



AN EVALUATIVE STUDY OF STRESS AND STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE EFFICIENCY OF INDIVIDUALS AT WORK

SHAZIA SHAHZADI^{1*}, MUHAMMAD NADEEM UMAR², TAUSIF A. RAJPUT³, SHAHZAD ALI KHAN⁴, ASHER AHMED MASHHOOD⁵

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Abstract

Objective: To study the scale and frequency of stress at work, to understand the causes and to determine measures that could be recommended to manage this stress in order to optimize the individual's efficiency at the job.

Design: This is a descriptive observational study. close-ended survey, stratified random sampling technique was used. It was conducted from 25th May 2021 to 1st October-2021 at QIMS, STMU, Riphah International Hospital and CMH Rawalpindi.

Methods: The sample consisted of 250 participants, in which 138 males and 112 females from Shifa Tameer e Millat University, Quetta Institute of Medical Sciences, Riphah International University Hospital, Health Services Academy and Combined Military Hospital Rawalpindi. The ages ranged between 20 to 60 years, with mean calculated ages of males being 28 years and for females were 27 years. The close-ended questionnaire was prepared to assess demographic Information like name, age, gender, marital status and job description. Work stressors questionnaire was used. however, 25 questionnaires had to be rejected as they were incomplete the questionnaire was made in English language and mainly nine parameters were included. These were, Disagreement and indecision, pressure of job, communication and comfort, work overload, job description conflict, boredom induced stress, problem of job security, time pressure and job awareness description.

Nine relevant parameters including their sub-parameters were evaluated. The most commonly quoted parameter in "disagreement and indecision" was the unfriendly attitude of coworkers 192 (77%), in "pressure of job" was too much supervision 127 (51%), in "communication and comfort" was that boss gives little feedback about your work 167 (67%), in "work overloaded stress" was that working conditions are unhealthy 170 (68%), in "boredom induced stress" was that individuals are not rewarded for final outcomes for their efforts 170 (68%), in "problem of security" was fear of being laid off or fired 105 (56%), in "time pressure" was that starting and ending times are rigid 187 (75%), in "job awareness and description" was lack of awareness of job requirement 192 (77%). Increased stress levels which were potentially causing loss of efficiency were found in employees, because of enhanced workload, excessive competitiveness being encouraged instead of friendly camaraderie and teamwork, lack of information and communication between employees and management, and because of job insecurity. Based on the feedback in our study we recommend that regular training and informational workshops including feedback about work performance and future vision of the organizations should be shared with the employees, especially where it directly affects their workload, promotions and careers. Assurances and steps taken to provide job security alongside effective communication and feedback loop between employees and managers, would go a long way in reducing levels of job-related stress.

Keywords: CMH, Employees, HSA, Management, Quetta Institute of Medical Sciences (QIMS), RIH&U, STMU, Stress

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2020, studies conducted on American workers revealed that about 94% of them were experiencing stress at work. Only 6% workers reported not feeling stressed at work, according to Wrike's USA stress statistics. Out of the 94%, about 23% rated their stress level as High and 6% rated it as Unusually High.

¹Speech Pathology and Psychology, Shifa Tameer-i- Millat University, Islamabad, Pakistan

²Department of Surgery, Riphah International University and Hospital, Islamabad, Pakistan

³Dean Faculty of Pharmaceutical & Allied Health Science, Shifa Tameer-i- Millat University, Islamabad, Pakistan

⁴Professor of Public Health & Vice Chancellor, Health Services Academy, Islamabad, Pakistan

⁵Department of Dermatology, Combined Military Hospital, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

*Corresponding author email- psyslp@yahoo.com

On average 80% of workers felt stressed out at their work, and around 50% said that they needed support and guidance in managing their stress, while 42% identified that their co-workers needed help with stress management at their job. 25% of the participants said that they felt like screaming while at work, while 10% felt insecure about violence tendency in their co-worker.

Research carried out by Mind, found that work-load at the job was the most significant factor at work aggravating stress in peoples' lives. He concluded that 1/3 i.e., 34% of the workers said that their job and workload were the biggest challenge in their life, even more than managing their debt and finances 30% or even matters of health 17%. Commonest causes of work related Stress are ,Job Insecurity (The most common culprit identified for work stress) ,Distribution of Work-load, Lack of Training for efficient job performance and lack of adequate resources at the work place for efficient working ,Lack of Control over work-related activities ,Management aloofness, lack of information sharing and difficult managerial style, Unregulated and non-compensated Extra working hours, Deficient Technological devices to facilitate work, Organizational change.

Seeing tired and embittered looks of colleagues at work, unwillingness of individuals to communicate with their colleagues, constant expressions of dissatisfaction, with resultant inefficiency and sub-par performance, could be the scene one commonly sees at mismanaged companies. And the commonest culprit that causes this negative picture is most usually the complex phenomenon of Stress at work. Stress at work is neither a new phenomenon nor something which is seldom faced.

This is especially true of an environment of impending economic crises, where only highly competitive individuals are encouraged, compounded by seeing or hearing continuous negative news on electronic and print media, with controversial debates on new incurable illnesses causing confusion, are the mix which is bound to ensure more and more stress on individuals. Stress nowadays is "not something new, not anything unknown" (Agrawal 2001, 11). Over the past few centuries since identification of stress effects, the meaning and definitions of stress have kept changing. However, two things have remained constant in the Stress to Disease relationship i.e psychological problems morphing into Physiological problems and biological issues becoming Mental Disorders. (Dewer 2002,37). Here are some examples of attempts at defining work-related stress:

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker". (United States National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, Cincinnati, 1999).

The emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological reactions to aversive and noxious aspects of work, work environments and work organizations. It is a state characterized by high level of arousal and distress and often by feelings of not coping" (Guidance on work-related stress: Spice of life-or kiss of death, European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs).

Stress is the reaction people have due to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed in them" (Managing stress at work: Discussion document, United Kingdom Health and Safety Commission, London, 1999).

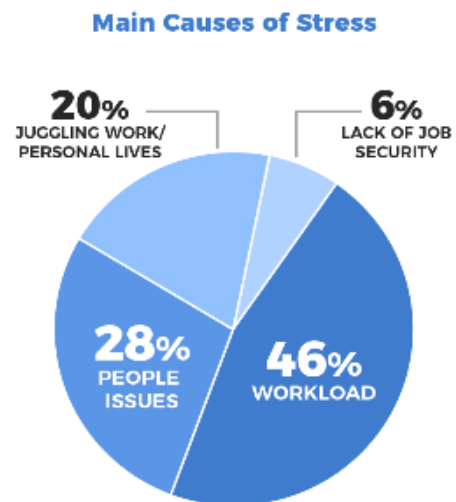


Figure 1 Main Causes of Stress

In summary, stress at work is caused by making demands on an individual which are over and above the coping resources possessed by that individual. These demands can be Social, Psychological, Financial, Physical or temporal. Therefore, stress is the byproduct of an individual's perception of his or her environmental factors or events. (R. Agrawal 2001, 60). Worldwide estimates of Stress-costs to businesses is around 7 billion USD a year. This estimate comprises sick-pays, poor performance related outcomes and missed deadlines. Although it must be kept in mind that not all stress related factors arise at work, however it cannot be over-emphasized that a negative mind-set and extortionist behavior of management cause workers to suffer a brutal life in such companies. The direct cognitive results of this stress are compromised mental functions such as ability to focus and concentrate on work, more negative versus positive thinking, altered reasoning, decreased memory and therefore lesser and inefficient output at work. (Lynn and Carbide, 1997). Work Environment and conditions that lead to stress:

1. The Work Pattern: Heavy workload on individuals, long working Hours especially if uncompensated for the over-time, changing shifts frequently and otherwise hectic routine at work especially if accompanied by lack of appropriate equipment which does not allow a worker to perform efficiently, lead to a sense of loss of control over their workspace and leads to discontent and stress.
2. Conduct of Management: Isolating the workers from the decision-making process, lack of adequate and fruitful communication between management and workers and lack of family-friendly policies, again lead to stress and discontent.
3. Work Environment: A work space environment which does not promote camaraderie among co-workers and seniors, creates a poor social environment and destroys team work thus

reducing overall efficiency. Similarly, where a policy of 'divide and rule' is implemented, the discontent especially among skilled workers increases.

4. Job Security and Career Concerns: Where threat of losing job is used as a tool to implement policies and especially if there is lack of opportunity of personal growth and merit-based promotion, the discontent level goes up and efficiency and personal interest in achieving targets is lost. ("A SURVIVAL GUIDE" Alice Adams, Andrew Ryder, 2003, 138)

Stress management primarily aims at creating certain alterations in the design of work and work environment in order to reduce the deleterious impact of various factors causing increased levels of stress in the work force. These alterations are generally focused on the individual, to help mitigate the stress, increase their efficiency and job satisfaction, and to help them cope with the stress factors at work. Interventions to manage stress can also be focused on the organizational role in creating a conducive environment for work, thus mitigating unnecessary stress. Stress management is the program of meditation, deep relaxation and actions to change the created situation and intended to reduce the effects of stress on the system. (Glossary of Oxford University Press 2005).

1. Stress Management Models: Stress at work is a complicated, multifactorial and multidimensional conglomerate of factors, which is further compounded by the individual's unique response to each stressor. However, we can identify at least two main models of stress management: The Transactional Model and The Health Realization model.
2. Transactional Model: Folkman, Susan and Lazarus, Richard was among the initial few researchers who in 1984 first proposed the Transactional Model of Managing Stress. According to them, Stress is created either by an imbalance between demands and resources or when the work pressure on an individual exceeds that person's perception of their ability to cope with it.
3. Health Realization Model: Mills, R. proposed the Health Realization Model in 1995. According to him, any organization must have a system to identify and help stressed out individuals to understand and recognize the signs of stress. The idea is to educate them and provoke a thought process, whereby they can identify when they are in the throes of insecure thinking, so that they can disengage that negative thought process and thus move towards a more natural positive attitude and positive feelings. (Mills, R, 1995).

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

In this era of competition, workload has automatically increased, and it is imperative that the work force perform at peak levels of efficiency in order to achieve the ever-rising targets and challenges. With the highly competitive market, rising demands of consumers and management raising the bar and targets every so often, stress at work is

a rising phenomenon. It is imperative to study this subject because of its negative impact on work force efficiency and thus productivity. Ultimately it costs the organization hiring that work force. In this study we isolate and identify the most common factors causing stress at work, and also attempt to suggest the most cost-efficient and effective ways to firstly prevent the unnecessary stress at work and secondly how to help individuals to cope with it.

Aim: This study is focused on evaluating the various factors that cause or exacerbate the work stress, and on how to manage these aggravating factors in order to optimize the efficiency of individuals specifically and the work force in general.

Objective: To identify the causes and exacerbating factors attributing to work stress

To suggest strategies that could help alleviate and manage work-related stress

3. METODOLOGY

This was a descriptive observational study, which was carried out through a close-ended questionnaire. Process of stratified random sampling was used. The total sample consisted of 250 participants, including 138 males and 112 females from Shifa Tameer e Millat University, Quetta Institute of Medical Sciences, Riphah International University Hospital, Health Services Academy and Combined Military Hospital Rawalpindi. The ages ranged between 20 to 60 years, with mean calculated ages of males being 28 years and for females were 27 years. The following instruments and tools were used the close-ended questionnaire was prepared to include Demographic Information like name, age, gender, marital status and job description. Work stressors questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was made in English language and mainly nine parameters were included. These were, Disagreement and indecision, pressure of job, communication and comfort, work overload, job description conflict, boredom induced stress, problem of job security, time pressure and job awareness description, with further 25 parameters included where relevant. The qualitative score regarding various features of stress started with simple answers like (Yes) and (No). Further rating at a scale of 1 to 5 was inculcated where relevant. Psychometric properties of scale at Cronbach's alpha value for work stressor scale was 0.96 (>0.90) which is consistent with high internal consistency. Having specified the problem suitable samples were taken from five institutions QIMS, STMU, RIH, CMH and HSA, and the data was collected and analyzed. Formal permission was taken from Heads of the institutions. A short demographical questionnaire along with work stressor questionnaire was distributed in the better educated employees of different departments (Doctors, IT department, Human Resource Department, Department of Medical Education and various Managers), of the a/m five institutions. This study took 6 months to complete the data from 25th May 2021 to 1st October 2021. Inclusion Criteria was Teaching faculty, Anatomy, Physiology, Biochemistry, Pathology, Community Medicine, Forensic Medicine. Clinical faculty: Dermatology, Surgery, Psychology, Speech pathology, public health, Managers: Accounts managers, Student affairs managers, HR, IT, Computer officers and exclusion Criteria was Nurses, Naib Qasids, Café

contractor, Drivers, Gardeners, Gate keeper, Sweepers, Lab Assistants, Ward Boys.

Ethical statement: After taking approval from ERC of QIMs and explaining the Aim of the study to students, informed written agreement was got and informed that all personal information and responses were kept confidential.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 Demographical Characteristics

S No	Demographical Data	Frequency and Percentages	
1.	Gender	Male 138 (55%)	Female 112 (45%)
2.	Marital Status	Married 120 (48%)	Unmarried 130 (52%)
3.	Age	20-30 192 (77%)	31-40 44 (17.5%)
		41-50 4 (1.5%)	51-60 10 (4%)
4.	Job Description	Doctor 68 (27%)	Managers 63 (25%)
		IT 47 (19%)	Other 72 (29%)

Table 2 Indicates the work stressors Parameters and percentages of the participants. (N= 250)

WORK STRESSOR	YES	NO
Disagreements and Indecision		
Unfriendly attitude in Coworkers	192 (77%)	58 (23%)
Coworkers are inefficient	148 (59%)	102 (51%)
Can't satisfy conflicting demands from superior	130 (52%)	120 (48%)
Pressure of Job		
Over loaded at work	128 (51%)	122 (49%)
Too much supervision	123 (49%)	127 (51%)
Job requirements are taking toll on private life	128 (51%)	122 (49%)
Communication and Comfort		
Boss gives little feedback about your work	168 (67%)	82 (33%)
Boss is overly critical of your work	130 (52%)	120 (48%)
Work Overload Stress		
Working conditions are unhealthy	170 (68%)	80 (32%)
Often take work home to complete	120 (48%)	130 (52%)
Rush to complete work	163 (65%)	87 (35%)
Job Description Conflict		
Poor flow of information	170 (68%)	80 (32%)
Not enough authority to do the job	108 (43%)	142 (57%)
Boredom Induced Stress		
Repetitive or highly specialized routine	140 (56%)	110 (44%)
Not learning anything new	168 (67%)	82 (33%)
Can't see final outcome of your efforts	170 (68%)	80 (32%)
Problem of Job Security		
Fear of being laid off or fired	140 (56%)	110 (44%)
Concerned about low wages	140 (56%)	110 (44%)
Time Pressure		
Starting and ending times are rigid	188 (75%)	62 (25%)
Not enough break or meal time	110 (44%)	140 (56%)
Work pace is too fast	140 (56%)	110 (44%)
Job Awareness and Description		
Awareness about job requirements	192 (77%)	58 (23%)
Appearance in any aptitude test to get this job	148 (59%)	141 (41%)
Qualification status according to job	168 (52%)	82 (33%)
Consistency in appointment or it keeps on changing	146 (56%)	110 (44%)

Table 3 Indicates total work stressors of nine parameters, as expressed in percentages

9 parameter of Work stressors	Percentages
Disagreements and Indecision	64%
Pressure of Job	50%
Communication and Comfort	59%
Work Overload Stress	60%
Job Description Conflict	56%
Boredom Induced Stress	63%
Problem of Job Security	56%
Time Pressure	58%
Job Awareness and Description	47%

Table 4 Mean, Standard deviation, and the one-way analysis of variance in Stress management strategies (SMS)

Variab les	HRM		TSM		NT		F (2,59)	η ²	Post- HOC
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
SMS	42.1	3.20	28.8	3.2	16.6	8.3	23.789 ***	0.46	1>2>3

***p < .001

Table 4 shows means, standard deviation and F-value for Stress management strategies on three groups (HRM, TSM, NT). Results shows significant mean difference of groups on stress management with F (2, 59) =23.789, p< .001. Findings reveal that HRM exhibited higher level of stress management as compared to TSM and NT group. The value of η² was .46 (< .50) which indicated small effect size. The post-Hoc comparison indicated significant difference between group mean of each group with other two groups.

5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine “the level of work stress, causes of this stress at work and possible stress management at the job”. Different work stressor parameters were tested in this study. Survey questionnaire containing 25 questions (sub parameters) was used to test the 9 main parameters.

In 2020, studies conducted on American workers revealed that about 94% of them were experiencing stress at work. Only 6% workers reported not feeling stressed at work, according to Wrike’s USA stress statistics. Out of the 94%, about 23% rated their stress level as High and 6% rated it as Unusually High.

On average 80% of workers felt stressed out at their work, and around 50% said that they needed support and guidance in managing their stress, while 42% identified that their co-workers needed help with stress management at their job. 25% of the participants said that they felt like screaming while at work, while 10% felt insecure about violence tendency in their co-worker.

Research carried out by Mind, found that work-load at the job was the most significant factor at work aggravating stress in peoples’ lives. He concluded that 1/3 i.e., 34% of the workers said that their job and workload were the biggest challenge in their life, even more than managing their debt and finances 30% or even matters of health 17%.

The results presented in table 1 show that majority of the participants were male, 138 (55%). Further the table indicates that most of the participants were between 20-30 years of age, 192 (77.1%). 120 (48%) participants were married and 130 (52%) were unmarried. By profession 68

(27%) were doctors, 63 (25%) were managers 47 (19%) IT engineers and 72 (29%) were from other professions.

Unfriendly attitude in coworkers was responded as 77% YES and 23% NO, coworkers are inefficient was responded as 59% YES and 51% NO, can't satisfy conflicting demands from superiors came out to be as 52% YES and 48% NO, overloaded with work was responded as 51% YES and 49% NO, too much supervision was responded as 49% YES and 51% NO, job requirement is taking toll on private life was as 51% YES and 49% NO, boss gives little feedback on work which is as 67% YES and 33% NO, boss is overly critical of your work was as 52% YES and 48% NO, work conditions are unhealthy was responded as 68% YES and 32% No, rush to complete work on short time was responded as 65% YES and 35% NO, poor flow of information to carry out job came out to be as 68% YES and 32% NO, not enough authority to do job 43% YES and 57% NO, repetitive or highly specialized routine 56% YES and 44% NO, not learning anything new, can't see final outcome for your efforts was as 67% YES and 38% NO, fear of being laid off and low wages was responded as 56% YES and 44% NO each, starting and ending times are rigid was responded as 75% YES and 25% NO, not enough break or meal time was responded as 44% YES and 56% NO, work pace is too fast came out as 56% YES and 44% NO, awareness of job requirement was as 77% YES and 23% NO, passing of aptitude test to get the job was responded as 43% YES and 57% NO, qualification status as per job requirement was as 67% YES and 33% NO, consistency in appointment was as 56% YES and 44% NO. Means, standard deviation and F-value for Stress management strategies on three groups (HRM, TSM, NT). Results shows significant mean difference of groups on stress management with $F(2, 59) = 23.789$, $p < .001$. Findings reveal that HRM exhibited higher level of stress management as compared to TSM and NT group. The value of η^2 was $.46 (< .50)$ which indicated small effect size. The post-Hoc comparison indicated significant difference between group mean of each group with other two groups.

6. CONCLUSION

It was summarized that most affected parameter in "disagreement and indecision" was inefficient coworkers 188 (64%), in "pressure of job" there was overload of work 151(50%), in "communication and comfort" boss gives little feedback about work 119 (59%), in "work overloaded stress" was unhealthy working conditions 181(60%), in "job description conflict" was poor flow of information to carry out job 111(56%), in "boredom induced stress" was can't final outcomes for the efforts 191(63%), in "problem of job security" was fear of being laid off or fired 112(56%), in "time pressure" were rigid job timings 175(58%), in "job awareness and description" was lack awareness of job requirement 244 (47%).

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the study findings, following recommendations can help in effective management of work-related stress:

1. In order to build air of friendliness among coworkers, there should be regular interactive

sessions and less comparison in employees by the authorities.

2. Bosses should be more responsive to workers and should give regular information regarding future improvement plans and feedback regarding their performances, this could be very encouraging.
3. To meet unhealthy working conditions, workplace setup and equipment should be improved along with working facilities to the employees.
4. Regular training workshops should be conducted so that workers learn more about their job.
5. Employees should be given complete security of their job, so that there is no fear of losing it. An environment of Justice and fair-play should be encouraged, and grouping should be discouraged.
6. Workers should be given optimum liberty to work, with certain limitations, to avoid too much supervision.
7. Hard work of employees should be appreciated by the bosses and they should be rewarded for their good performances.
8. Relaxation in timings should be given at the time of need.

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