

Impact of Stress on Employee Well-Being: A Review

Mohd Aziz*

ABSTRACT

Stress has become one of the most significant health issues of the 21st century. Apart from creating physical and mental concerns in the individual employees, it endangers the overall organizational health by reducing its productivity and profitability. In today's modern era of highly sophisticated jobs, people are living in a stressful time doing one or more than one job, that too with lots of efforts to meet the expectations of the job profile, which creates high amount of tensions, anxiety, anger, fatigue, fretfulness or irritability etc. These situations effect the efficiency and commitment of the employees towards their jobs. Thus, it has become essential to systematically research the causes of stress and some strategies to cope up with the same. Several studies have been made by the researchers across the globe, to get in-depth insights of the occupational stress. Work-stress literature of the past three decades shows that large number of researches has been done during the recent decade, which shows the importance of this literature in the management discipline. This study is an attempt to review some of the major findings of the work-stress literature and the study reveals that Burnout plays the role of mediator which significantly impacts the employee's well-being. Regular and periodic motivation moderate the stress level among the workforce. Occupational Stress can be managed by adopting suitable stress coping strategies.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Well-Being, Motivation, Burnout, Stress Management

INTRODUCTION

Stress is state of anxiety or mental strain brought on by a challenging situation. The challenging situations can arise due to any reasons of a

* Research Scholar, University of Hyderabad, Telangana, India.
Email: mdazizhr@gmail.com; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0603-362X>

person's life. Those reasons may be caused by the challenges, known as stressors, which ultimately creates unpleasant feeling either physically or emotionally. Likewise, employees at the workplace may get several challenges which are totally new to them and/or not manageable by them. When these types of situations occur employees may get tensed and stressed which may affect the productivity of their jobs. The terms "job stress," "occupational stress," and "work stress" are commonly used to describe this. Hans Selye first used the term "stress" in 1936 and later described it as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change." In the 1920s, Hans Selye, a medical professional at the University of Montreal, created the term "stress." He noticed that his hospitalized patients all had this one characteristic, regardless of the conditions they suffered from. It seems like they were all sick. He thought that they were all under physical stress.

Occupational stress is specifically defined as an individual's inability to manage expectations at work as a result of a mismatch between their skill set and the demands and conditions of their industry. It is physical and mental illness that has an impact on a person's efficacy, productivity, well-being, and caliber of work (Comish & Swindle, 1994). It is a person's incapacity to fulfill the demands of their work as a result of an unbalanced perception of themselves and their surroundings. A stressful situation could arise from a potential, need, or resources that is pertinent to what someone desires and for which the final result is seen as both uncertain and important. It is the circumstance in which people's physical and mental well-being have a negative impact on their ability to execute their jobs (Holmlund-Rytkönen & Strandvik, 2005).

According to Leka et al. (2004), When resources, such as knowledge and skills regarding the situation, are discovered to be insufficient to handle the inconveniences and challenges in the environment, people may experience stress. So basically, the major stressors are the challenging tasks and the inability of the employees to complete it in the stipulated time.

In today's modern era of highly sophisticated jobs, people are living in a stressful time doing one or more than one job, that too with lots of efforts to meet the expectations of the job profile, which creates high amount of tensions, anxiety, anger, fatigue, fretfulness or irritability etc. These situations affect the efficiency and commitment of the employees towards their jobs. A National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) report from 2014 states that 29% of Americans say they are

“quite a bit or extremely stressed at work,” 40% say their jobs are “very or extremely stressful,” and 75% believe that workers today face higher levels of stress at work than they did in the past.

Thus, it has become essential to systematically research the causes of stress and some strategies to cope up with the same. Several studies have been made by the researchers across the globe, to get in-depth insights of the occupational stress. Work-stress literature of the past three decades shows that large number of researches has been done during the recent decade, which shows the importance of this literature in the management discipline. This study is an attempt to review some of the major findings of the work-stress literature.

MAJOR OCCUPATIONAL STRESSORS

Since, it is a known fact that, in order to find solution to a problem, it is essential to trace-out the root causes of that problem. Some of the forces as an antecedent to stress, used by the researchers includes: Work Overload, Role ambiguity, conflicting roles, caring for others, Participation, inadequate feedback, keeping up with the rapid advancement of technology, Having a creative role, career advancement environmental factors and organizational structure, and newest episodic events. Work-Overload: overburdening the employee with extra job tasks or the targets which are beyond the capability of employees (Franch & Caplan, 1972; Margolis et al., 1974; Russek & Zohman, 1958), Role ambiguity: Lack of clarity regarding one's role's responsibilities, powers, and tasks (French & Caplan, 1972; Kahn et al., 1964), Role conflict: Conflicting demands from superiors or subordinates in a role (Beehr et al., 1976; Caplan and Jones, 1975; Caplan, et al, 1975; Hall & Gordon, 1973; Kahn et al., 1964), Responsibility for people, efforts to promote well-being, employment security, and professional advancement (French & Caplan, 1972; Pincherle, 1972), Worker's Participation: The degree to which one is in charge of important choices in their field of work (Kasl, 1973) (Margolis et al., 1974), Lack of feedback: Absence of information regarding work performance (Adams, 1980; Cassel, 1974), Adapting to quick changes in technology: adjusting to the quick changes in the realm of information processing (Ginzburg, 1967), Change-making inside the organization is a prerequisite for being in an inventive role (Kahn et al., 1964; Lawrence & Lorsch 1970), Career advancement: Effects of status inequality, unstable employment and unfulfilled aspiration (Brook 1973), (Erikson

& Gunderson, 1972); (Kahn et al., 1964), Recent episodic experiences: A number of severe life occurrences, including divorce, loss of loved ones etc. (Holmes & Rahe, 1975; Cobb, 1977; Adams, 1980). Therefore, in the work-stress literature, there are some major causes (stressors) of stress, which are depicted in Fig. 1.

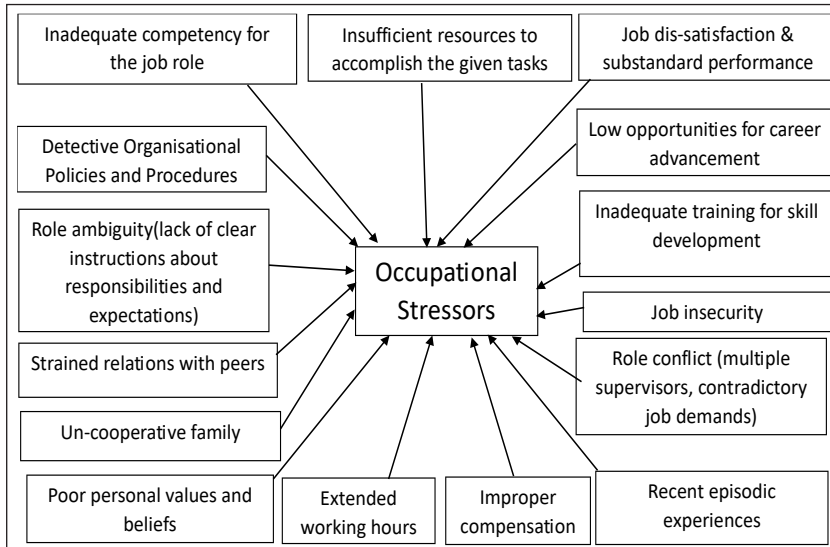


Fig. 1: Occupational Stressors

WHAT IS WELL-BEING?

While there isn't a single, agreed-upon definition of what well-being is, most people agree that it includes, at the very least, positive moods and emotions (like happiness and peace of mind), the absence of negative emotions (like anxiety or depression), contentment with their lives, wholeness, and productive functioning. In other words, signs of wellbeing include feeling good about yourself and possessing a positive attitude on life. In terms of public health, physical well-being—such as feeling generally well and energetic—is also seen to be crucial to total well-being (both psychologically and physically).

The concept of well-being is difficult to grasp. As a result, the phrase "subjective well-being (SWB)" was coined since most researchers believe that happiness is a personal experience. SWB may include the characteristics like: (i) A state of mind or emotion connected to an individual's subjective experience. Individuals with high well-

being perceive themselves as happy and fulfilled (Wright, 2005). (ii) Positive emotions predominate, with very few unpleasant emotions (iii) The seamless integration of everyday life or a career is a measure of one's overall well-being (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001). (iv) Emotions and cognition, which simultaneously reflect favorable and unfavorable aspects of one's experience and assessment of their current situation, are components of well-being (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003). (v) Analysis on multiple dimensions is frequently part of well-being. A wellness plan has the potential to foster a sense of support and value among employees. It may also increase team morale and motivate workers throughout the entire company to meet goals. Better workforce overall well-being also contributes to higher worker morale. Workers feel valued and capable when their needs are met. Employers are obligated to provide workers with the support and attention necessary for their physical and mental health. Without a doubt, a key component of every organization is its workforce. The organization, despite its tiny size, may nonetheless find many valuable methods to improve the level of living for everybody. Being enthusiastic about the well-being of staff members now can enhance or possibly save lives in years to come.

IMPACT OF STRESS ON EMPLOYEES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Stress has become one of the most significant health issues of the 21st century. Apart from creating physical and mental concerns in the individual employees, it endangers the overall organizational health by reducing its productivity and profitability. Stress results in 40% of employee turnover, 50% of absenteeism, and 5% of lost productivity, as per a study by Matteson and Ivancevich from 1987. Interestingly, the causes of stress (stressors) were almost preventable with adaption of suitable stress coping strategies. Workplace stress has detrimental effects on both employee performance and the general effectiveness of the company. According to Weidner et al. (1997), men's reports of healthcare symptoms and behaviors that compromise their health are more common among those who experience professional stress, or upset. Goal success, job satisfaction, organizational dedication, professional self-esteem, home life satisfaction, and lifestyle contentment are all negatively connected with job stress (Abraham & Hansson, 1996; Duxbury & Higgins, 1991; Seibert, 1991). Employees frequently experience high levels of time stress,

due to lengthier workdays which results in a diminished desire to perform better (Rose, 2003). Ivancevich and Donnelly (1975) also founded that job stress and job performance are negatively correlated, meaning, the lower the stress the better the performance, and higher the stress poorer the performance. Employees' health is harmed by negative organisational stress, and it intensifies uncommon biological circumstances that are detrimental to human psychological health (Hinton et al., 2010). Doby and Caplan (1995) assert that stress at work can make people feel anxious at home. The psychological and social dynamics of their family will be disturbed by this circumstance, which will have an impact on both the home and the workplace. Employees' psychological, physical, and behavioral health all suffer as a result of stress, which has an impact on how well they work. As a result, there is job discontentment, stress, high blood pressure, smoking, drinking, absenteeism, and job turnover. This not only destroy the employees state of mind but also deteriorates the overall organizations health.

POSITIVE SIDES OF STRESS (EUSTRESS)

Stress that improves performance and raises job happiness is known as eustress or positive stress. Hans Selye originally coined the term "Eustress" in 1976. He characterized eustress as appealing and connected to the benefits of an antecedent response. Following Selye, Hurrell et al. (1997), identified eustress as basically being in good health and doing well. Eustress was also defined as the result of the stress response being focused on producing advantageous and beneficial results. Eustress is the kind of stress that spurs you on to keep working. It can spur motivation and give you the push you need to finish your assigned tasks. If the outcome of a situation is perceived as good, that is, if it maintains or improves well-being or indicates that it will do so, then positive evaluations of stressors occur. Eustress measures how much a scenario or occurrence is viewed as benefiting a person or improving his or her wellbeing cognitively. The following traits describe eustress: short-term, emphasizes energy, motivates, is seen as being within our range of coping, feels stimulating, and enhances efficiency. In contrast to it, distress is characterized by anxiety, long term effects, awful feelings, outside of coping capacity, reduces performance and may lead to serious psychological and physiological issues. To remain content, inspired, intellectually stimulated, and successful, everyone needs a small amount

of stress in their day to day life. A person's level of enjoyment and engagement, or positive affect, can be used to gauge how excited, engaged, and awake they are feeling during their work hours (Watson et al., 1988). Healthy perceptions, beliefs, and even physical well-being itself may be influenced by positive emotional states (Salovey et al., 2010). According to a study, women's favorable work experiences have a positive impact on their home lives as well (Barnett & Marshall, 1992).

TWO DIMENSIONS OF STRESS: CHALLENGE-RELATED & HINDRANCE-RELATED

For a very long time, theories and research on employee effectiveness have been dominated by the detrimental effects of work stress. According to Selye's (1955) argument, stress levels should be categorized based on the type and severity of job demands. Furthermore, not all stresses lead to illness. Some stressful situations might result in good emotions and outcomes. Selye further distinguished between good and bad stress by dividing it into two categories: eustress and distress (Selye, 1976). Selye also attempted to examine the psychological impacts of eustress. After performing qualitative investigations and interviewing managers in firms, Cavanaugh et al. (2000) finally identified two categories of job stress connected to difficulties and impediments. "Demand of job and work environments, such as a tight schedule, work scope, and high workloads and duties" contributes to challenge-related stress. Stress associated with challenges, although being unpleasant, is believed to provide benefits for workers. A challenge stressor is a workload requirement that also fosters the achievement and personal growth of the individual. In contrast, hindrance-related stress is caused by "work-related requirements, such as organizational politics, formality and red tape, role ambiguity, and job insecurity, which may restrict or hinder personal work achievement and is unrelated to personal rewards or merits" (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Some studies also revealed that, both, the challenge related stress and hindrance related stress have mental and physical costs, including emotional exhaustion. In other words, the two categories of workplace stressors both adversely affect employees' psychophysiological health to varying degrees. Even when a challenge stressor has a good effect on a person's personal development and performance, it is still a stressor (Hongchao Wu et al., 2020). However, a study conducted by Li-fang Chou et al. (2014), revealed that, the challenge-related stress leads to improvements in the

employees' performance whereas hindrance-related stress deteriorates the performance of the employees.

BURNOUT AS A MEDIATOR

Occupational stress is the primary cause of burnout, which also negatively affects mental health (Alcides Moreno et al., 2020). A combination of the following three traits characterizes burnout, a syndrome that arises from chronic, poorly managed professional stress: Emotional exhaustion, job cynicism, and diminished professional efficacy (Maslach et al., 1996). According to Wang et al. a high degree of work stress is associated with higher burnout symptoms. Additionally, Chen et al. discovered that burnout mediated the association between workplace stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health symptoms. Job burnout can impact employee satisfaction, job productivity, and rate of employee turnover (Wong & Laschinger, 2015). Places with high work stress have a much higher incidence of burnout than places with low levels of stress (Poghosyan et al., 2009). It is possible to gauge stress prevalent in the workforce by identifying the early warning signals of employee burnout and examining how often they appear in the workplace. The state of burnout significantly affects the employees' physical and mental well-being which in turn has an adverse effect on the overall organizational health. Preventing burnout is the best approach to handle it. It's critical to establish a plan and choose how to handle employee burnout when preventative measures fail or external pressures are out of the employer's control. An enterprise-wide problem, managing burnout and emphasising employee psychological well-being can lead to more effective work practises and better performance. Burnout may be less detrimental if managers are given the training and tools, they need to identify workers at risk for it and provide solutions for those who are already experiencing it.

MOTIVATION AS A MODERATOR OF STRESS

Literature demonstrates that there is a contextual relationship between stress and employee performance, and that the context and situation dictate the nature and type of interaction (Cummings & Cooper, 1998). Existing research demonstrates the importance of employee motivation in the literature on organizational behavior (O'Reilly et al., 1991). Research has shown that those who have a clear sense of their life's purpose tend to

be more psychologically well and to have less symptoms of depression. Therefore, when people are highly driven to achieve their goals, stress may be simpler to handle. Employee satisfaction increases when they are motivated, and this leads to better output (Buford et al., 1995). A few factors that affect motivation include social fulfilment, psychological growth, and physical wellness. We will definitely encounter tension in our quest for wellness, development, and fulfilment as we have expectations of both ourselves and the others we should satisfy.

Evidence from the literature indicates that stress has a detrimental impact on employees' performance, and that employee motivation lowers stress (Sullivan, 1992). Employees who are adequately motivated exhaust stress, according to Robison (2010). The workers became more enthusiastic as a result, and their psychological and physical well-being improved. Employee dedication is further increased as a result, and they are less likely to think about their complaints when working on an assigned task. This increases the organization's workforce's productivity, innovation, and creativity. Thus, the literature shows that motivation significantly moderate the stress level thereby reducing the chances of poor performance.

STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Occupational stress can be managed with the help of following strategies.

(i) Setting up the job schedules that are appropriate for the needs and obligations of the job position. (ii) Organizations should offer support emotionally in addition to offering assistance for completing work and other given obligations. (iii) Job rotation may be implemented to avoid repetitive and uninteresting tasks. (iv) Job descriptions, policies, and paths for promotions should be transparent to all the employees. (v) Appropriate channel of communication must be established to convey any work related issues. (vi) Superior staff should motivate the subordinates as and when required with positive and appreciative feedback. (vii) Working hours can be made flexible, if possible, to the employees. (viii) Stress management sessions and workshop should be held at regular intervals. (ix) Compensation system may be altered to offer attractive monetary and non-monetary benefits. (x) Employees should be offered vacations, leisure time, and sports after set intervals to prevent feelings of isolation, sleep-related disorders, etc. (xi) Counselling is another technique, in

which problems with the person's personality and psychological health are triggered with the help of professionals. (xii) Restructuring the physical environment and workplace to create comfortable atmosphere. (xiii) The organization's training procedures should be improved and modified as per the requirement of the job role. (xiv) Concentrating on method of performance evaluation that helps in identifying an employee's strengths and weaknesses, and then delivering training in accordance with those findings. In addition to helping with skill development to meet organizational goals, it lowers stress. (xv) In recent years, mindfulness practices have become popularly incorporated into other disciplines like yoga and meditation. As a result, the blood pressure is brought back to normal, heart disease is treated, chronic pain is reduced, and sleeping patterns are improved. Additionally, it improves concentration and capacity for paying attention.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The contribution of this paper to the literature on occupational stress and employee well-being can be summarized as follows: (1). Comprehensive Review of Occupational Stressors: The paper consolidates various research findings on the major causes of occupational stress, including work overload, role ambiguity, conflicting roles, and inadequate feedback. By identifying these stressors, it provides a clearer understanding of how different factors contribute to stress in the workplace. (2). Integration of Burnout as a Mediator: One of the key contributions is highlighting "burnout" as a mediating factor between occupational stress and employee well-being. This adds a nuanced perspective to the existing literature by connecting the impact of stress on both individual mental health and overall organizational performance. (3). Positive Stress (Eustress): The paper introduces the concept of "eustress" (positive stress), which is often overlooked in traditional studies that focus only on the negative aspects of stress. It underscores that not all stress is detrimental and that positive stress can enhance performance and motivation, thus encouraging future research to explore both sides of the stress spectrum. (4). Motivation as a Moderator: It also contributes to the literature by discussing "motivation" as a moderator of stress. It suggests that motivated employees can better manage stress, which in turn improves job performance. This introduces the idea of using motivational strategies to mitigate the effects of stress. (5). Stress Management Strategies: The paper offers practical solutions

for managing occupational stress, from clear job descriptions to stress management workshops and mindfulness practices. This contribution is important as it bridges theory with practice, offering actionable recommendations that can be implemented by organizations. (6). Literature Synthesis: By reviewing decades of work-stress literature, the paper offers a synthesis of past research, making it a valuable resource for future scholars seeking an overview of key findings and gaps in the field. In conclusion, this paper adds value by integrating various dimensions of occupational stress, providing insights into both negative and positive aspects of stress, and proposing strategies for stress management, making it a useful reference for both academics and practitioners in the field of human resource management and organizational psychology.

CONCLUSION

Stress has become the significant issue in organizations for employees and as well the employers. It not only reduces the employee's productivity and efficiency but also deteriorates the overall organizational health. Most of the studies revealed that occupational stress is negatively correlated with employees resulting in decreased organizational performance. Additionally, a few research investigating the advantages of stress have been carried out and consequently founded that stress may also enhance enthusiasm of the employees to finish their tasks within the stipulated time. Challenge related stress inspire employees to take up challenging tasks to get personal satisfaction, whereas hindrance-related stress prevents them to perform better in their job roles. Studies have also shown that regular and periodic motivation moderate the stress level among the workforce. Burnout plays the role of mediator which significantly impacts the employee's well-being. Occupational Stress can be managed by adopting suitable stress coping strategies.

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