



A STUDY ON STRESS MANAGEMENT: EFFECTS AND COPING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Stress these days has become one of the most talked about and least understood word. The phrase 'everybody knows what stress is and yet nobody knows what it is' describes the complexities of the understanding of the word 'stress'. Many researchers believe that stress is becoming a major contributor to negative psychological consequences on the employee resulting in low employee morale, high accidents rates, high rate of absenteeism and high attrition rates and have caused difficulties for employees in getting along with others which has resulted in decreased productivity. Studies show that stress is responsible for 70% visits to doctors and is the reason for 85% of the serious illnesses. WHO commissioned study conducted by Indian Institute of Population Science states, that almost 60 percent of Indians suffer from stress related backache and unhealthily large percentage suffer from chronic exhaustion, sleep and other stress related disorders. This paper aims at studying the causes of stress among employees, to examine the effects of stress on employees and offer remedial measures for helping the employees in overcoming the problems related to it.

Keywords: Stress, stressors, symptoms, effects, remedial measures.

INTRODUCTION

Stress in the workplace is more than just rushing to meet a deadline or feeling a twinge of frustration at your job role. The most insidious workplace stress is consistent and unrelenting; in fact, this type of stress is known as chronic stress, and it can be deadly. Whereas episodic (or acute) stress can be defined as the stress that's directly related to a particular incident, chronic stress is unrelenting and can follow you around day in and day out. This is the type of stress that affects health and unfortunately, it is the kind that's most common in the workplace. For many people, stress has become a part of life. Stress isn't always bad. In small doses, it can help an individual perform under pressure and motivate him to do his best. But when the individual is constantly running in emergency mode, the mind and body pay the price. By understanding the signs and symptoms of stress and taking steps to reduce its harmful effects employees can prevent stress from ruining their life.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the causes of stress among employees
- To examine the effects of stress on employees
- To suggest remedial measures to employees in overcoming workplace-related stress.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is a descriptive study in nature. The secondary information has been collected from articles published in books, reports and websites related to stress management.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Stressful working conditions are actually associated with increased absenteeism, tardiness, and intentions by workers to quit their jobs – Journal of Applied Psychology. According to the American Institute of Stress (2014), workplace stress costs organizations over \$300 billion annually in lost productivity due to absenteeism, turnover and healthcare expenditures. Demanding schedules, high stress levels and performance linked prerequisites in private sectors, nearly 42.5% of employees in private sectors are afflicted from depression or general anxiety disorder, compared to government employees with lesser levels of psychological demand at work. In the list of the top diseases that affect corporate executives, depression (42%) ranks at the top, followed by obesity (23%), high blood pressure (9%) and diabetes (8%). The top 3 cities where professionals were the most prone to depression were Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai, in that order an ASSOCHAM study reveals.(2015).Stress caused either due to professional or personal challenges has an impact on both the Return on Investment – ROI (quantifiable) as well as Value on Investment – VOI (qualitative)of an organization .The total organizational productivity loss per year approximately adds up to INR 49.67 Cr, 105.48 Cr and 10.5 Cr across IT/ITES, Finance / Banking and Travel & Hospitality sectors respectively making it a serious contender for organizational investments towards holistic health and wellness of employees particularly with a focus on minimizing stress levels . Lack of clarity of goals, lack of flexibility, having to work in shifts, and inability to manage personal and professional responsibilities have high impact on absenteeism and result in loss of productivity.(Workplace Stress Report-2016)“Nearly 80 per cent of working professionals in India complain that they suffer from stress and their organizations don't have any programs to manage stress at work. 'Workplace stress' or 'occupational stress' is identified as a medical hazard, which has serious physical and psychological implications on individuals' wellbeing. Every working professional- regardless of age, experience, gender and profile has felt the pressure of work-related stress at some point in in their career, says a new Times Jobs study. "While some level of stress is acceptable but chronic stress has become a common ailment for many professionals, issues such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, migraines, and heart problems start affecting employee wellbeing and productivity. The study reveals, 60 per cent of employees find workplace stress so high that they want to quit their jobs. This is not a healthy sign," says Nilanjan Roy, Head of Strategy, Times Business Solutions.” (ET Bureau, Nov 16, 2016) Stress causes as much harm to your body as a diet of junk food (especially for women), says a new study done on mice. It revealed that exposure to stress can alter gut micro biota — the microorganisms vital to digestive and metabolic health.(Hindustan Times Oct 17, 2017) According to recent scientific study conducted on 3,730 workers, none of which were diabetic at the start of study; wherein researchers examined data after 12 years of follow-up. It was found that workers who experienced increasingly stressful tasks on the job were 57% more likely to develop diabetes. It is observed that major changes in work may affect risk of developing diabetes.(Times of India Feb 28, 2018)

CONCEPT OF “STRESS”

The word ‘stress’ possibly is derived from the Latin word ‘Stringere’, means to draw tight and was used in the 17th century to describe hardship, strain, adversity or affliction. Distress and strain are commonly used words in association with the word stress. Distress is severe pressure of pain, or sorrow, and an anguish, exhaustion or breathlessness while strain is the exertion to meet demand, injury or change resulting from such exertion, or the condition of a body subjected to stress. Fatigue, another word used in the same context is stress which refers to weariness after exertion or long strain. Thus, stress is a constraining force acting on a person, who is attempting to cope with this force, exerts or strains himself, and perhaps feels fatigued as a result, and distressed. In common language, the 'stress' is employed to indicate distress, which originally reflects a kind of hardship/burden/pressure/compulsion inflicted on something on somebody.

Stress means mental, physical and emotional tension, strain or distress. It is a condition of strain that has a direct bearing on emotions, thought process and physical conditions of a person. Besides, it refers to two simultaneous events – an external stimulus called a stressor, and the emotional and physical responses to that stimulus. The emotional and physical responses are fear, anxiety, a surging heart rate, blood pressure, fast breathing, and muscle tension. Therefore, stress is our internal reaction to negative, threatening and worrisome situations.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Causes of stress

It's important to recognize the common causes of stress at work in order to reduce stress levels where ever possible. The causes of stress are found within the environment, the individual and the interaction between the two. These stressors can be divided into two classes:

- i) Those that lie within the individual
- ii) Those that are a part of the external environment.

Internal Stimuli for Stress

The internal sources of stress are complex and difficult to isolate, although they function in continual interaction.

1. Inner conflicts: However favorable or unfavorable the external conditions may be stress is a constant companion for many people. Non-specific fears, anxiety and guilt feelings maintain the body in a state of readiness for emergency action on a continuing basis.
2. Perceptual Influences: Perception is influenced by a number of internal factors. People with inner conflicts are likely to perceive environmental conditions as threatening. It is because they presume that environment is full of danger and they perceive the evidences of danger everywhere.
3. Motivational Level: People who are highly motivated and ambitious to achieve are more likely to experience stress than those who are content with their career status. Persons whose self-expectations exceed their abilities and opportunities are especially stress prone.

Environmental Stressors

The environmental and internal conditions that lie beyond an individual's control are called environmental stressors. Such stressors can have a considerable impact on work performance and adjustment. These stressors can be classified as follows:

1. **Task Demands:** Task demands are factors related to a person's job. They include the design of the individual's job, working conditions, and the physical work layout. Changes and lack of control are two of the most stressful demands people face at work.
2. **Role Demands:** The social-psychological demands of the work environment may be every bit as stressful as task demands at work. Role demands relate to pressures placed on a person as a function of the particular role he or she plays in the organization. Role conflicts create expectations that may be hard to reconcile or satisfy. Another major cause of role stress is role ambiguity. Role ambiguity is created when the role expectations are not clearly understood and the employee is not sure what he or she is to do.
3. **Inter-personal demands:** These are pressures created by other employees. Lack of social support from colleagues and poor interpersonal relationships can cause considerable stress, especially among employees with a high social need.
4. **Physical Demands:** Non-work demands create stress for people, which carry over into the work environment or vice versa. Workers subject to family demands related to marriage, child rearing, parental care or public service organizations may create role conflicts or overloads that are difficult to manage.

Damaging effects of stress

General symptoms of stress: These symptoms can be classified as cognitive symptoms, emotional symptoms, physical symptoms and behavioral symptoms.

Cognitive symptoms include memory problems, inability to concentrate, poor judgement, seeing only the negative, anxious or racing thoughts, constant worrying.

Emotional symptoms include moodiness, irritability or short temper, agitation or inability to relax, feeling overwhelmed, sense of loneliness and isolation, depression or general unhappiness.

Physical symptoms include aches and pains, diarrhea or constipation, nausea, dizziness, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, frequent colds, constant tiredness, weakness, fatigue etc.

Behavioral symptoms like eating more or less, sleeping too much or too little, isolating yourself from others, procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax, nervous habits(e.g. nail biting, pacing)etc.

When the demands of the workplace become too much to handle, employees generally display signs and symptoms that indicate they are feeling 'stressed out'. Unfortunately, individuals may not recognize these signs and let them go untreated. This is where serious conditions can occur, either mental or physical in nature, and a need arises for professional intervention. It is important that employees learn to recognize stressful reactions in themselves and others so that they can stop the downward spiral of stress before it becomes detrimental to their health.

Effects of Stress: The effects of untreated stress can be studied from two viewpoints that is, individual and financial viewpoint. When individuals have been continually exposed to stress for long periods of time (i.e., their stress responses are continuously activated), a situation known as ‘chronic stress’ can occur. Coronary heart disease, hypertension (high blood pressure), some forms of cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, irritable bowel syndrome, depression, anxiety, ulcers, strokes, stomach and duodenal ulcers, indigestion, heartburn and burnout are some of the effects of stress.

From a financial and economic standpoint untreated workplace stress is associated with increased levels of employee absenteeism and turnover, decreased levels of productivity, as well as lost work days due to disability or sick leave.

Remedial measures to reduce stress

1. Learn how to manage stress: Managing stress is all about taking charge. Taking charge of one’s thoughts, emotions, schedule, environment and the way a person deals with problems. Stress management involves changing the stressful situation when you can, changing your reaction when you can’t take care of yourself, and making time for rest and relaxation.

2. Strengthening relationships: A strong support network is our greatest protection against stress. It is necessary to spend time with the people you love .Our responsibilities should not keep us from having a social life.

3. Learn how to relax: Relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing and yoga activate the body’s relaxation response. If practiced regularly it can lead to a reduction in everyday stress levels. It also increases the ability to stay calm and collected under pressure.

4. Investing in emotional health: People with good emotional health have an ability to bounce back from stress and adversity. This ability is called resilience. It helps in remaining focused, flexible, and positive in bad times as well as good. So it is very essential to build up emotional well-being just like our physical health.

5. Time management: The best way to manage stress is to better control your use of time. The well-organized employee can often accomplish twice as much as the person who is poorly organized. Improving time management skills can give individuals a greater sense of control.

6. Physical exercise and diet: Employees can seek to improve their physical health by exercising regularly. Regular exercise makes an individual more confident, more optimistic and less stressed. Diet plays an indirect role in stress management. A nutritional diet makes a person less vulnerable to distress.

7. Learned optimism: Optimistic people avoid distress by understanding the bad events and difficult times in their lives as temporary, limited and caused by something other than themselves. Learned optimism means identifying pessimistic thoughts and then distracting oneself from these thoughts or disputing them with evidence and alternative thoughts.

CONCLUSION

The problem of stress is inevitable in the present working environment. Stress has the potential to eat into our society’s well-being. Many studies have revealed that stress affects the physical and mental health of the employees. By adopting coping strategies negative dimensions of stress can be reduced which in turn can make a person productive and constructive in his work.

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