can be a threat to your health and safety at work. The main causes for work related stress are poor communication, bad work culture, and skills not matching that are needed for a job. Stress can also be triggered by events away from work, such as bereavement, money worries and illness. The relevance of stress at workplace assumes significance as it has a direct bearing not only on the productivity of the organization but also on the health and life of the individual. In such cases people under large amounts of stress can become tired, sick, and unable to concentrate or think clearly. Sometimes, they even suffer from mental breakdowns. This research paper is an endeavor to understand the different facets of employee's stress and how stress at workplace can be managed by practicing certain logical approaches.

Introduction: Stress is body's way of responding to any kind of demand. It can be caused by both good and bad experiences. The term stress is generally associated with fatigue and strain- both physical and mental. Stress can affect our body and mind. When we feel stressed, our bodies react by releasing chemicals into the blood. These chemicals give people more energy and strength, which can be a good thing if the stress is caused by the physical danger. Nearly everyone agrees that job stress results from the interaction of the workers and the condition of work. However, the importance of worker characteristics versus working conditions is the primary causes of job stress. According to **NIOSH (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health)** favours the view that the working conditions play the primary role in causing job stress.

However, the role of individual factors cannot be ignored. According to **NIOSH** view, exposure to stressful working conditions can have a direct influence on worker safety and health. In the past twenty years many studies have looked at the relationship between job stress and variety of ailments mood and sleep disturbances, upsets stomach and headache, and disturbed relationships with family and friends are examples of stress related problems. Stress is highly subjective experience **(Lazarus, 1966 Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).** What determines the experience of stress is an outcome from factors such as the individual biography and previous experiences, demands and requirements at the workplace, the family situation, etc. **(Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1974; Cox and Ferguson, 1991).** Specific situations can appear as considerably more stressful to one person than to another without any seemingly objective reason. Each day brings new, stressful situations-both in our personal as well as professional lives. The challenge lies in our ability to understand and come to grips with the situation and deal with it.

The concept of stress management has been used to denote various activities aimed at mediating the impact of stress organizations. The notion of stress management underlines the possibility of managing such an abstract, diverse and subjectively grounded experience as stress.

Review of Literature:

Beehr and Newman (1978) define occupational stress as "A condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning."

Miles and Perreault (1976) identify four different types of role conflict: 1. Intra-sender role conflict 2. Inter sender role conflict. 3. Person- role conflict; 4. Role over load. The use of role concepts suggests that job related stress is associated with individual, interpersonal, and structural variables **(Katz and Kahn, 1978; Whetten, 1978)**. The presence of supportive peer groups and supportive relationships with super visors are negatively correlated with **R.C. (Caplan et al., 1964).**

There is evidence that role incumbents with high levels of role ambiguity also respond to their situation with

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anxiety, depression, physical symptoms, a sense of futility or lower self esteem, lower levels of job involvement and organizational commitment, and perceptions of lower performance on the part of the organization, of supervisors, and of themselves **(Brief and Aldag, 1976; Greene, 1972).**

Ivancevich and Matteson (1950) indicate, "Lack of group cohesiveness may explain various physiological and behavioral outcomes in an employ desiring such sticks together." Workplace interpersonal conflicts and negative interpersonal relations are prevalent sources of stress (**Dewe, 1993; Lang, 1984; Long et al., 1992),** and are existed with negative mood depression, and symptoms of ill health **(Israel et al., 1989; Karasek, Gardell and Lindell, 1987; Snap, 1992).**

Lack of participation in the decision making process, lack of effective consultation and communication, unjustified restrictions on behavior, office politics and no sense of belonging are identified as potential sources of stressors. Lack of participation in work activity is associated with negative psychological mood and behavioral responses, including escapist drinking and heavy smoking **(Caplan et al., 1975).**

According to **French and Caplan (1975),** "Pressure of both qualitative and quantitative overload can result in the need to work excessive hours, which is an additional source of stress." Having to work under time pressure in order to meet deadlines is an independent source of stress. Studies show that stress levels increase as difficult deadlines draw near.

Stress is often developed when an individual is assigned a major responsibility without proper authority and delegation of power. Interpersonal factors such as group cohesiveness, functional dependence, communication frequency, relative authority and organizational distance between the role sender and the focal persons are important topics in organizational behavior **(Van sell, Brief, and Schuler).**

Stress develops when an individual feels he is not competent to undertake the role assigned to him effectively. The individual feels that he lacks knowledge, skill and training on performing the role **(stress, conflict management and counseling, p.283)**

Symptoms of Work Related Stress: The signs of job stress vary from person to person, depending on the particular situation, how long the individual has been subjected to the stressors, and the intensity of the stress itself. Typical symptoms of job stress can be:

- Insomnia- Insomnia is the feeling of inadequate or poor-quality sleep because of one or more of the following: trouble falling asleep. People will be unable to carry out their daily responsibilities either because they are too tired or because they have trouble concentrating due to lack of restful sleep. Insomnia may cause a reduced energy level, irritability, disorientation, dark circles under the eyes, posture changes and fatigue.

- Loss of mental concentration, anxiety, stress.

- Absenteeism: Absenteeism is one of the most obvious costs of stress to employers. Generally employees do not come to their workplace owing to environmental stress. They are found negligent towards their duties and responsibilities.

- Depression: Difficulty in decision-making, lack of energy, loss of interest in normal pleasurable activities, poor sleep and appetite, irritation and frustration are some of the symptoms that arise from depression.

- Substance abuse, family conflict, physical illnesses such as heart disease, migraine, headaches, stomach problems, and back problems.

Strategies for Coping with Stress: There are also other numbers of ways that can help in reducing work stress which include:

Prioritizing Work: Multi-tasking is the buzzword these days. An individual requires special skills to perform multiple tasks simultaneously. One way to minimize stress while multi-tasking is to plan, prioritize, and perform. Planning involves preparing a list of activities that need to be performed. This involves considering the time factor. Prioritizing involves ranking the activities based on their importance and performing these activities in that order. Prioritizing activities each day is the simplest way to tackle stress. The next step is to schedule time for tasks depending on the priorities. For instance, a person may have to attend a community meeting and an official party. He/she may schedule time for both activities by attending the official party first and then the community meeting.

Delegating work: Some individuals prefer doing all the work themselves. This adds to their stress. They should learn to delegate routine work to others. For instance, a manager can delegate the work of preparing a report on a project to a subordinate.

Laughter: Laughter is a good de-stressor. An individual can relax and de-stress by watching a humorous movie, reading comics, etc.

Relaxation: It is very important for a person to schedule some time for relaxation. This relaxation time should disconnect the person from all his/her tensions, worries. This is the time when the person rebuilds his/her energy

Causes of Stress:

JOB CONTENT	WORK LOAD AND WORK PACE	WORKING HOURS
• Monotonous, under-stimulating, meaningless tasks. • Lack of variety • Unpleasant tasks • Aversive tasks	• Having too much or too little to do • Working under time pressures	• Strict and inflexible working schedules • Long and unsocial hours • Unpredictable working hours • Badly designed shift systems
PARTICIPATION AND CONTROL	CAREER DEVELOPMENT, STATUS AND PAY	ROLE IN THE ORGANISATION
• Lack of participation in decision making • Lack of control over working methods and work pace	• Job insecurity • Lack of promotion prospects • Work of low social value • Piece rate system schemes • Unclear or unfair performance evaluation systems	• Unclear Role • Conflicting roles within the same job • Responsibility for people • Continuously dealing with other people • and their problems
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	ORGANISATINAL CULTURE	HOME WORK INTERFACE
• Poor Relationships with co-workers • Bullying, harassment and violence • Isolated or solitary work • Improper procedures for dealing with problems	• Poor communication • Poor leadership • Lack of clarity about organizational objectives	• Conflicting demands of work and home • Lack of support for work problems at home

levels. Relaxation techniques vary from person to person. One person may unwind by listening to music; another may prefer a long solitary walk. People can relax by talking to friends, watching a movie, reading comics, etc. They should, however, ensure that the breaks are relaxing and not tiring. The break should help them to easily get back to work.

Meditation: Meditation is one of the most effective techniques in reducing and avoiding stress. Regular meditation helps in stress reduction. Meditation is a technique to achieve a thoughtless or mindless state. In this state, a person has no thoughts. This kind of state thus acts a stress reliever and a great rejuvenator. It

• enables one to control the thought process

• enables one to take effective decisions

• helps in physical and mental relaxation

• improves concentration

Holistic Therapies: Holistic therapies allow the body to heal naturally. These therapies have no side effects and are reliable. Some popular holistic therapies are massage therapy, aromatherapy, reflexology, and nutrition therapy.

Massage therapy is the oldest technique used for reducing stress. Massage encourages blood circulation, easy breathing, and quick relaxation of the muscles.

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils in the treatment process. The oils are derived from plants and flowers.

Reflexology is the use of meridians or zones to reduce stress. Our body is a network of nerves. This therapy involves applying gentle force on pressure points on the hands and feet. This pressure stimulates the brain to release endorphins (feel good hormones). Reflexology works on the circulatory, nervous, and lymphatic systems.

Nutrition Therapy involves avoiding stress by eating good food. As discussed earlier, food and stress are related. Food is vital for the body. It is converted into energy to help the body grow and maintain itself. Food also helps the body to fight stress and replace damaged cells naturally. We are what we eat. Nutrition therapy emphasizes the maintenance of health and fitness through eating nutritious food. An ideal diet consists of 30% fruits and vegetables, 30% starchy foods, 15% protein, 15% milk and dairy products, and 10% fat and sugary foods. In addition to these, smaller amounts of vitamins and minerals are required. Water should also be included in a healthy diet.

Conclusion: Work stress is a real challenge for employees and their organizations as a whole. This can be cured by maintaining a harmony between work life and domestic life. It allows an employee to fulfill all the roles

in his/her life effectively and efficiently. Researchers have proved that employees are at their best when they are contented and motivated both at work and at home. Achieving a work-life balance is not as easy as it seems. In the corporate world, change is constant and imminent. The impact of globalization has further fuelled these changes. The corporate world signifies uncertainties, too many responsibilities, and long work hours. These changes in the environment disturb the balance between domestic and work-life of employees. Work stress should not be confused with challenge. Challenge energizes employees and thus helps in increasing the productivity of the work. In a nutshell workplace stress cannot be avoided but it can be minimized through

• Developing positive coping strategies to handle stress in your life.

• Focus on good qualities and accomplishments.

• Set realistic short term and long term goals.

• Examining and analyzing situation and trying to determine if there are any changes that can be made to ease stress and pressure.

If stress is unmanageable and unavoidable, seeking professional help from counseling centres may be helpful.

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