"Occupational Stress Management among Information Technology Professionals in India"

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ABSTRACT

This fast moving century is belong to IT era, in India software industry has become one of the fastest growing indrustries, The IT sector professionals are characterized by long time working, night shifts, lack of mobility and continued visual focusing the monitor leads to "Occupational Stress", it may be related with many factors like income, age, nature of work, type of organizations, personality type etc. Increasing age because many problems, employees cannot do their works effectively. Six major categories of potential sources of stress at work have been identified by Cooper and Marshall (1976): Intrinsic to the job, Resulting from one's role in the organization, Career Development, Relation with others, Orgnizational structure and climate. Ivancevich and Mattson (1980) suggested four main items that are namely: Physical environment, Individual Level (Role and career development variable), Group level (Relationshipbased) and Organizational level (OrganizationalClimate, Structure, job Design and task characteristic).

KEYWORDS:*Stress, Occupational Stress, IT Professional, Stress Management Technique*

1. INTRODUCTION

"Stress is the trash of modern life-we all generate it but if you don't dispose of it properly, it will pile up and overtake your life"

Stress is often coined as a medical term or a psychological phenomenon because of its possibilities in deteriorating the health condition of a person and the stimulus that triggers the fight or flight response respectively. Modern time is the age of anxiety and stress which itself will be affected by number of stressors as concluded by Coleman (1976).Occupational stress in the workplace can make people dread walking in to the office every morning and then make them worry about their jobs at night. Beehr and Newman (1978) defined Stress as a situation which forces a person to deviate from its routine functioning due to change in psychological or physiological condition. When staff is unhappy, they are less efficient, less effective and more likely to squander work hours or ultimately quit. The main area of this study is occupational stress to an individual of the corporate culture in today's time. Juggling between their work and life to strike that balance, meeting with the high demands of the market, giving into the competition at workplace to prove their worth et al.

On the other hand one of the fastest growing work forces is the group of information technology professionals. The number of personal computers around the world is close to the billion, but the number of IT professionals joining this field is declining fast. Bureau of Labor statistics

estimated that about 1.6 million new IT professions would be created from 2004-2016. It is also different from other conventionally male oriented occupational fields like medicine, accounting where female participation is rising, whereas the number of women in the field of IT is dwindling.

Occupational stress is the stress among the working professionals. The occupational stress may be related with many factors. All factors influence the stress level of an employee. Because the increasing age cause many problems. The employees cannot do their works effectively. Through increasing age also increasing their responsibilities. So sometimes the professionals cannot able to maintain responsibilities effectively. Education is also an important factor in occupational stress. Working in IT field computer knowledge is important .So the educational qualification is must. The level of stress varied from the people with high qualification and low educational qualification.

One of the main problems is stress. So education and occupational stress are related. Sex and occupational stress are related. The women cannot able to do overtime work and heavy work. The male professional does more work than female professionals. The overtime and heavy work cause many mental problems in female workers. Now women employed in all types of profession. So the level of stress is different from male and female professionals.

Monthly salary is an important variable. A person has the right to get equal pay for equal work. In some professions the high workload only gets low salary. This can lead the problem of stress; if the professional do not satisfied to his salary there he can lead to occupational stress. Marital status influence occupational stress. Because the married persons play roles at one time. They become capable to match up with both occupation and family roles. Most of the male married persons are the head of the family. So occupational stress is increased the married persons than unmarried.

Stress is not always dreadful, as some people are derived to work much better with certain amount of stress as it provides them motivation creativity and mild feeling of euphoria but the concern lies where too much stress or repeated stress can have negative physical, mental and emotional consequences on a person's mind and body. Striving to achieve a mark or a goal set is often in the mind of many but by putting health at stake would mean deriving yourself backwards to accomplish that target as excessive stress can interfere with the productivity and impact the physical and emotional health. Ability of an individual to deal with it can mean the difference between success and failure for themselves. A person can't control everything in their work environment, but that doesn't mean being powerless—even when stuck in a difficult situation. Finding ways to manage workplace stress isn't about making huge changes or rethinking career ambitions all the time. The bottom line is, focus on the one thing that's always within a person's control: Themselves.
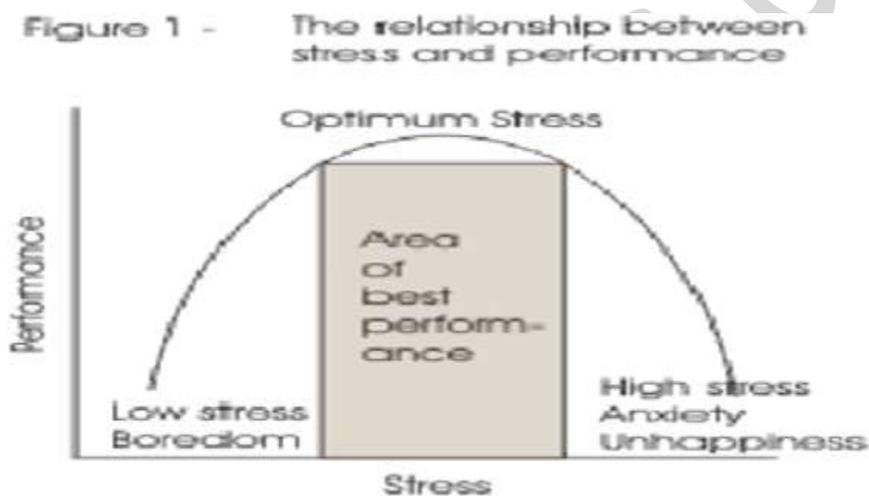
Relaxation techniques reduce the level of stress of a person. Relaxation techniques help the professionals to relax themselves. Yoga, meditation and exercise are the main relaxation techniques. While some work pace stress is normal excessive stress can interface with your productivity and impact your physical and emotional health. And your ability to deal with it can mean the difference between success and failure. You cannot control everything in your work environment, but that doesn't mean you are powerless. Even when you are stuck in a difficult situation. Finding ways to manage workplace, stress is not about making huge changes or

rethinking career ambitions, but rather about focusing on the one thing that always within your control you. In this article, coping with work stress, recognize the warming signs, taking care of you, priorities and organizing, improving emotional intelligence, breaking bad habits.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a complex phenomenon. It has been defined in many ways, but simply put; it is the wear and tear of everyday life. In every day's life people are subjected to a wide range of pressures. Similarly there are also a wide range of resources and strategies for coping with pressure. Sometimes people cope well and will not feel that the pressure is having any adverse effect upon them. At other times they will have difficulty in dealing with the situation and that is when we may use the term "stress".
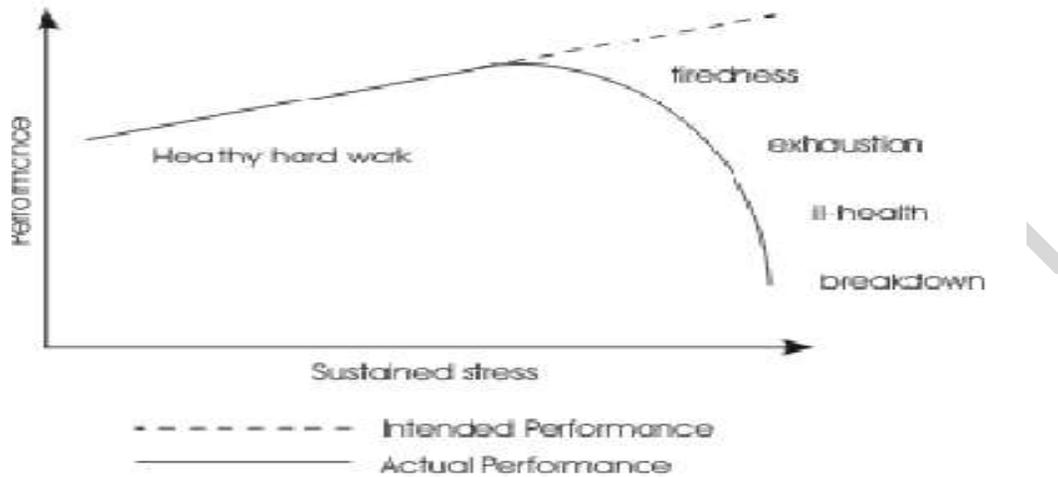
Short term stress: The diagram below shows the relationship between stress and the quality of performance when one is in situations that impose short term stress:

Figure 1 –   The relationship between stress and performance

Where stress is low, one may find that his/her performance is low because of boredom, lack concentration and motivation. Where stress is too high, the performance can suffer from all the symptoms of excessive short-term stress. In the middle, at a moderate level of stress, there is a zone of best performance. If one can keep oneself within this zone, then that person will be sufficiently aroused to perform well while not being over-stressed and unhappy.   This graph, and this zone of optimum performance, is different shapes for different people. Some people may operate most effectively at a level of stress that would leave other people either bored or in pieces. It is possible that someone who functions superbly at a low level might experience difficulties at a high level. Alternatively someone who performs only moderately at low level might perform exceptionally under extreme pressure. The best way of finding your optimum level of stress is to keep a stress diary for a number of weeks.

Long term stress: The problems of long term, sustained stress are more associated with fatigue, morale and health than with short term adrenaline management. The graph below shows the way in which performance can suffer when someone is under excessive long-term stress:

Figure 2 - The relationship between long-term stress and performance

The graph shows stages that a person may go through in response to sustained levels of excessive stress: • during the first phase a person will face challenges with plenty of energy. One's response will probably be positive and effective. • After a period of time one may begin to feel seriously tired. The person may start to feel anxious, frustrated and upset. The quality of one's work may begin to suffer. • As high stress continues one may begin to feel a sense of failure and may be ill more frequently. A person may also begin to feel exploited by his/her organization. At this stage the person may start to distance himself/herself from the employer, perhaps starting to look for a new job. • If high levels of stress continue without relief one may ultimately experience depression, burnout, nervous breakdown, or some other form of serious stress related illness.

1.1: Pressure and stress: Pressure at the workplace is something unavoidable due to the demands of the present-day scenario in the corporate field. As an individual it should be known that there is a thin line between pressure and stress. Pressure is always there as it's essential that people experience challenges within their lives that helps in pushing themselves to feel motivated. Certain level of an increase in pressure is acceptable and can improve performance and the quality of life. However, when that pressure becomes unmanageable, there comes the necessity to identify the level that has altered into stress and is persistently affecting an individual's attitude and behavior at the workplace. The pressure of working life can lead to stress, if it is excessive and long term.

Stress is the adverse reaction of extreme pressure, which an individual is unable to cope up with for various reasons such as absence of proper delegation and authority to complete a certain task, not being able to match the job demands with emotional and physical ability etc. Some of the factors of work stress include lack of control on the job, excessive workload, poor working relationships within the workplace, repeated stretching of working hours. It is believed that, not all individuals are same, so is the cause of stress to them.

1.2: Work-related stress: Six major categories of potential sources of stress at work have been identified by cooper. They are stressors intense to the job, the role of the individual in the organization, career development, and relationship with others at work. Organizational structure and climate and the interface between home and work [Kahn, Cooper 1993]. Both physical and the task demands of a job are included in the category of stressors which are intrinsic to the job. Every job is thought to have a set of unique factors which job holders identify as source of pressure [Kahn Cooper 1992]. Both quantitative and qualitative overload to high levels of stress. Quantitative overload refers to those situations in which an individual is asked to do more work than can be completed in the time available. Qualitative overload occurs when an individual feels a lack of the skills and abilities needed to perform a given [Kahn Cooper 1993] stress at work can be classified into organizational stressors and extra organizational stressors.

1.3: The symptoms and effects of excess stress: Manifestations of excess or poorly managed stress can be extremely varied. While many persons report that stress induces headaches, sleep disturbances, feeling of anxiety or tension, anger, or concentration problems, others may complain of depression, lack of interest in food, increased appetite, or any number of other symptoms. In severe situations one can experience overwhelming stress to the point of so called "burnout", with loss of interest in normal activities. Scientific studies have shown that psychological stress may worsen the symptoms of almost every known medical condition. Examples of conditions in which stress may worsen the intensity of symptoms include cardiovascular diseases, asthma, multiple sclerosis, chronic pain, acne and depression. While stress alone is not a cause of cardiovascular disease or high blood pressure, it may actually worsen the progression of these diseases in many people. Stress also has effects on the immunesystem. While some studies show that acute, short term stresses may actually be able to boost the body's immune response, chronic (long-term) stress has the effect of "wearing down" the immune system, leading to an increased susceptibility to colds and other infections. Scientific studies have also shown that stress can decrease the immune response to vaccinations and prolong wound healing.

1.4: What can I do better manage Occupational Stress: In general, stress is related to both external and internal factors. External factors include your physical environment, your job, relationships with others, your home, and all the situations, challenges, difficulties, and expectations you are confronted with on a daily basis. An internal factor determines your body ability to respond to, and deal with, the external stress inducing factors. Internal factors which influence your ability to handle stress include your nutritional status, overall health and fitness level, emotional wellbeing, and he amount of sleep and rest you get. Managing stress, therefore, making changes in the external factors which confront you, or with internal factors which strengthen your ability to deal with what comes your way.

2. COPING WITH JOB STRESS IN TODAY'S COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

For employees in the corporate sector, the journey in the job feels like a roller coaster ride to an extent that they lose the self-control and just work with the flow often neglecting the impact that it will have on them. Emotions are contagious and stress directly affects the emotional state of an individual besides the physical aspects. Stress is not a negative phenomenon:

2.1. Reducing job stress by taking care of yourself:Stress at work interferes with the ability to perform the job due to various effects of it like distraction, headaches, feeling of depression, social withdrawal, loss of interest in the work etc. even if the individual is passionate about the work or feels committed to it, the first thing that should come to the mind is taking care of yourself. When the needs of the body are taken care of, the person is more active and resilient to stress. The better one feels, the better they are equipped to combat job stress.

2.1.1 Get support: stress is to reach out to family and friends. It might not be a way out for every person but just sharing the feelings can most of the times bring down lot of stress that's caused mentally to an individual. For some, accepting support is a sign of weakness but at times most family and friends feel wanted that they are being trusted enough to be confided in and it will only strengthen the bond.

2.1.2 Proper rest: People often avoid this simple formula of dealing with stress either by getting entangled in social gatherings which are an obligation at times, family requirements or most of the times due to work itself. Some people feel that they can suffer but their work mustn't but they forget that their body is not a machine which can work according to their needs. In short what you give, you will get back and pay for it later. For example: Due to work overload, an employee is been called for 7 days at a stretch taking off the weekend and is not compensated with a day off in the next week. This repeated action can cause lot of stress to an individual and may make them feel like machinery.

2.1.3. Connection with your inner-self: It's often believed that one understands oneself better than anyone else but at times ability to think and process those feelings need connection with our inner self. Some people have strong intuitive power but seldom use it for decision making purposes especially on the job. One should always pay attention to their feelings and factor them into the decision making at work. If emotions are ignored, it becomes difficult to fully understand the motivations and needs, or to communicate effectively with others.

2.2. Reducing job stress by organizing and prioritizing: It's not always possible to do every piece of work at the same time or juggling between work and life outside work. There comes the need of prioritizing the work within the office or outside the office because both set of things affect the work at job. People need to understand that they are human beings and not super humans; the need to define their own limits is necessary often to put the best foot forward at the place of work and outside it. It's imperative to comprehend that both the lives are equally central, the only fact is sometimes one is important over the other but what needs to be taken care of is that those things need to be organized and prioritized to lead a hassle free life most of the times.

2.2.1. Don't over-commit: Individuals have the habit to keep their plate full, trying to fit too much into one day or trying to feel superior by undertaking jobs which will just overburden them. If those tasks cannot be eliminated they can be prioritized as it's not possible everything holds equal weight. Some tasks can be done later and the one which needs more attention can be done first. People need to be realistic in their approach before committing themselves to anything at work.

2.2.2. Delegation of responsibility: The need to do it all by yourself approach is not worth all the time because appreciation might come your way but in that course what all is required to be given up needs to be foreseen. It might be worth it at that moment but might not be later. It's the

capability of an individual to think what's beneficial in the long run. If other people can take care of the tasks, why not let them? A person's desire to control or oversee every little step can attract unnecessary stress in the process. Be careful of the desires because what is wanted is not always needed.

3. ROLE OF MANAGERS AND EMPLOYERS IN HELPING EMPLOYEES DEAL WITH JOB STRESS

Managers and employers play a vital role in shaping the future of employees as they are the support pillars who can make or break any situation for them. It should be in their best interest to keep stress levels in the workplace to a minimum level. They are sometimes the role model for an employee's behavior in certain situations, as they may act like their manager in that given state. There are some organizational changes that managers and employers can undertake to reduce stress at workplace related to the job in hand as that's the point of ignition for stress.

3.1. Improve communication with employees: Employees often try to be in the good books of their superiors and for that they try to create a professional rapport with their managers. It should be the duty of the manager to strike a conversation now and then with the employees which should be friendly and efficient and not disreputable so as to build a comfort level at the workplace. Sharing information related to them or little feedback now and then in a good spirit can be helpful at times.

3.2. Employee participation: Seek and encourage participation from the employees in matters related to their job, this will increase their commitment and build their self-esteem which will directly reduce any kind of stress as they feel indispensable. Managers should make sure that the workload is suitable to employees as per their abilities and resources to avoid any kind of unrealistic deadlines. Just to get the work done approach is not feasible time and again Show that they are valuable and so is their time to get the things done. Social participation and interaction amongst employees should be arranged time after time as peers are the workplace friends who curtail stress most of the times. not having enough work at job can be a stressor for some, as an empty mind is devil's workshop.

4.ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN MANAGING WORK RELATED STRESS

HR can help organizations create a culture that respects people's personal lives and their obligations outside work. They can also help employees set reasonable goals and expectations for themselves. When work becomes a routine and slowly monotony creeps in, there is the challenge to break the chain and implement ideas to create an atmosphere of connection with the organization.

- Coach and train managers on having reasonable expectations from employees.
- Utilizing the in between break/meal time or dedicate a day or few hours to plan an event. Invite suggestions to get employees involvement and perk-up the excitement.
- Arranging lunch meet outside the workplace boundaries, organizing a get together to have some chit chat session or gaming session when at workplace.

- Wellness programs can also improve overall employee health and cut back on stress and sick-day losses. It may involve bringing in a nutritionist to speak with staff, sponsoring a cooking class or subsidized gym memberships. Organizing a company sports team can also give employees something fun to do together after work that can build friendly teamwork and competition.

- Family-friendly policies can be incorporated by welcoming families into employee events. By maintaining a family-friendly attitude, employees get an opportunity to engage their family members in the other half of their lives which is spent at the workplace and around those people. Employees who have a comfortable home life are also likely to feel more satisfied with their jobs and maintain healthy relationships at work.

- Strengthening the Inter-personal relationships at work can also be encouraged among staff members by developing a rewards system. For example, HR might develop certificates that colleagues can award each other anonymously for a job well done or for displaying qualities that the company values in its policy. At the end of the month or quarter, staff can exchange the certificates for gift certificates or prizes. This will also make employees work better with a positive attitude.

- Turning work into play by incorporating humorous activities, anecdotes, role plays or fun training materials into training sessions, meetings and activities as and when possible. This can help lighten up the job environment and add an incentive for employees to participate and learn.

- The ultimate goal is for HR to remain available to resolve issues and to proactively step in and give employees the impetus and opportunity to work together in an effective way. The HR department should set an example for building a positive work environment by combating job stress at workplace.

5. RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

It can reduce stress symptoms and help the people enjoy a better quality of life, especially if you have an illness. Explore relaxation techniques you can do by yourself. A relaxation technique [also known as relaxation training]is any method process, procedure or activity that helps a person to relax; to attain a state of increased calmness ; or otherwise reduce levels of anxiety, stressor anger. Relaxation techniques are often employed as one element of a wider stress management program and can decrease muscle tension, low or the blood pressure and slow heart and breath rates, among other health benefits. People respond stress in different ways by namely, by becoming overwhelmed depressed or both. Yoga and other techniques that include deep breathing tend to calm people who are overwhelmed by stress, while rhythmic exercise improves the mental and physical health of those who are depressed.

Yoga

Yoga is the physical, mental and spiritual practices or disciplines, which aim at transforming body and mind.

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Exercise

Physical exercise is a bodily activity that enhances and maintains physical fitness and overall health and wellness. It is performed for various reasons including strengthening muscles and the cardiovascular system. Frequent and regular exercise boosts the immune system and helps prevent the disease of affluence such as heart disease, cardiovascular disease, diabetes& obesity.

Meditation

Meditation is a practice in which an individual trains the mind or induces a mode of consciousness, either to realize some benefit or as an end of itself. The word meditation carries different meanings in different contexts. Meditation has been practiced since antiquity as a component of numerous religious traditions and believes. Meditation often involves an internal effort to self-regulate the mind in some way. Meditation is often used to clear the mind and ease many health issues such as high BP, depression and anxiety. Meditation may involve generating an emotional state for the purpose of analyzing the state, such as anger, hatred etc... Or cultivating a particular mental response to various phenomena.

Talk to yourself

When a person is under stress, people start talking to themselves unconsciously as if there are two people inside one body. Screaming and screeching negative voices on one hand and on the other side, a calm representative of one's own self who is often subdued by the negative agent. Stress is the time when the calmer agent needs to be listened to, to get hold of the situation before reacting or blasting on others. Cooling down is very important and making yourself understand that these situations have arrived in past as well and managing it again is not a problem. The —I can do it‖ attitude is what matters most at this time and this can only be done by talking to your own self.

Solicit for a friendly ear

Every person has someone who they can rely on and in the moments like these, a friendly ear comes as an advantage. The purpose of this is not only to vent your frustrations but also giving an opportunity to the other person to gauge on the matter presented and may be that can give a new perspective and connotations to the situation, which the mind is not able to foresee due to blockage of negative thoughts.

Project an impression of calmness around others

Stress is contagious and so is mood. If one person talks frantically to the other, there are high chances of getting the response in the same tone which would further create tensions between the people and around affecting the work environment. If matters need to be resolved, work it up as it should be when faced with the same situation but on the flip side.

Think about the time when the period of stress will be over

A break in the thought process is necessary and instilling the feeling of happiness and alleviation when the job will be done. Slow down and process the thoughts to think over what all can be done once the burden is over. Sometimes by channelizing these thoughts to the after work situation gives a boost to the energy levels and a new energy is developed to do away with the tasks as soon as possible.

6. CONCLUSION

In the present scenario, occupational stress is more common in people working in information technology field. Occupational stress causes many problems in their family. We can see that number of divorce rate is increased in between the IT professionals. So it is very important to check their occupational stress status in the present situation. Life would be simple indeed if our needs were automatically gratified. As we know many obstacles, both personal and environmental, prevent this ideal situation. Such obstacles face adjective demands on us and can lead to stress. In quality of a person's life depends to a great extent on how efficiently he/she adjust to or copes with, the psychological and physical demands of his/her environment failure in the above task may result in impaired physical and psychological well-being, disease and even death.

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