

To cite this article: Dr. Rani P.B. (2024). WORKPLACE STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW, International Journal of Research in Commerce and Management Studies (IJRCMS) 6 (6): 260-270 Article No. 317 Sub Id 605

WORKPLACE STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Dr. Rani P.B.

· Guest Lecturer in Commerce University College (Evening Programme)
Hampankatta Mangalore-575001 Karnataka

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38193/IJRCMS.2024.6621>

ABSTRACT

Excessive stress in the workplace is a serious matter of concern for everyone. Stress and strain adversely affect employees' quality of work (QWL) and quality of life (QL). Changing the composition of the workforce, the increasing influence of information and communication technology (ICT), long working hours and huge work pressures to meet deadlines, enormous turbulence in the business environment, a self-imposed compulsion to retain one's job and progress in the career path, successfully navigating the dynamics of corporate culture and leadership bring about several changes having far-reaching implications for the employees, organizations, and society-at-large. The present study attempted to review the previous studies relevant to the present study. The review presents some important and relevant studies on occupational stress experienced by employees working in various sectors, coping strategies they adopted to overcome the stress are indicated. The present research paper attempted to gather information by reviewing published books, and articles in multiple journals, and collecting relevant data from published dissertations

KEYWORDS: Workplace Stress and Coping Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Work' can be defined as an application of physical or mental effort or activity towards the accomplishment of something, especially to earn more income to achieve basic needs and to maintain a better lifestyle while fulfilling personal aspirations, wants, demands, and expectations. Every waking hour of an individual's day, his/her life revolves around his/her work. So work is needed for an individual to lead a useful and ennobled life. Mushroom growth of industries and an increasingly competitive business environment, in the international market have led the corporate world to face new challenges and problems. To compete at a global level, employees have to undergo a lot of mental stress to meet the demands of their work, which has become the core of an organization to keep its existence. So, occupation is considered a main source of stress in people's lives for every person. 'Occupational stress' becomes a major issue and matter of concern for the employees and the organization. It has become a crucial topic for the study of organizational behaviour and the practice

of human resource management.

Occupational stress is closely related to the workplace and organizational performance, which can be defined as the “harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the workers.” When the worker feels overwhelmed at work, he/she can lose confidence and become irritable or withdrawn. Stressed workers are increasing their risk of serious physical and mental health problems like headaches, backache, anxiety, depression, heart disease, stroke, etc. Stress also leads to other behaviours, such as alcohol/drug abuse, eating disorders, long working hours, and aggressive behaviours that can have adverse effects on physical and psychological health and well-being.

The sign of ‘workplace stress’ is work itself which varies from person to person, depending on the particular situation. The majority of the workers experience stress at some point during their work life. Being stressed, it would be hard for an individual to move with family, friends, co-workers, and society. There is no such thing as good stress but some workers find it more tolerable than others. For each person, there is a level of stress that helps the person maximize his or her work goals. Work itself can have positive or negative profound effects on an employee’s contemporary life. It is widely acknowledged that injuries and disease in the workplace constitute moral, legal, and economic problems of an individual and organization alike.

Objectives of the Study

Find out the causes of occupational stress experienced by employees working in various sectors, its consequences, and the coping strategies they adopted to overcome the stress are also indicated.

METHODOLOGY

The present research paper gathers information by reviewing published books, and articles in various journals, and also collecting relevant data from published dissertations.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual framework

As per the physical and biological sciences as well as behavioural study, the concept of ‘stress’ means an intense condition, involving tension, worry, and anxiety. The term stress was borrowed from the discipline of physics. Stress=pressure, which means that force placed upon an object to cause damage by bending or breaking. In the case of human beings, stress is often used to describe the body’s responses to demands placed upon it, whether these demands are favourable or unfavourable. People experience work pressure due to unmet expectations which is transformed into disappointment. However, that pressure becomes excessive or otherwise unmanageable, which ultimately leads to

stress. Stress is a response and not an illness that reflects certain biochemical reactions in the human body. Mental and physical illnesses develop if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged, and the resultant aggressive mentality becomes difficult to cure. Stress in its initial stage may not be as dangerous as perceived. Still, its prolongation causes worry, loss of confidence and determination in life, and a decline in interest in doing work.

Stress and Strain relationships

Stress is the emotional and physical strain caused by an individual's response to pressure from the outside world. Hans Selye (one of the early pioneers of modern stress theory) first employed the term stress in a biological context in the 1930s. He referred to stress as an upset in the body's balance due to physical, mental, or emotional stimuli. Stimuli or situations that can result in the experience of stress are termed 'stressors'. However, stressor is a predictor of stress, and strain is a consequence of stress. The human body has a natural chemical response to a threat or demand known as the 'flight or fight reaction' wherein the body releases adrenaline and once the threat or demand subsides the body can return to its natural state. The term fight or flight was first developed by Walter B Cannon in 1915. The fight or flight response, also known as the acute stress response, is an automatic reaction of the body and mind to a stressful and potentially dangerous situation during which the brain reacts quickly by preparing the body for action to keep the person in a safe condition. Humans as well as animals react to the acute stress by either fighting the threat or fleeing from it.

Stress can be both eustress and distress aspects. The notion of eustress and distress is developed by Hans Selye, one of the early pioneers on stress. He supposed that eustress (positive stress) occurs when an individual views a situation as slightly pushed but does not get overwhelmed by it. The goal is slightly more than one can handle but not unachievable. This makes the goal challenging, the accomplishment which leads to increased satisfaction and confidence. Eustress turns into distress if an individual cannot cope with the amount of pressure or trauma, he/she is under. Distress (negative stress) refers to harmful unpleasant demands on the individual. It is a negative emotional reaction to the output of stress. Job burnout, substance abuse, violence, depression, and anxiety are measures of distress, and hope, meaningfulness, and manageability are considered measures of 'eustress'.

Many factors influence the individual's interpretation of a threat, response to it, and recovery after a threatening experience. Different personality styles, gender differences, age, context, family history, emotional state, understanding of self, and general social awareness will all influence each person's stress level. Depending on how long it continues, how powerful they are, and how strong the employee's recovery powers are. stress can either be mild or severe, temporary or long-term. Stress in medium, mild, or moderate cases, can show attention, learning, problem-solving, and creativity. That can motivate and help to be more productive. At a lower level, it can show all the signs of

boredom, weariness, lack of interest, and lethargy. In severe cases, it can include worry and loss of interest in life and work. However, that can usually harm the mind and body.

One cannot avoid stress. But it can never be ignored because by ignoring stress will lead to serious consequences and cause more medical problems. If it is well managed through coping strategies, it will convert ill-being into well-being. "Stress" in occupation is a condition or a feeling experienced when employees are unable to match their knowledge and abilities to the work demands and pressure. Stressful conditions in the workplace can harm the mental and physical well-being of the workforce. By and large, stressed workers tend to be fatigued, prone to mistakes and injuries and are more likely to be absent, and most significantly they incur more healthcare costs than other employees. Therefore, work stress can decrease the overall ability to work productively.

Strain is defined as "the individual's response to stress" (Cope, C. M., 2003. p.41), and it can affect people in a variety of ways, including physiological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural effects that emerge as a result of stress, and which disrupts the human body's natural function. Cynicism, decreased professional efficacy, decreased loyalty to the organisation, and increased desire to leave the workplace are all possible outcomes (Idris, 2009). Strain, on the other hand, is thought to be the result of stress or the negative consequences of traumatic events (Fletcher, 1988; Hobfoll, 1988; Jones & Kinman, 2001).

Coping Strategies

Increasing vulnerability in the workplace causes decreasing power to control the physical and mental condition of the body. When an individual has the feeling of decreased power, he/she is not able to combat the stressful situation, and also difficult to take positive action to solve the problem. In this awful situation in the workplace, a coping strategy can immensely benefit and can help the employee to cope with all levels of stress. Coping or managing stress means keeping their stress level under control. Usually, a stressed worker requires a lot of physical and mental relaxation. Coping with stressful situations is not a simple exercise. However, sometimes they are unable to deal with stressful situations at the workplace. but they need it positively. The defense mechanism against stress is called coping, which converts stressful situations into relaxation. That gives them the power to maintain a better management of stress levels protect themselves from vulnerability and prevent the impact of stress on the workforce. The ability to cope with stress is an important aspect of working life, both in terms of work performance and general health.

When individuals experience stress or face a demanding situation, they adopt different ways of dealing with it as they cannot remain in a continued state of tension. Coping or coping strategies are brought about by a person's conscious mind, which refers to an individual's efforts and energy to solve personal

and interpersonal problems to manage stress. Managing stress is a synthesis of wisdom accrued knowledge and personal experience. Overtime stress is also a process of transformation, in which one moves from a motivation of fear forward, to a motivation of love and compassion, which not only connects the dots between mind, body, and spirit to create positive choices but also builds a bridge to a better life. When individuals experience stress or face a demanding situation, they adopt different ways of dealing with it as they cannot remain in a continued state of tension.

Coping refers to how an individual deals with stressful situations. That differs from person to person and from situation to situation in the same person. There are two major ways of coping- changing oneself or changing one's (his/her) environment. Coping is done with a desire to maintain a sense of personal integrity and to achieve greater personal control over the environment. He/she faces a stressful situation, then modifies some aspects of the situation such as analysing, recognising and appropriately facing the problem, being decisive, trusting in self, practicing good management, improving self-image, maintaining better family relationships, using scientific methods to tackle the challenge, acquiring alternate interests, avoiding confrontation, acquiring more qualifications, using better communication, etc., to achieve a more adequate person-environment fit. For all these reasons it can be said that the best way to manage stress is to prevent it.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study attempted to discuss various models and theories relating to workplace stress proposed by different authors in different years which will provide definite pointers to fine-tune the theoretical framework, adopt a robust research design, and guide organisational and managerial practice.

Michigan model (1962)

In 1962, French and Kahn developed the Michigan Model. The Michigan Model puts a strong focus on the individual's contextual stressor expectations (Caplan et al., 1975). Environmental stressors are subjectively viewed, such as role uncertainty tension, loss of participation, job stability, workload, lack of difficulty, and so on, and thus personality variables, demographics, and social reinforcement moderate these expectations to contribute to health outcomes (Kompier, 2003).

Role stress theory (1964)

The role stress theory was developed by Khan et al., in 1964, which postulated that organisational factors generate role expectations among role senders, who then transmit these expectations as role pressures to the focal person. These pressures interact with the personality of the focal person and with interpersonal factors, yielding experienced pressure (e, g., role ambiguity, role conflict). Experienced pressure creates symptoms of ill-health and activates defence mechanisms and coping responses.

Defence mechanisms are attempts to distort the ambiguity or conflict in sent-role pressures, reducing experienced-pressure without actually altering the situation. Attempts to cope with task stresses, change conflicting requests, or stop the condition are examples of coping responses. Coping may change the impact of sent-role pressures on experienced-pressure by changing personal and interpersonal factors, or it may affect role perceptions directly or indirectly by personal and interpersonal factors (Edwards, J.R.1992, p.241).

Role Conflict Theory (1964)

Role conflict theory (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal 1964) suggested that *ceteris paribus*, when people are involved in some sort of role conflict, they are exposed to more stressors and experience increased stress and strain. A mismatch between the needs of an individual's environment (e.g., given duties) and the individual's ability to fulfil the role criteria can lead to role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964). Role conflict can also arise from the competing demands of various positions (Kahn et al., 1964). Kahn et al., (1964) stated three generalisations about role conflict such as (1) role conflict often results in psychological conflict, which means when an individual experiences conflict between roles, that often morphs into an internal conflict; (2) The appearance of conflict is influenced as much by an individual's perceived needs and ideals as it is by external demands; and (3) conflict is the result of a push to change, the source of the push (i.e., internal to the individual, or external to the environment) is irrelevant (McMillan, H.S. 2011, pp.19-20).

Equity Theory (1965)

Equity theory was developed by Adams in 1965. People equate results to the amount of work they put in and the relative efforts of others, he said. Inequity occurs where the effort/outcome ratios are not proportional. Employees believe they contribute more (time, commitment, expertise, flexibility) than they gain (job security, career opportunities). In the workplace, perceived inequity is thought to be a major cause of counterproductive and withdrawing behaviours. Reduced motivation and dedication to the job and employer are examples of reactions to perceived inequity, with implications such as lateness, absenteeism, organizational cynicism, attrition, and, in some situations, workers' compensation lawsuits. Increases in workers' compensation claims for workplace depression may be seen as an effort by workers to make up for alleged inequity (Kenny, D. 2005. pp.29-30).

Vitamin Model (1987)

The vitamin model was developed by Warr in the year 1987. He proposed a "vitamin model" to define the links between stressors and employee health and well-being. This model proposes that while a certain level of work autonomy, role expectations, social support, ability utilization, capacity range, and task input is beneficial to the worker, a high level of these job qualities creates a stressful scenario. High levels of pay, protection, and role importance, on the other hand, do not have this negative

impact.

Workstyle Model (1996)

An individual's (his/her) workstyle, according to the workstyle Model (Feurstein, 1996) is described as their unique pattern of cognitions, behaviours, and physiological reactions when performing work tasks. According to this model, high-risk workstyles entail bad positioning, excessive power usage, less rests, and other behaviours that are likely to cause muscle pressure and stress.

Cognitive Continuum Theory (CCT) (2000)

Hammond proposed the Cognitive Continuum Theory (CCT) in the year 2000. Stress is incorporated into this paradigm as a result of a disturbance of the "constancy," or equilibrium, or homeostatic interaction between cognition and the demands of the world (the task). Stressors are divided into endogenous (any negative change within the task system, e.g., loss of an information source) and exogenous disruptions (those due to factors outside the task system (e.g., fire, noise, cold). Meanwhile, Hammond (2000) proposes that all organisms seek to maintain stable relations within their environment and the disruption of stabilised relations produces what we know as stress.

Job demands-resources model (2001)

Physical workload, time constraint, shift work, work-home tension, and the physical atmosphere of the workplace are all task demands, according to the job demands-resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001). Physical, psychological, social, and organisational features that assist individuals in achieving work goals, reducing task pressures, and enhancing personal growth and development are referred to as job capital. Resources can be external (organizational, participation in decision making, rewards, task variety, and social support) and internal (cognitive) (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001, Pp.499–512.)

According to the work demands-resources model's health disability mechanism, high job demands, and low resources are linked to job pressure, such as physical symptoms and burnout (Lewig, et. al., 2007). High demands and high resources, on the other hand, result in engagement (a constructive and rewarding state of mind that contributes to dedication), vigor (resilience, perseverance, and willingness to invest effort in work), dedication (enthusiasm and inspiration), and innovation (the introduction and application of new ideas, products, processes, and procedures in an organization that benefits the organization) and that they foster a critical psychological state (meaning fulness) or a situation where the resources in the environment

allow people to meet demands that result in personal growth and development (Hackman and Oldham,1975).

Management of stress should be approached based on ideological underpinnings and a holistic context. Various theories pertaining to the field of workplace stress provide a sound theoretical foundation indicating a kaleidoscopic perspective. Antecedents, perception of eustress and distress, stressors, strains, coping strategies, impact on the overall well-being of the employees, and finally organisational and managerial interventions in order to handle workplace stress certainly indicate multidisciplinary, multicultural, and multidimensional aspects. Ultimately, theory without practice is sterile; and practice without theory is futile.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Occupational stress is becoming a major contributor to the 'health and performance problem' of individuals and its unnecessary occurrences lead to huge expenses for organizations. The manner in which a person copes with stressful events and the extent to which managing the causes of stress at the workplace has been identified as a crucial factor, which can prevent or eliminate the impact of stress in the workforce. Several studies exist on these topics carried out in India and abroad by scholars, academicians, and organizations. This is an attempt to review the literature of previous research work relevant to the present study.

House, J.S., et al., (1979), studied occupational stress and health among factory workers (N=1809) includes hourly (nonmanagerial) work force of a large tire, rubber, plastics, and chemicals manufacturing plant in a small city in the Northeast (U.S.). The analysis of the study found that psychosocial job stress was significantly associated with psychological and psychosomatic disorders among blue-collar workers, the study suggesting that such stress may pose an additional hazard to blue-collar workers by making them more susceptible to the effects of noxious environmental agents on dermatological and, especially, respiratory functioning.

Pettegrew, L.S., et al., (1981), studied the effects of job-related stress on medical centre employees. The study observed that the communicator style accounted for the greatest differences between employees who were experiencing stress due to being unprepared to perform their work role. Physician appeared to be more assertive and less supportive in their communication; administrators/managers were assertive but also supportive while line employees were both submissive and supportive in their communicator style. Statistically significant found that the discriminant functions were less powerful than the communicator style discriminant functions.

Olsson, K., et al., (1990), described stress and coping strategies of three-shift workers. the study found that nurses experienced more mental and physical occupational stress than the paper workers. The nurses working in an irregular three-shift system reported more shift work stress compared to the male

and female paper workers in regular shift. The nurses reported more often active cognitive coping strategies than the paper workers. The nurses who used active problem-solving coping methods had less psychological symptoms than the other nurses. If the nurses had not used so many active cognitive methods and social support, they might have been even more exhausted. The fixed shift system gave the paper workers abundant leisure time in which to take care of themselves and to use coping methods to promote their health.

Loo, R., (1992), Organizational actions to manage workplace stress: the Canadian experience the study suggested that more Canadian organizations, especially smaller ones, need to pay some attention to managing work place stress rather than ignoring or dismissing it as unimportant. Organizations should find cost-effective techniques appropriate to managing stress in their setting. Manufacturing sector, need to overcome the perception of union and employee resistance to such policies and programs and services.

Lindstrom, K., (1992), Coping with job stress by managers at different career stages in Finland and the United State the Finnish managers showed lower job demands but more heart symptoms and stomach trouble. Their characterizing coping strategies were internalizing the problem and problem solving. The US managers had higher job demands, more headaches, and more sleep problems, and they used socially oriented coping and daydreaming as coping strategies.

Reichel, A., (1993), Work Stress, Job Burnout, and Work Outcomes in a Turbulent Environment: The Case of Israeli Executives. The analysis of the study revealed that burnout and stress have statistically significant on work outcome, for the junior manager's group. The macro-stress (national levels of stress in terms of national survival, political, social, or economic issues) was much stronger than work-related stress so that work stress and burnout do not play meaningful roles in determining Israeli executive work outcomes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceived job success).

M. A. Rahim, (1997), studied the relationships of stress, locus of control, and social support to psychiatric symptoms and propensity to leave a job: a field study with managers. The study stated that the managers with high internal locus of control who receive high social support will perform significantly better than the ones with the opposite conditions. Managers who are externalizers (i.e., low on internal locus of control) particularly require stress management training. A major implication for the findings is that managers who possess high internal locus of control personality should be particularly selected for positions which involve high stress.

SUMMARY OF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An attempt is made to critically review the literature of the past published research work relevant to

the present study. The present study reviewed earlier studies carried out in India and also abroad, which are closely related to gender-neutral studies on stress, stressors, strains, and coping strategies, the review reveals some important and relevant Indian and foreign studies in various professionals in different sectors include: chemical manufacturing plant, medical hospitals, construction industry, public and private industry, education institutions and other sectors.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the ability to cope with stress is an important aspect of working life both in terms of work performance and general health. Coping or coping strategies are brought about by a person and interpersonal problems to manage stress. Stress management strategies, however, can be used to reduce the intensity of a stress response in situations where individuals have exceeded their coping resources. Successful coping requires a set of knowledge, skills attitudes, values, and habits that are adequate for dealing with a variety of situations. Health is perceived as a multidimensional process that comprehends the totality of one's being. True health must include not only physical fitness but also simultaneous psychological and spiritual well-being. Stress management involves an effort to obtain physical, mental, intellectual, social, and spiritual wellness. Total well-being pertains not merely to an individual, but to the whole community. In addition, stress management involves improvement in cognition (perception), affect (feeling), and conation (action). In the process of stress management, every individual can acquire the requisite competencies to handle critical situations with a well-balanced mind and a victorious life.

REFERENCES

Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D., Quinn, R. Snoek, J., & Rosenthal, R. (1964) *Organizational stress: Studies in the role Conflict and role ambiguity*, New York: Wiley.

Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D., Quinn, R. Snoek, J., & Rosenthal, R. (1964) *Organizational stress: Studies in the role Conflict and role ambiguity*, New York: Wiley.

Adams, J.S. (1965), Inequity in social exchange. In L. Berkowitz (ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 2, 267–99, New York: Academic Press.

Caplan, R.D., Cobb, S., French, J.R., Harrison, R.D. & Pinneau, S.R. (1975). *Job Demands and Worker Health: Main effects and occupational differences*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.

House, J. S. Wells, A., Landerman, L.R., McMichael, A. J. and Kaplan, B.H. (1979), *Occupational Stress and Health among Factory Workers*, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 139-160.



Pettegrew, L.S. Thomas, R. C., Ford, J., and Raney D.C., (1981), The effects of job-related stress on medical centre employee communicator style, *journal of occupational behaviour*, vol.2, No. 4, pp.235-253.

Warr, P.B. (1987). *Work, unemployment, and mental health*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Olsson, K., I. Kandolin, I., and Kauppinen-Toropainen, K (1990), Stress and Coping Strategies of Three-Shift Workers., *Le Travail Humain*, Vol. 53, No. 2, pp. 175-188

Loo, R. (1992). Organizational actions to manage workplace stress: the Canadian experience, *Journal of Health and Human Resources Administration*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 90-109

Lindstrom, K., Hurrell, J. J. (1992) Coping with job stress by managers at different career stages in Finland and the United States, *Scand J Work Environ Health*,18(2):14-17

Reichel, A. and Neumann, Y. (1993), Work Stress, Job Burnout, and Work Outcomes in a Turbulent Environment: The Case of Israeli Executives *International Studies of Management & Organization*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 75-96

Feurstein, M. (1996). Workstyle: definition, empirical support and implications for prevention, evaluation, and rehabilitation of occupational upper-extremity disorders. In S.D. Moon, & S.L. Sauter (Eds.). *Beyond Biomechanics: Psychosocial Aspects of*

Musculoskeletal Disorders in Office Work. 177-206. Bristol, PA. Taylor and Francis.

Rahim M.A., (1997), Relationships of stress, locus of control, and social support to psychiatric symptoms and propensity to leave a job: a field study with managers, *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Volume 12, No. 2, PP.159-174