Stress at Workplace- A Curse?

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Abstract: *In our fast moving work life, each and every person working in organizations are concerned about the impact of occupational stress in their life.People can make extra-ordinary demands on their life.Stress arises when they do not realize that they are expecting too much. Employees must be aware of their work assigned and be clear about the outcome, if it is completed successfully. Though stress is inevitable, it affects the employee turnover, productivity and the overall efficiency of the enterprise. Usually employees need higher wages and greater privileges in their working life. This oftenincreases the responsibility, accountability and working hours. Also workplace promotion is a dream for each employee. For this he need some attributes on work, be creative enough and has to introduce different personality traits and so on to succeed.Successful delegation of work is a major boost to gain free time in a busy life. Understanding the realities of stress, this study explores how it affects the employees as well as the organizations and gives some practical approaches and adaptive strategies to overcome it.*

Keywords: *Occupational stress,Effects of stress,Stress interventions*

1. INTRODUCTION

Stress is a part of daily life. It's how we react to it that makes all thedifference in maintaining our health and well-being.

Pressures occurthroughout life and those pressures cause stress. You need to realize thatyou will never completely get rid of stress in your life, but you can learncoping techniques to turn that stress into a healthier situation.Highly stressed individuals are at greater risk for multiple healthconditions including cardiovascular disease (Hemingway & Marmot,1999; Kivima¨ki, LeinoArjas, Luukkonen, Riihima¨ki, Vahtera,& Kirjonen, 2002), cancer (Antoni et al., 2006), diabetes (Hu,Meigs, Li, Rifai, & Manson, 2004), depression and anxiety(Garcia-Bueno, Caso, & Leza, 2008), fatigue (Van Houdenhove,

V.Den Eede, & Luten, 2009), obesity (Black, 2003), and musculoskeletalpain (Finestone, Alfeeli, & Fisher, 2008). In fact,psychological stress and the associated chronicinflammatory responsehave been implicated in virtually all chronic conditions(Chrousos & Gold, 1992; McEwan, 1998; Black, 2006; Cohen,Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007). Further, highly stressed employeesincur productivity losses and health care costs above those withnormal levels of stress (e.g., Baime, Wolever, Pace,

Morris, &Bobinet, 2011; Goetzel et al., 1998). To successfully address thisissue for employees, worksite stress management programs mustbe accessible, engaging, and convenient in terms of scheduling,time requirements, and on-site locations, as well as have managementsupport. To successfully address this issue for *employers*, theprograms must be economically sustainable and demonstrate effectivenessby capturing data on relevant indices of stress, health,productivity, and/or costs. Mental stress adversely impacts physical and mental health. Inaddition to the health effects cited above, psychological stress isalso widely recognized as a major contributor to poor morale,absenteeism, high staff turnover, and reduced productivity at work. (Limm, Gundel, Heinmuller, Marten-Mittag, Nater, Siegrist, et al.,2011; Michie & Williams, 2003; Noblet & LaMontagne, 2006).High stress also has been shown to significantly impair memoryand the ability to learn (Lupien et al., 2005). Furthermore, stressed,chronically ill employees are expensive, both in terms of healthcare costs and decreased productivity (Baime, Wolever, Pace, etal., 2011; Goetzel et al., 2004; Thygeson, 2010). The InternationalLabor Organization has "estimated that 30% of all work-relateddisorders are due to stress, and that the loss caused by suchstress-induced disorders amounted to EUR 9.2 billion in the EU,EUR 1.1–1.2 billion in the U.K., and USD 6.6 billion in U.S.A."(Mino, Babazono, Tsuda, & Yasuda, 2006). In large scale studies,employees with high stress have significantly higher annualizedmedical expenditures (odds ratio 1.528) compared with thosewith lower stress, and their medical expenses are estimated at45–46%.

2. OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Occupational stress is defined as the perception ofa discrepancy between environmental demands(stressors) and individual capacities to fulfill thesedemands (Topper, 2007; Vermunt and Steensma,2005; Ornelas andKleiner,2003;Varca,1999).Christo andPienaar (2006) for example, arguedthat the causes of occupational stress includeperceived loss of job, and security, sitting forlongperiods of time or heavy lifting, lack of safety, complexity of repetitiveness and lack ofautonomyin the job. In addition, occupational stress is causedby lack of resources and equipment; workschedules (such as working late shifts or overtime)and organizational climate are considered

ascontributors to employees stress. Occupationalstress often shows high dissatisfaction among theemployees, job mobility, burnout, poor work performance and less effective interpersonal relations at work (Manshor, Rodrigue, and Chong,2003). Johnson (2001) similarly argued thatinterventions like identifying or determining thesigns of stress, identifying the possible causes forthe signs and developing possible proposedsolutions for each signs are required. Thesemeasures allow individuals to build coping skillsand develop strategies to develop individualizedstress management plans that include eliminatingthe sources of stress. Moreover, increasingindividual coping skills is another interventionwhich will be used by the management to minimizestress.

3. STRESS AND THE WORKPLACE

Organizational factors linked to stress

Various definitions of stress gave rise to many theoretical frameworks over the years. A growing convergence of the stress definition has been on a harmful psychological and/or physiological response of the individual that has both emotional and cognitive components and that is a product of an imbalance between appraisals of environmental demands and individual coping resources (Cox & Mackay 1981; Israel 1996). The HSE taxonomy (Cox & Griffiths 1995) whichlater gave rise to management standards aimed at creating a healthy organisational environment havebeen narrowed down to the following seven factors (Mackay et al. 2004):

* Demands (including workload and work patterns)
* Control (how much say the person has in the way they do their work)
* Support (including management encouragement, supportive leadership and resources)
* Relationships at work (including interpersonal interactions and the processes of dealing with
* conflict)
* Role (clarity of the worker's understanding their role and the degree of role conflict)
* Change (how it is managed and communicated within the organisation)
* Culture (the way organisations demonstrate their commitment to fairness and openness).

This paradigm is a usefulreminder of health-promoting aspects of work. While stress research focuses on the negative aspectsof work that potentially cause harm, the same factors, when managed well, produce positivepsychological and social outcomes.
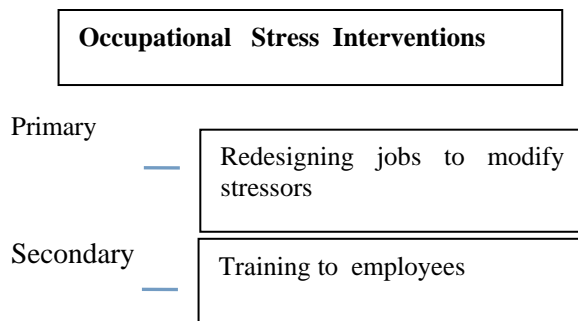
Certain Perceptions of Employees Concerning the Stressors They Experience on the job
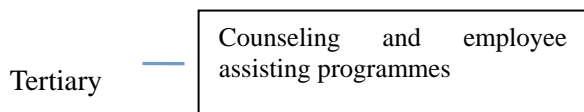
* Low/inadequate salary
* Unfair treatment by superiors

* Work overload
* Inadequate resources
* Uncertainty about promotion
* Work/family conflict
* Lack of superior interest in personal problems
* High responsibility
* Excessive supervision and criticism
* Rigid/authoritative system
* Competition with co-workers
* Need to make fast decisions

Interventions in managing the stress

There are many interventions used in managingstress in organizations but the interventions, whichare commonly used, include the primary, secondaryand tertiary.Primary interventionsemphasize on identifying the possible causes ofstress and their subsequent risks to employees.This is done by taking pre-emptive action to reduce the stress hazard or limiting the employee exposure to stress. Therefore, stress audit shouldtake place using appropriate methods includingface-to-face interviews with the staff or by the useof a dedicated questionnaire or throughappropriate occupational stress indicator. Oncedata is collected decisions can be taken on themanagestress. Basically primary interventions includeredesigning jobs to modify work place stressors,increasing workers decision-making authority(Jackson and Schuler, 1983) or providing co-workersupport groups (Defrank and Cooper, 1987;Kolbell, 1995).Secondary interventions are designed to providetraining to the employees. These interventionincludeseminar programs to help participantsrecognize and deal with stress and identifyorganizational stressors. They also serve a dualpurpose of identifying the current stress factorsand help .inoculate. seminar members from futurestress. Secondary interventions are aimed atreducing the severity of stress, treating symptomsbefore they lead to serious health problems in anindividual and the organization at large (Murphyand Sauter, 2003).Tertiary interventions are interventions, which takecare of individuals who are already suffering fromthe effects of stress. These interventions include counseling and employee assistance programs,consulting a stress manager or mental healthprofessionals to assist employees to cope withstress (Arthur, 2000).

Occupational Stress Interventions

Primary	Redesigning jobs to modify stressors
Secondary	Training to employees

Tertiary	—	Counseling and employee assisting programmes

A stress intervention program has been defined as "any activity or program initiated by an organization that focuses on reducing the presence of work-related stressors or assisting individuals to minimize the negative outcomes of exposure to these stressors" (Ivancevich et al. 1990).

Organization at times react to the need to reduce stress in their workplaces. Often this need is recognized through poor people-related outcomes, such as unplanned absences or high cost of stress-related workers' compensation claims.

4. CATEGORIES OF INTERVENTIONS

Individual approaches

Interventions within the individual category include the following programs: relaxation training withand without biofeedback, meditation, cognitive-behavioral therapy, physical exercise, timemanagement training, Employee Assistance Programs, other health promotional education (Giga et al.2003b). Some approaches include a combination of these programs, however, all of these are based onthe assumption that altering the individual's perceptual, information processing, cognitive and behavioral responses are sufficient in order to reduce the probability of harmful stress effect. Theyalso fundamentally ascribe the responsibility for managing stress to the individual.

Organizational approaches

Organizational level interventions tend to be proactive in nature and thus belonging in the primaryprevention category of stress interventions. There are numerous examples of organizational-levelinterventions as they can include any program designed to develop and improve organizational health.All of these can have preventive effects on employees' health.

Giga, Cooper & Faragher (2003a) have identified the following programs reported in various studies as organizational stress intervention: Selection and placement, training and development programs, improvements in physical environments, communication improvements, and job design/restructure,and combinations. There are also combinations of these approaches.Some of these organizational approaches listed above are immediately recognized as standardmanagement programs adopted at various cycles of organizational life to effect change orimprovement in performance. The extent to which these can be classified as stress intervention programs depends on the purpose for which they are enacted.

5. MULTI-MODAL APPROACHES

Stress intervention approaches combining individual and/or team with an organizational strategy arereferred to as multi-modal. Examples of such programs at both individual and organizational levels arethe creation of peer support groups, improving worker participation, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy(CBT) based training and relaxation.The most common approach observed in organizations is found in the secondary – individual category.These types of intervention programs aim at the individual altering his or her perceptions of the workenvironment and learning resilience and coping skills to reduce the negative impact of potential stressors (Richardson & Rothstein 2008).

Systems approach to stress intervention

An organizational intervention that has become known as comprehensive or a systems approach is noted by a number of components including context-specific identification of those aspects of workthat pose hazard to employees' psychological health. One formal approach to such an assessment isthe risk management methodology with includes hazard identification, assessment of risk and planning(Cox & Griffiths 1995), as a component of the organization Occupational Healthy and Safetysystem.

The Vichealth study classified stress intervention evaluation studies as having a "high" systems approach if they were focused on primary prevention directed at the organisation and environment, ifthey were integrated with either secondary and/or tertiary interventions, and if there was a stakeholderparticipation in the conduct of needs or risk assessment (LaMontagne et al. 2006).The following general hallmarks are typical of a stress intervention program that can be classified asbeing systemic (Jordan et al. 2003):

1. Risk assessment methodology
2. Top management commitment
3. A participative approach
4. A formal stress prevention strategy
5. Stress prevention activity.

Researchers consider that practice in the above five areas to be essential to the development of a comprehensive stress prevention program and a culture that supports healthy workplace practices (Jordan et al. 2003).An important point of differentiation of a systemic approach is the emphasis of an accurate assessmentof specific and context-specific risks. By focusing on the work aspects to which the employees areexposed and which they report are most associated with negative effects employers, the preventionprograms can be intelligently designed and evaluated [2]. A prevention program that adopts theinternational risk management standards has built-in components of a systems approach.

An Emerging Positive Approach

As organizations seek ways to help employees navigate the ever-challenging workenvironment,they increasingly are recognizing theimportance of positivity and concentrating on developing employee strengths, rather than dwelling on the negative and trying to fix employee vulnerabilities and weaknesses.

This approach does not claim to discover the value of positivity but, rather, calls for a more positive approach than the dominant negative perspective regarding occupational stress.

For example, a recent survey of the articles in the occupational health literature found about a 1 (positive) to 15 (negative) ratio (of positively to negatively focused articles)

(Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Drawing from positive psychology (e.g., Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi,2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002),the emerging positive organizational behaviorapproach (introduced by Luthans, 2002a,2002b; for a recent review article see Luthans& Youssef, 2007, and also see Nelson & Cooper,2007; Wright, 2003) provides such apositive perspective and serves as the foundationfor this study. Specifically, positive organizationalbehavior (POB) is "the study andapplication of positively oriented human resourcestrengths and psychological capacitiesthat can be measured, developed, and effectivelymanaged for performance improvement"(Luthans, 2002b, p. 59).

6. CONCLUSION

Work stress is a costly phenomenon that has been increasingly recognized as a serious organizational and health issue internationally. There is agrowing body of research evidencethat some aspects of the work environment are hazardous to employee's health through astress response that can lead to long-term poor health outcomes.The evidence for the causal relationships between stress and poor health outcomes isoverwhelmingly convincing and has been gathered over decades of research through work base observations, and studies of biological pathways and epidemiological evidence.There is a converging agreement on the definition of work stress as well as its theoreticalprocess after many years of confusing and multiple definitions and frameworks.

Theconsensus regarding its negative effects on individuals extends to organizations. However,there is a widening divergence between the known research and managers' beliefs about thecauses of stress. While research points increasingly to organizational factors, the predominantbelief in organizations is that it is a personal and individual issue.The assumption that the worker is responsible for dealing with stress stems from these beliefsand the lack of acceptance of work factors as a causation of stress. While the organizations recognize the negative effects of work stress they predominantly respond to it byimplementing stress intervention programs that are individually rather than organizationally and preventively focused.Although there are few studies of organizational interventions with robust research designs,there are clear indicators that systemic and comprehensive prevention programs have asignificant and positive effect on the individual and organisational health.Issues need to be addressed concerning the organizational responsibility for preventing andmanaging stress within the ethical framework of corporate responsibility for providing a risk free environment for employees. The approach by governments to treat the issue of workstress as a health and safety aspect of organizational life has emphasized the Board's moraland legal obligation to ensure it is managed at the organizational level.The evidence clearly points to the need for more systemic and preventive approaches tomanaging stress in the workplace as these can be more valuable for both organizations andtheir employees. There is also a potential for organizations to benefit significantly from ahealthier work environment created by focusing on those aspects of work that reduceemployee distress and increase well being within a specific context.

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