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# COMBATING STRESS AT WORKPLACE

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**Abstract:** *It's not stress that kills us it is our reaction to it* -Hans Selye

Workplace Stress is a growing concern for human resource management people. Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. It's a well-known fact that higher level of stress results in physical and emotional problems in the employees. Mental tensions, frustrations, insecurity and aimlessness are among the most damaging stressors and psychosomatic studies have shown how often they cause migraine headache, peptic ulcers, heart attacks, hypertension, mental disease, suicide or just hopeless unhappiness. Stress at workplace can be a real problem to the organizations as well as for its workers.

The main objective of the research is to find the effect of stress at workplace and ways to redesign individual's work method and improving professional relationships. Identifying the stressors and techniques to deal effectively with factors causing stress. The practical strategies aimed at leveraging & developing strong mindset can prove beneficial to cope better with workplace stress. Utilization of the psychological capital of an individual for combating occupational stress will be emphasized. Supported by the works of several renowned authors on stress and its types and physical and emotional effects on an individual, this paper is aimed at examining causes and the impact of stress on quality of life among the executives serving in organizations. For conducting this study, a sample comprising 300 executives was selected with adequate representation at junior, middle and senior levels. All subjects were administered the questionnaires to assess the psychological and emotional problems arising due to stress in an individual. Detailed implications of this study will be discussed in the paper.

**Keywords:** Stressors, Psychological Capital, Combating, Well-Being.

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**Introduction:** Stress has been identified as one of the most common work-related perils of modern times. Previously it was limited to the developed countries, but with the turn of the century, it emerged as a global syndrome. Many organizations have also realized the cause and impact of employee stress and have initiated steps to combat work-place stress.

Employees who are stressed are more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, less productive and less safe at work. Their organizations are less likely to be successful in the competitive market. Stress at workplace can be a real problem to the organizations as well as for its workers.

This paper is an effort to study 'stress at workplace'. The focus will be to collect the information related to the causes and effects of stress at workplace and ways combating stress.

Stress has been defined as a stimulus, a response, or the result of an interaction between the two, with the interaction described in terms of some imbalance between the person developed, particularly that surrounding the person-environment (P-E) interaction, researches have considered the nature of that interaction and, more importantly, the psychological processes which it takes place (Dewey, 1992). Stress is a physiological and psychological imbalance. It arises due to the demands on a person and that person's inability to meet these demands. Stress is the body's way of reacting to any situation and it can have serious repercussions on an individual's life. Yet, people fail to realize the importance of stress management in their lives. Effective managers can stay in control of life, without panicking even under stressful situations. They handle stress by planning work, taking regular breaks, and rejuvenating them. The term 'stress' has a different meaning for researchers in various disciplines. In the biological literature, it is used in relation to single organisms, populations of organisms, and ecosystems. Biologists refer to things such as heat, cold and inadequate food supply as being sources of stress. Human biologists add to this microbial infection and taking toxic substances.

Social scientists, for their part, are more concerned about people's interaction with their environment and the resulting emotional disturbances that can sometimes accompany it (Hinkle, 1987).

Scientists define stress as the pattern of emotional states and physiological reactions occurring in response to demands from within or outside organizations (i.e, stressors) [Greenberg & Baron, 2010: 182]. Although, human bodies respond to both positive and negative sources of stress, the concept of stress is more often related to negative sources of stress. The bias is since people's reactions to stress on the job tend to be negative in nature, making it a concern to managers within organizational context. Hence, when one refers to work stress, it is nothing but the harmful physical and emotional responses that people experience in their jobs (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 2005). The present paper tries to discuss various conceptual aspects of stress, the strategy to managing and combating the stress.

**Stressors & Types of Stress:** The term stress has many definitions (Lazarus & Folk man, 1984). Stress can be defined as an internal state which can be caused by physical demands on the body ( disease conditions, exercise, extremes of temperature, and the like) or by environmental and social situations which a evaluated as potentially, harmful, uncontrollable, or exceeding resources for coping. The physical, environmental, and social causes of the stress state are termed stressors

**Eysenck (1996) Divided Stressors Into Three Broad Categories:**

*Stressful Life Events:* This situation usually occurs mainly because of our relationship with other people;  
*Environmental Stressors:* The stressors of this category are like noise, vibration, electric shock and heat;  
*Technological Threat:* In his popular book, **Future shock (1970)**, **Alvin Toffler**, attributes the future shock to too much change in too short as “the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time. Stress is a subset of emotion (Lazarus, 1993). Stress is caused by a multitude of demands (stressors), such as an inadequate fit between what we need and what we are capable of, and what our environment offers and what it demands of us (Levi, 1996). Stress is the external pressures and tensions the internal pressures (Saunders, 1997).

**Physical:** The body gets affected physically due to stressful situation. Symptoms may occur from headaches, to tension in the neck, forehead, and shoulder muscles. Prolonged exposure to stress can lead to digestive problems, ulcers, insomnia (sleeplessness), fatigue, high blood pressure, nervousness, excessive sweating, heart ailments, strokes and hair loss, etc.

**Emotional:** These problems arise due to stress affecting the mind .Symptoms such as anxiety, anger, depression, irritability, frustration, over-reaction to everyday problems, memory loss and a lack of concentration while carrying out any task may be noticed. Anxiety is a response to loss, failure, danger or a fear of the unknown. Anger is a response to frustration or social stress and can become a threat to other individuals, if not kept in check. Depression is frequently seen as an emotional response to upsetting situations, such as, the death of a loved one, illness and failure.

**Psychological:** Long-term stress can cause psychological problems in some individuals. Symptoms may include social isolation, phobias, compulsive behaviors, eating disorders and night terrors.

*Stress can be positive or negative i.e eustress (positive stress) and, distress (negative stress).*

Eustress, or positive stress improves performance whereas distress decreases performance.

**Sources of stress** There are several stressors, which are responsible in causing stress in everyday life.

The following factors are responsible for causing stress:

**Environmental Factors:** This consists of those factors which originate from environment like ambient environment, physical events, psychological sub systems, social events and biotic events. Environmental uncertainty influences stress levels among employees in an organization.

**Individual Factors:** Essentially, these factors are family issues, personal economic problems, and inherent personality characteristics. Broken families, failed marriages and other family issues may create stress, which may affect job performance. Over-Spending and debt situation can also create financial strain and eventually, stress. Another individual factor, which is responsible for creating stress is, a person's basic dispositional nature. For example, a person, who loses temper often, is more prone to stress situation. Individuals with high level of mistrust for others also cause stress for themselves.

**Occupational Factors:** Occupational Demands- By their very nature, some jobs place more uncontrollable demands than others. (on, 2010:184):

- Working in unpleasant physical conditions
- Performing unstructured rather than structured tasks The more a job possesses these characteristics, more frequently the job has the potential to generate stress within individuals who may be performing it. Role based Stress- Pareek (2011) has emphasized on job role stress and opined that, role stress can occur from two sources, namely role-space conflicts and role-set conflicts.

**Consequences of Stress:** Stress affects in various ways, like, high blood pressure, ulcers, irritability, difficulty making routine decisions, loss of appetite, accident proneness, and the like. These symptoms can be classified as: physiological, psychological, and behavioral symptoms.

**Physiological Symptoms:** Earlier, research findings revealed that the stress could create changes in metabolism, increase in heart and breathing rates and blood pressure, inducing headaches, and heart attacks. Recent researches reveal that stress may have other harmful physiological effects. For example, one study linked stressful job demands to increased susceptibility to upper respiratory illnesses and poor immune system functioning, especially among people with low self-efficacy (Schaubroeck et al. 2001). Another study found out that, higher levels of psychological burnout among employees were related to substantially higher levels of sickness absence (Borritz, et al, 2010). It has been proved that there is a strong link between job stress and personal health. A study revealed that, chronically stressed employees were likely to suffer much more from metabolic syndrome (combination of factors, such as, obesity around the abdomen, high triglyceride levels, glucose intolerance, etc.), than their nonstressed counterparts. Metabolic syndromes are linked to such serious problems like diabetes and hypertension (Chandola, et al. 2005).

**Psychological Effects:** Too much of stress affects psychological health of an individual. It results in overall poor performance in all life activities. Psychological stress leads to difficulty in concentrating on any task. Individual under stress is unable to even spend his leisure time productively. He is always in state of anxiety. Stress makes person unable to think prudently and affects its decision making abilities. Mood swings are observed. Increased usage of food, alcohol cigarettes and at times drugs are observed in persons under stress. Individual develops fears and phobias. He feels his life is out of his control and feels exhausted and frustrated and is most of the times in confused state.

**Effects on Family and Society and Workplace:** A stressed individual can play havoc with family life. He/she may indulge in self-destructive behavior which will have an adverse influence on family members. Stress has adverse effect on society too. It makes people feel isolated, irritated and unfriendly. This affects interpersonal relations of the person. The greater the stress people encounter on the job, the more adversely affected their job performance tends to be (Motowidlo et al, 1986). However, more researches are needed to conclude the stress-performance relationship. Absenteeism could be a major problem due to stress. Frequent absenteeism due lack of motivation for work affects the organizational performance. Workplace accidents and conflicts are the major effects of stress. Employees under stress are more likely to get into conflicts which has negative effect on organizational work culture.

**BOSS — the Burn-Out Stress Syndrome** — is a common syndrome among the KPO employees and includes chronic fatigue, insomnia due to the complete alteration of 24-hour biological rhythm of the body. Crossing lines of gender, religion and caste, anyone can fit into this type of work, assuming they have good language skills. Lamenting on the stress factor, many call centre employees called for longer breaks during work hours and an insight on loss of identity of employees is also a rising question. Every year in Japan around 30,000 deaths occur because of Karoshi (over work). In a study conducted by Delhi based NGO - Saarthak in 30 Indian companies, it was found that 50% of the employees suffered from stress related problems. Further, in the studies conducted in the US and UK, it was found that more than 60% of employees complain to be stressed out in their jobs. It has been seen that individuals fail to cope with stress. Such people are often described as suffering from burnout – a syndrome of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion coupled with feelings of low self-esteem or low self-efficacy, resulting from prolonged exposure to intense stress and the strain reactions following from them (Greenberg, 2010). Burnout has an adverse impact on job performance.

**Strategies to COMBAT Stress:** According to Dr Raw Baum ,a Pittsburgh,Pennsylvanian bioenergetics analyst and stress educator, "stress is our body's bio chemical reaction to how we live our lives.Stress can develop into distress and disease through your personal adaptations to internal and external environments.

Individuals can adopt several techniques to reduce the stress level Becoming aware of the stressors is the first step in handling stress . the failure to cope with one stressor may give rise to another stressor, thus, adding to the magnitude of the experience of stress.

Some of the most important strategies for the working individuals to fight stress are prioritizing and delegating work .

Effective time management helps in reducing stress level to a greater extent.To manage time, an individual needs to distinguish between tasks that are very urgent and to be performed immediately and other tasks, which need to be done in due course of time. Higher priority needs to be given to the most important tasks with more priority. While planning, an individual also needs to assess the requirement of time to complete a task. Buffer time need to be provided, along with the allocating times for contingencies.

**Social Support network:** It work as stress buster for an individual . One can feel relieved by sharing feeling, experience, problems.Social support provides a sense of belongingness.It also reduces the lone time, which in turn reduces the feeling of being stressed.The social support network provides suggestions, advices to cope with the stress.

**Relaxation:** People who keep time to relax, are better at dealing with stress. Relaxation deviates mind off the stress and substitutes it with more calmness. Genuine relaxation must result in peace of mind. Relaxation not only lowers blood pressure and heart rate but also improves concentration, boost up confidence and reduces anger and frustrations.

**Healthy Diet and Fitness:** Research indicates that reduced intake of salt and saturated fats, and increased consumption of fiber – and vitamin-rich fruits and vegetables help to cope with the physiological effects of stress.

**Yoga and Regular exercise:** It also helps. People who exercise regularly obtain many benefits closely related to resistance of the adverse effects of stress (Bakker et al, 2000).

**TM Technique:** Transcendental meditation is very effective and relatively easy to learn technique for lowering stress. During meditation ,the heart rate goes down and in well-practiced meditators ,may cease for periods up to 30 secs. The consumption of oxygen decreases, muscle tension is reduced, blood levels of lactate and cortisol which respectively are associated with anxiety and stress, decrease: Number of studies have shown that the bodily changes in TM state are very identical to one under relaxed state.

Meditation in any form helps in minimizing stress and for higher level of mental relaxation.In addition to this stress reduction can be achieved using other techniques such as systematic desensitization Technique (relaxation -response technique) of Herbert Benson.

**Adequate Sleep:** Adequate sleep fuels mind and body. Irregular and disturbed sleep often hampers concentration and decreases energy levels. This, in turn, affects the effectiveness of work and increases job related stress. During sleep, the body rests, repairs, rebuilds, grows, and heals itself and stresses and tensions accumulated throughout the day are ideally released.

The corporate yoga classes are also gaining popularity in managing stress in India. It has been found that, fitness sessions such as yoga, de- stresses the employees and the number of sick leaves go down. There may be two types of training sessions. One, where the company provides a space for yoga sessions. The second option is termed as Desktop Yoga, where the trainer sits on the floor, where the employees have their respective workstations. The exercises can be done even without taking a scheduled break. These sessions do not go on for more than 15 minutes. (adopted from Companies organising stress busting courses for employees to increase productivity. Tasmayee Laha Roy, ET Bureau Apr 15, 2013, 06.10PM IST [http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2013-04-15/news/38556060\\_1\\_stress-management-corporateyoga-client-list](http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2013-04-15/news/38556060_1_stress-management-corporateyoga-client-list))

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