

A Study of Stress Levels Among Employees and their Effects on Output

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ABSTRACT: "Having a job in many ways improves an individual's health and overall attitude toward life." However, many people face significant stress in the workplace that it outweighs any possible benefits and even poses a threat to their health.

The United States' National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health defines job stress as 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. Job stress can, in turn, lead to poor health and even injury. Many workers report experiencing work-related stress at their jobs and this compromises their performance and health. A recent survey by Northwestern National Life revealed that about 40% of workers reported that their jobs were extremely stressful. In another survey by Yale University, 29% of workers reported feeling extreme stress because of their jobs. Stress levels vary between professions and population groups. Some workers are at a higher risk of stress than others. Studies reveal that younger workers, women, and those in lower-skilled jobs are at most risk of experiencing work-related stress and its attendant complications. Casual full-time workers, who are likely to have the lowest job control and high job demands are most at risk of job strain.

KEYWORDS: stress, employees, workplace, job, output, effects, men and women, health, compromise, resource, strain

I. INTRODUCTION

Workplace stressors are classified as physical and psychosocial. Physical stressors include noise, poor lighting, poor office or work layout, and ergonomic factors, such as bad working postures. Psychosocial stressors are, arguably, the most predominant stress factors. These include high job demands, inflexible working hours, poor job control, poor work design and structure, bullying, harassments, and job insecurity. Workplace stress not only affects the worker, it also has adverse effects on company performance well. The effects of job-related strain are evident in workers' physical health, mental health, and their behavior. These effects occur in a continuum, beginning as distress in response to stressors. Distress, in turn, leads to elevated blood pressure and anxiety, which increase the risk of coronary heart disease, substance abuse, and anxiety disorders. The impact of stress on cardiovascular disease has been well established: Studies have shown that workplace stress is a strong risk factor for precludes to cardiovascular disease (obesity, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure) and of adverse cardiovascular events, such as heart attack and stroke.

There is also a growing body of evidence that work-related stress increases one's risk of diabetes. Other physical health problems linked to workplace stress include immune deficiency disorders, musculoskeletal disorders including chronic back pain, and gastrointestinal disorders, such as irritable bowel syndrome. Workplace stress also has adverse effects on workers' mental health, with an increased risk of anxiety, burnout, depression, and substance use disorders. Workers who are stressed at work are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors, such as cigarette smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, and poor dietary patterns. With these attendant health effects, workplace stress reduces employee productivity, increases absenteeism and presenteeism, increases the number of days taken off work for doctor visits, and increases healthcare costs incurred by employers. Workplace stress is also linked to higher accident and injury rates and higher turnover rates, both of which increase administrative costs.

Workplace stress is preventable and identifying the potential sources of stress to employees in an organization is the first step in addressing them. Effective interventions for reducing workplace stress can be classified as primary, secondary, and tertiary.

Primary interventions involve proactive measures to prevent stress by removing or reducing potential stressors. This level of intervention focuses on the sources of physical and psychosocial stress in the workplace. Examples of primary interventions include:

- Redesigning the work environment
- Providing breaks and nap-times for employees
- Increasing employee participation in decision making and work planning
- Increasing time and resources for completing specific job tasks
- Matching job description with employee skills and qualifications
- Creating clear promotion and reward pathways
- Eliminating physical hazards
- Substituting with safer equipment and technology
- Establishing control measures to reduce worker's exposure to occupational hazards
- Promoting the use of personal protective equipment

Discussion

Secondary interventions are corrective and are focused on altering the ways workers perceive and respond to stressors. These interventions aim at improving worker's ability to cope with stress and detect stress-induced symptoms early. Examples of secondary interventions include:

- Training and education of employees
- Cognitive behavioral therapy training for workers
- Routine health surveillance - screening for high blood pressure and stress symptoms

Tertiary interventions are forms of control at the level of the illness. These are initiated for workers who are already experiencing stress. Tertiary interventions involve providing treatment, compensation plans, rehabilitation programs, and return to work programs for affected workers. Tertiary interventions include:

- Providing medical care and employee assistance programs to affected workers
- Return-to-work plans including modification and redesign of work

Workplace stress is a silent, and oft-neglected, factor which impairs employee health and productivity. It not only affects the workers but also contributes significantly to a decline in a company's overall success. Employers should begin to tackle this worrisome concern to create a healthier, safer, and more productive work atmosphere."

III.RESULTS

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 this 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.

Workers 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, and participation in decisions that concern their jobs is provided.

Stress related hazards at work can be divided into work content and work context.

Work contents includes job content (monotony, under-stimulation, meaningless of tasks, lack of variety, etc); work load and work pace (too much or too little to do, work under time pressure, etc.); working hours (strict or inflexible, long and unsocial, unpredictable, badly designed shift systems); and participation and control (lack of participation in decision-making, lack of control over work processes, pace, hours, methods, and the work environment).

Work context includes career development, status and pay (job insecurity, lack of promotion opportunities, under- or over-promotion, work of low social value, piece rate payment schemes, unclear or unfair performance evaluation systems, being over- or under-skilled for a job); the worker's role in the organization (unclear role, conflicting roles); interpersonal relationships (inadequate, inconsiderate or unsupportive supervision, poor relationships with colleagues, bullying/harassment and violence, isolated or solitary work, etc.); organizational culture (poor communication, poor leadership, lack of behavioural rule, lack of clarity about organizational objectives, structures and strategies); and work-life balance (conflicting demands of work and home, lack of support for domestic problems at work, lack of support for work problems at home, lack of organizational rules and policies to support work-life balance).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Employees stress is a growing concern for organizations today. Stress can be defined as a lively circumstance in which people face constraints, opportunities, or loss of something they desire and for which the consequence is both unpredictable as well as crucial. Stress is the response of people to the unreasonable/excessive pressure or demands placed on them.

Stress is not always negative. It may also bring out the best in individuals at times. It may induce an individual to discover innovative and smarter way of doing things. This positive dimension of stress is called as eustress. But usually, the term stress has a negative implication and this negative aspect of stress is termed as distress. For instance - When a subordinate is harassed or warned by his superior, unhappiness of unsuitable job, etc. We can say that "Stress causes some people to break, and other to break records."

Symptoms of Stress

Some of the symptoms of stress at workplace are as follows-

- Absenteeism, escaping from work responsibilities, arriving late, leaving early, etc.
- Deterioration in work performance, more of error prone work, memory loss, etc.
- Cribbing, over-reacting, arguing, getting irritated, anxiety, etc.
- Deteriorating health, more of accidents, etc.
- Improper eating habits (over-eating or under-eating), excessive smoking and drinking, sleeplessness, etc.

It is thus very essential to have effective stress management strategies in an organization so that the detrimental repercussions of stress on the employees as well as their performance can be reduced and controlled.

Sources/Causes of Stress

The factors leading to stress among individual are called as stressors. Some of the factors/stressors acting on employees are-

1. Organizational factors- With the growth in organizational stress and complexity, there is increase in organizational factors also which cause stress among employees. Some of such factors are-
 - a. Discrimination in pay/salary structure
 - b. Strict rules and regulations
 - c. Ineffective communication
 - d. Peer pressure
 - e. Goals conflicts/goals ambiguity
 - f. More of centralized and formal organization structure
 - g. Less promotional opportunities
 - h. Lack of employees participation in decision-making
 - i. Excessive control over the employees by the managers
2. Individual factors- There are various expectations which the family members, peer, superior and subordinates have from the employee. Failure to understand such expectations or to convey such expectations lead to role ambiguity/role conflict which in turn causes employee stress. Other individual factors causing stress among employees are inherent personality traits such as being impatient, aggressive, rigid, feeling time pressure always, etc. Similarly, the family issues, personal financial problems, sudden career changes all lead to stress.
3. Job concerning factors- Certain factors related to job which cause stress among employees are as follows-
 - a. Monotonous nature of job
 - b. Unsafe and unhealthy working conditions
 - c. Lack of confidentiality
 - d. Crowding
4. Extra-organizational factors- There are certain issues outside the organization which lead to stress among employees. In today's modern and technology savvy world, stress has increased. Inflation, technological change, social responsibilities and rapid social changes are other extra-organizational factors causing stress.

Strategies for Managing Stress

Stress experienced by the employees in their job has negative impact on their health, performance and their behaviour in the organization. Thus, stress needs to be managed effectively so as to set off these harmful consequences. Strategies for managing stress are as follows-

Organizational strategies for managing stress

1. Encouraging more of organizational communication with the employees so that there is no role ambiguity/conflict. Effective communication can also change employee views. Managers can use better signs and symbols which are not misinterpreted by the employees.
2. Encourage employees' participation in decision-making. This will reduce role stress.
3. Grant the employees greater independence, meaningful and timely feedback, and greater responsibility.
4. The organizational goals should be realistic, stimulating and particular. The employees must be given feedback on how well they are heading towards these goals.
5. Encourage decentralization.
6. Have a fair and just distribution of incentives and salary structure.
7. Promote job rotation and job enrichment.
8. Create a just and safe working environment.
9. Have effective hiring and orientation procedure.
10. Appreciate the employees on accomplishing and over-exceeding their targets.

Individual strategies for managing stress

1. The employees should make a “to-do” list daily, prioritize the acts in the list and plan the acts accordingly. Take regular breaks during work to relax you. By effective time management, the employees can achieve their targets timely and can meet work pressures and, thus, avoid stress.
2. Do hard work. Strive to achieve your goals but do not do it to the harm of family, health, or peer.
3. Indulge in physical exercises. It helps in effective blood circulation, keeps you fit, diverts mind from work pressures.
4. Encourage a healthy lifestyle. Take a regular sleep, have plenty of water, have healthy eating habits. Promote relaxation techniques such as yoga, listening music and meditation.
5. The employees should have optimistic approach about their work. They should avoid connections with negative approach employees.
6. The employees should have emotional intelligence at workplace. They should have self-awareness, self-confidence and self-control at workplace.
7. The employees should build social support. They should have close connections with trustworthy peer who can listen to their problems and boost their confidence level. This social network will help the employees to overcome stress.
8. Employee counselling is a very good strategy to overcome employee stress. Through counselling, employees can become aware of their strengths and how to develop those strengths; their weaknesses and how to eliminate them; and they can develop strategies for changing their behaviour. Employees are also given career counselling which helps in reducing their ambiguities with regard to career.
9. Find a fun way to release stress, such as, cracking jokes, playing tennis, golf, etc.
10. Do not remain pre-occupied with yourself. Turn your focus outwards. Help others. This will release some stress.

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