

Stress- Nature, Causes And Coping Mechanism In A Post-Pandemic Environment

Mr. Anurag Mishra¹ , Dr. K Thriveni Kumari²

¹Ph.D. Scholar, Presidency University , anurag.mishra@presidencyuniversity.in,

²Associate professor, Presidency University , Itgalpur Rajanakunte, Yelahanka, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560064, Thriveni.k@presidencyuniversity.in

ABSTRACT

Stress is an unavoidable situation. It impacts our life and damages our relationships with others. It makes drastic changes in our behavior which creates psychosomatic condition. The unawareness of mind and body make people anxious. At workplace, it hampers employee's productivity and increases team conflicts and unhealthy relationship. However, stress management can help to overcome stressful situation. At individual level self-awareness, problem-solving strategies, empathy, yoga and meditation techniques are beneficial practices which help our body to reduce the chances of heart disease and mental issues. By providing social support, healthy working environment, psychological trainings on stress and anger management makes employees to overcome and improve productivity. Due to current fearful situation of COVID-19, majority of people are feeling stressful. The present paper is focusing on the current problems of stress on individual and at work place. Critical examination has been done on previous models of stress and emphasizes has been made on the major symptoms of stress based on cognition, emotion, physical and behaviour. Further, the study has also provided suggestions for workplace stress coping strategies based on previous research works.

Keywords-Stress, causes and symptoms, stress management, workplace.

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is a psychosomatic condition in which a person is physically and mentally unable to cope up with a situation. McGrath (1976) prefers to define. "Stress involves an interaction of person and environment. Something happens "out there" which presents a person with a demand, or a constraint or an opportunity for behavior. Under the condition of stress, mind and body are unable to response and most physical disorders are thought to be particularly prone to mental disorder. Stress includes changes influencing practically every arrangement of the body, impacting how individuals feel and act. According to American Psychological

Association (APA), stress is characterized as the physiological or mental response to inside or outside stressors. For Example, dry mouth, sweating, shortness of breath, accelerated speech, longer duration of stress fatigue, augmentation of negative emotions and palpitations.

Due to stress in day-to-day work, negative emotions like anger, fear, anxiety, associative compulsive disorder, loneliness, jealousy, self-criticism arise which hijack our mind and cause adjustment disorder, anxiety disorder, delirium, amnesia etc. People who are unable to cope up with their stress lack proper commitment to their job. It also causes problems in interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, lack of integrity,

confident, co-operation, motivation, counter productivity and mutual respect. Beehr & Newman, (1978) concluded that in the condition of job stress, the person (mind and/or body) is

forced to deviate from normal functioning. Factors related to job stress interact with the worker to change (disrupt or enhance) his/her psychological or physiological condition.



Fig.1 Nature of stress- source-Michie, S,2002

Stressful situations make an individual unable to cope up with the environment. It is a psychological state in which the individual is not in the condition to take decisions, experiences change in behavior and feels pressure in working situations. According to the study of Michie, 2002, due to stress the feelings (e.g. anger, fear, anxiety, loneliness jealousy, irritation, self-criticism); adjustment disorder (lack of concentration, improper decision making), or physical symptoms (sickness, headaches) arise.

2. STRESS-ATTRIBUTES & THEORIES

2.1. Attributes of stress

In physics interaction between a force and offered resistance creates tension or pressure. Similarly, exchange between damage and defence causes stress. Selye ,1946 stated that the stress is subdivided into three psychological stages which are known as "General Adaptation syndrome (GAS)". The three stages are alarm reaction; the stage of resistance and the stage of exhaustion. Alarm reaction-under the stress, it is initial symptoms the body experiences which creates the situation of "Fight or Flight". Heart rate becomes rapid, muscles get tense, adrenal glands release cortisol. Stage of resistance -Body starts repairing

itself and release lower amount of cortisol. Similarly, heart rate gets adjusted to become normal. It allows us to be familiar with the external environment which is no longer harmful to us. Stage of exhaustion-If the stressful events are for longer period and stage of resistance does not function, causes of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion occurs. It creates the situations like fatigue, burnout, depression and anxiety.

2.2. Transactional Theory of stress

Lazarus & Folkman (1984) notes that transactional theory of psychological stress focused on appraisal and coping of the situation, determines if the stress is caused or not. Initially, individual assesses the risk in stressful situation (primary appraisal) and prepares the coping

strategies (secondary appraisal) to accommodate or remove the stressful situation. In an organization, the transactional approach is helpful to understand the nature of stress and its relationship with the work. Employee evaluates situations which are hazardous to health. The individual uses the adapting phenomenon which includes both psychological and behavioral responses to regulate interior and outside stressors. The deviation in psychological and /or physiological from normal functioning is the result of changes in job related factors at particular condition in an organization. (Cooper & Marshall,1976; Ivancevich & Matteson,1980; Katz & Khan, 1978; Schuler,1974). The stress is caused by these deviations from normal psychological and /or physiological conditions based on an urgent need or demand.

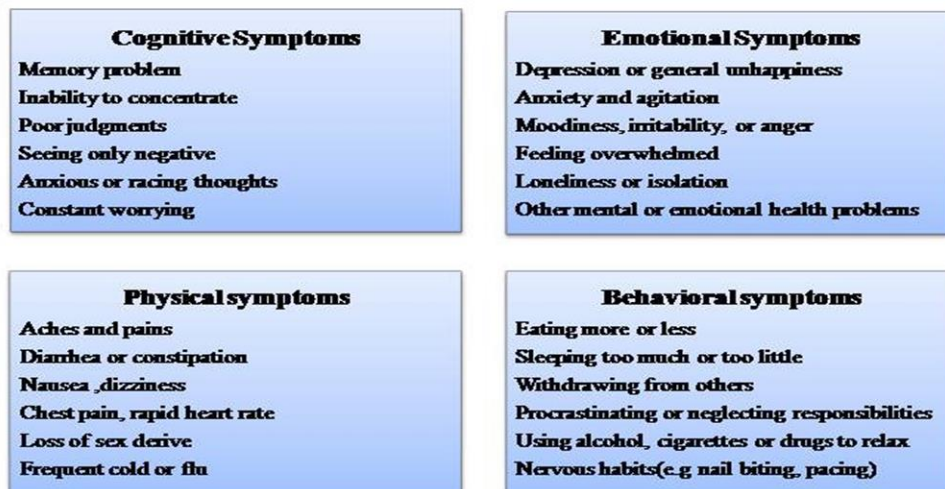


Fig.2 Symptoms of stress Source: Segal, Smith, Segal and Robinson, 2019**3. CAUSES OF STRESS**

Stress is an unpredictable situation and it involves conflict at personal and professional level. An individual displays stress in various ways, short-term psychological states (anxiety, tension) to long-term or chronic psychological responses (reduced productivity or damaged health issues) Margolis & Kroes (1974). Asgher et al., (2015) concluded that inefficient organizational environment, work load and time management, financial constraint, job security, leadership and motivation are influencing factors of stress. Study also reveals that financial constraints are the major source of stress. Nekoranec & Kmosenka (2015) studied that work performance is deteriorated by long-term work and mental load. It also causes the problems such as perception disorder, cognitive disorder and slow decision-making abilities. It also causes disturbance in interpersonal relationships, psychological terror and employee turnover.

3.1 STRESS IN AN ORGANIZATION

Stress in an organization has been segregated between organizational qualities and individual qualities which measure stress. (Cooper & Marshall, 1976; French, 1974). Stress is conceptualized as Person-Environment which includes that nature of role, individual characteristics and conditions of working environment. According to (Lofquist & Dawis, 1969) The Person-Environment (PE) conceptualized that the person is under stress when capabilities of persons and their resources fail to meet the demand of environment. In an organization when employees are not able to achieve the outcome based on standards, it causes situations of stress.

Role conflict, ambiguity, and overload have been studied frequently as the cause of occupational

stress (Brief & Aldag, 1976; Kahn et al., 1964; Rosse & Rosse, 1981). Workplace factors are associated with the amount of stress in an organization. Working conditions, nature of job, role ambiguity, work overload, long hour of work, overtime work are the causes of intrinsic stress at work. Unclear role at workplace causes stress and conflict among the employees. Improper training, job insecurity, holds on promotions, relationship at workplace and organizational culture creates stressful situations and impact on health of employees. Similarly, unsupportive responses from peers and bullying cause stressful condition at workplace. Health of employees is negatively related with workplace stress. In a study of Rahman, 2013 Most important stressors are long working hour and work burden. Meta-analytic reviews concluded that poor mental health, psychological distress and reduced job performance is impacted by role ambiguity and role conflict. (Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006; Schmidt et al., 2014)

4. STRESS MANAGEMENT AT WORKPLACE

At workplace, the issues related to stress are major challenges which require relevant style of management to overcome. The prevention of stress requires relevant strategies followed by organizations and employees. Work on stress management suggested that guidance and counseling, psychological support, emotional intelligence, self-awareness and consciousness can work as stress reducing strategies at workplace. Further, organizational decentralization, job promotion and enrichments, employees hard work and time management, regular sleep, proper diet and physical exercise plays major part in stress management (Shukla & Garg, 2013). The developed 3-D model of stress management that includes 3 stages i.e unexpected stage (determining exact situation), stress

projection stage (determining exact level of stress by various stress test) and expected stage (finding and mapping of stress by understanding physical, physiological and occupational consequences and applying stress management techniques). Hussin, 2008. In further study of Nekoranec& Kmosena,2015, developed stress coping

strategies at workplace. It includes reduction of noise and dust and setting proper temperature at workplace; gaining social support by co-workers and leaders for problem solving and coping with emotional trauma and stress coping programs such as physical fitness, meditation and socio-psychological training.

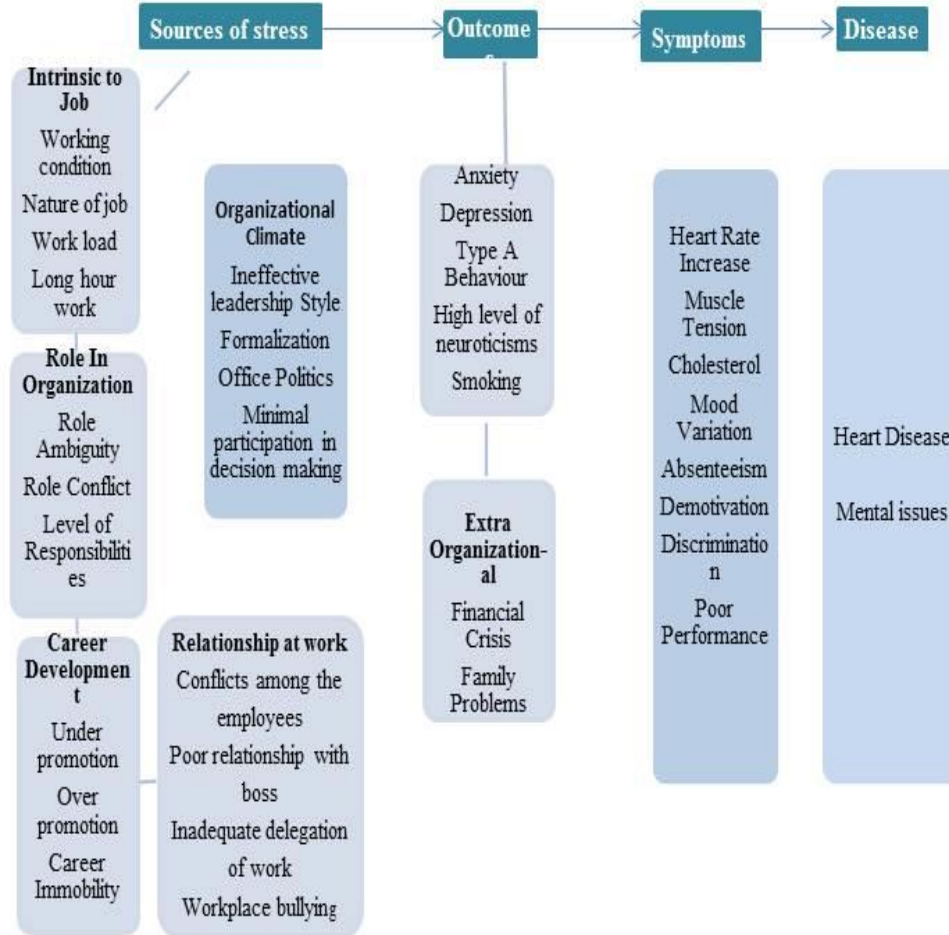


Fig.3 Model of stress- and related out comes -Source: Murphy (1995) &Michie (2002)

Tran et al., 2020 seminal work on stress management suggested that organizations need to

identify overly stressed employees and help them to reduce it. Implementation of appropriate

strategies and policies of human resource department help to overcome stressful situations. Babatunde, 2013, stated that strategies of managerial stress awareness training, role clarification and workload adjustment provide better organizational outcomes. Holman et al., identified that Stress management intervention (SMI) at workplace based on level which includes the individual and organizational. At organizational level, changes in job design, employee participation or changes in working time schedules and at individual level, cognitive-behavioral therapy, relaxation technique and mindfulness training are practices for reducing stress. In an organization, human resource department can help to overcome stressful situation at workplace. The study of Asgher et al., 2015 argued that Human Resource department (HRD) needs to build stress management system within the organizations. Similarly, Patro & Kumar, 2019 concluded that employee counseling, career counseling and self-management trainings need to get conducted for management of stress. Stress management trainings, yoga and meditation are major practices of stress management among employees.

5. RECOMMENDATION

The present study made an attempt to understand the problems which arise due to stress at individual level and at organizational level. It also provides a study in the nature of stress. Implementation of proper practices can help to overcome such issues. Practices like one-on-one meeting that can cause shouting between a leader and subordinate, due to its monologic nature should have an element of dialogue between the two people. Secondly, the study included the mechanism of origin of stress based on previous literature and techniques to overcome it. Further implication included the stress management techniques at work place. Organizations can

adapt and implement adequate policies for managing stress at workplace. Counseling, anger management and identification of causes of stress by human resource department can make employees to manage stressful situations and guide their work effectively. Employees can take personal initiatives for stress management. Time-management, increased physical exercises and anger management trainings are additive for reducing stress at personal level. Similarly, daily walking is helpful in reducing stress. It also improves mood and reduces risk of heart attack. Also, socialization and taking proper guidance from a counselor can help to tackle and keep away from stressful situations.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has provided the symptoms and causes of stress. Stress can be a difficult situation however it is possible to cure it by proper understanding about the causes of its origin. Workplace stress creates the problems in working environment, relationship management, productivity, team conflicts and employee well-being. Due to stress and unfriendly environment, people feel uncomfortable with their work and have insecurity at their job. Individuals' self-awareness about their emotions and state of mind can help them to overcome it. Relaxation training e.g. meditation or yoga is helpful in stress management. Emotional management and emotional control are negatively associated with self-reported stress and burnout. The study of Jones et al., 2003 on worksite disability management concluded that programs like employee assistance programs (EAP) and return to work are preventive measures of stress management at work place. Similarly, psychologist can provide Psycho-educational trainings, wellness and safety programs on stress management, to management and staff members. The awareness of social support, effective training, positive outlook, trust and hope are

essential measures for psychological well-being for an individual and an organization. This research paper has provided additive outcomes for further research.

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