

A Conceptual Study on Factors Leading to Stress and its Impact on Productivity with Special Reference to Teachers in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Stress has become innate to all occupations and other aspects of life. The term 'stress' can be perceived in various ways like environmental pressure, strain which an individual encounters, unpleasant interactions between an individual and the circumstances, etc (Halkos & Bousinakis, 2010). Usually, at work place, the unmatched job requirement and an individual capability create a pressure or emotional disturbance which is perceived differently by every individual thus making stress a very subjective element (Michie, 2002). In modern times, the definition of a stress is more related to the personal experience of an individual that is caused due to the pressures and demands of the workplace (Blaug, Kenyon & Lekhi, 2007). The stress can significantly impact the ability and performance of an individual as well as their perception on own's capability. Studies have associated different types of stressors, such as organizational factors, psychological distress with the performance of an individual. Further, the level of stress in respondents depends upon their age, qualification, position in the organization, type of work (creative or routine), etc. The field of higher education is also no exception to stress. On account of the growth in number of institutions, enrolment rate, evolving higher standards of education and competition in the job market, institutions of higher learning are expected to turn out competitive and more stressful. In the current study, the researcher tries to analyze factors leading to stress and its impact on productivity with special reference to teachers in higher education.

KEYWORDS: stress, productivity, higher education

INTRODUCTION

The term "stress" has been stated in a number of ways over many years. Stress was understood originally as pressure from the environment; however, it was later understood as pressure which is there within an individual. The most generally accepted definition for stress can be stated as "the interaction between an individual and the circumstances" (Michie, 2002). The manner in which an individual respond to stress depends on the perception of the situation by the individual, presence or absence of social support, their past experiences, and the differences in the reactions to stress. The term stress was first used to describe a biological response to physical mechanisms by Hans Selye, who stated stress as "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand on it. However, the body has only a limited capacity to respond to stressors. The workplace makes a variety of demands on people, and too much stress over too long a period of time will exhaust their ability to cope with those stressors" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

There exists a notion that stress involves a sequence of events which includes the existence of demands, a set of events or processes through which the existing demands are

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considered significant, and the formation of responses that have an impact on the well-being of the individual (Cox & Mackay, 1981). There exists an acceptance on the definition of stress as a psychological state that involves both emotional and cognitive components.

Review of literature:

Burman and Goswami (2018) have enlisted various work stressors such as low income, lack of family support, poor interpersonal relationship, role ambiguity, irrational organizational policies, poor environment, workload, etc

Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) define teacher stress as "a response by a teacher of negative affect (such as anger, anxiety or depression) accompanied by potentially pathogenic physiological changes (such as increased heart rate, or release of adrenocorticotrophic hormone into the bloodstream) as a result of the demands made upon the teacher in their role".

Singh and Rani, (2015) Stress as a pressure that exceeds the resilience of an individual in physical or mental state.

Stress can be positive or negative with respect to a person's point of view. For people with high tolerance, stress becomes an aspiration to perform well but for others, stress causes mental burnout thereby decreasing their productivity.

Sharma and Shakir, (2017) Stress is huge mental or physical burden on an individual who is not able to manage it.

Oligny (1994) defines burnout as development of negative attitude towards work by the employees, stress and becoming disconnected from their job, thereby decreasing productivity.

French et al., 1982; Olivier & Venter, 2003; Montgomery & Rupp, (2005) Teaching is considered to be a stressful career with the proof of mental and physical problems faced by the teachers.

Stress can lead poor performance of the teachers (Folkman et al., 1986) and directly affect the students (Wentzel, 2010). It has been found that stress not only affects the performance of the teachers on their job but also their family and societal interactions (Burman and Goswami, 2018). Protracted work stress leads to burnout (Reddy and Poornima, 2012). Caspari (1976) states that the major stress felt by the teachers at the end of the academic year were in controlling the unrestrained students than other factors. The distinction between organisational stress and personal stress faced by teachers was made by Halpert (1966). He infers that the physical indicators of the stress are due to organisation whereas the mental anguish is due to personal stress.

Organisational causes of stress are commonly attributed to the stress of the employees. Workload (Demerouti, et al., 2001; Kaur, 2007), physical environment of classes (Friesen and Williams, 1985; Harris, 2011), lower pay and incentives, duration of classes (Drago et al., 1999; Montalvo, Bair, & Boor, 1995), various other roles of teachers (Nadeem and Abbas 2009), unrestrained students (Jacobsson, Pousette, & Thylfors, 2001; Wisniewski and Gargiulo, 1997), lack of harmony with higher authorities and colleagues and high expectations are cited as the reasons for organisational stress (Rupa and Durai, 2012; Bartholomew et al., 2014; Sharma and Shakir, 2017).

Okojie (2011) recognised the roles of teachers in an institution apart from being a teacher in the perspective of a technology-driven class atmosphere. Some of the roles were team players, investigators of latest advancements in teaching methods and authorities in enriched learning procedures. He opined that teachers have the necessity to adapt themselves to latest technologies and reinvent themselves showing that the role of a teacher has become multi-faceted from the traditional role.

Leung et al. (2009) elucidates that occupational stress has caused high mental stress among teachers in Hong Kong but coping mechanisms for stress is not prevalent. It is recommended that stress management programmes be conducted to reduce stress among teachers. Another form of organisational stress in higher education institutions is the pressure to publish research work and articles. The management sets an impractical target of annual

publications required along with severe implications in case of target not met. This puts extreme pressure on the teachers and lead to burnout (Miller et al., 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Other than the job-related responsibilities, individuals are given other responsibilities to achieve higher levels of productivity. The scenario where there is a conflict in the job requirement, overload of work, skills and capabilities of an employee can result in job-associated stress and pose a threat to the employees as well as the organization. In all organizations there are similar issues related to job stress, such as low productivity, high employee turnover, personal problems, increased absenteeism, health issues such as alcoholism, smoking which in turn affects the employee performance at work (Blix et al., 1994). There are empirically tested reports on the consequences of the employee's job stress on their declining performance and productivity (Hoboubi et al., 2017; Jalagat, 2017; Naqvi et al., 2013). There could be numerous causes and a combination of factors such as organizational setup (organizational factors), management of work and relationships at work and personal factors including work-life balance related to job stress.

Objectives:

1. To analyse the factors leading to stress.
2. To study impact of stress on productivity with special reference to teachers in higher education.

Methodology:

Data has been drawn from various sources such as internet, articles, books and journals.

Analysis:

Factors leading to stress

Organizational factors

Workload has been considered as the most significant and widespread factor linked to stress related to work. Other factors such as long working hours, work place bullying, shifts in working hours, workplace harassment, and reduced workforce are some of the other factors that result in stress at work place (Blaug, Kenyon & Lekhi, 2007). Michie (2002), in her study on "Causes and management of stress at work," stated some of the key factors that cause stress at workplace. The job intrinsic factors which include long hours of work, lack of variety, lack of breaks, time pressure and poor physical working conditions (light, space, and temperature) were reported to be associated with stress and health risks. Other organizational factors that have been reported to lead to stress include limited and extensive contacts, routine work, limited organizational influence, break opportunities, work flexibility, and frequent overtime (overtime, and high work pace) (Bergqvist et al., 1995).

Other factors related to work place stress stated by the Institute of World Health Organization, UK, include contextual and content factors related to work. Work content factors that cause stress includes working environment and equipment used (lack of availability, reliability and suitability of the equipment), short working cycles, underuse of skills, uncertainty of tasks, lack of control over work, and poorly managed work schedules (inflexible work schedules, unpredictable working hours, and unsocial hours). The contextual factors which create potential hazardous

conditions are organizational culture which involves poor communication, low levels of support for solving problems, lack of definition of organizational objectives; roles in the organization which includes role conflict and ambiguity; interpersonal relationships at work which includes poor relationships with superiors, interpersonal conflict, and social isolation; and personal life interference at work which includes dual career problems, and low support at home (Arnold, Robertson & Cooper, 1993).

Structure of the organization, organizational climate in terms of role overload, emotional burnout/ exhaustion (Gayman & Bradley, 2013); and organizational culture also play an important role in causing stress. This is the reason for differing levels of stress among different individuals who work in different backgrounds. Economic uncertainties, technological uncertainties, and organizational leadership (leadership style adopted by the managers) also promote stress.

Personal factors

Stress could also be caused due to personal factors such as relationships with others and utilization of free time. Personal factors which include age, term with the organization, similarity of job with vocational interest, personality characteristics, and family considerations play an important role in explaining the dynamics of work participation (Porter & Steers, 1973). Characteristics of an individual such as anxiety level, level of neuroticism, their tolerance for ambiguity, and Type A behavioral pattern may also cause stress. Further, individuals who confront lack of material resources (finance), psychological resources (self-esteem, coping skills) are more likely to be prone to high levels of stress (Michie, 2002).

Other personal factors such as job satisfaction and work-life balance experienced by the employees are also connected with stress. Factors such as physical health, psychological wellbeing, and job satisfaction of employees across various occupational groups have been found to be associated with job related stress. The emotional labor associated with jobs that involve high stress has been found to be a potential causal factor for stress (Johnson et al., 2005). Lower levels of job satisfaction have been found to be a possible consequence of stress (Collie, Shapka & Perry, 2012). Furthermore, stress and job satisfaction have been found to be related to employee's working conditions as well.

Work-life balance has an impact on the performance of employees. Employees who confront conflicts between the roles they play at home and at work and fail to balance between work and family responsibilities are more prone to intense pressure which may have a negative impact on their mental and physical health (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992).

Psychological and physiological distress

Physiological distress is characterized by sensory, subjective and hysterical experience that is related to potential damage to the body and its various tissues (Tracey, 2005; Peyron, Laurent, & Garcia-Larrea, 2000).

The high levels of stress endured by the individuals in order to succeed in life have an adverse effect on their cognitive, physiological, emotional and behavioral patterns.

Psychological distress is predominantly defined as a state of emotional suffering that is characterized by somatic symptoms and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Psychological distress is mainly caused when an individual is exposed to a stressful situation and the individual finds it difficult to cope with the situation (Horwitz, 2007).

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment refers to the employee's feelings of obligation to remain with the organization or the company. Such feelings arise due to the internalization of normative pressures exerted on the individual before entering or after entering the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Stress related to individual's role in an organization has a negative correlation with the individual's commitment towards the organization. Employees who experience high levels of organizational stress report poor levels of organizational commitment. Overly stressful work environment manifests poor commitment among its employees (Qazi & Nazneen, 2016; Green, Dishop & Aarons, 2016).

Employee productivity

Employee productivity can be defined as the appraisal of the efficiency of employees or a group of workers. Employee productivity can be measured in terms of the output yielded by an employee during a specific period of time.

Productivity of teaching staff

In order to achieve quality output, the most essential part of any school program is highly qualified teachers (Kagwiria & Amukowa, 2013). Productivity of teachers can be defined as "The contribution a teacher is to progress from teaching students by using inputs that are relatively variable in the short run (pedagogy, time, classroom management, etc.) to inputs that are relatively fixed in the short run (student abilities, attitudes, school climate, etc.)" (Schalock, 1987) (p.61). Thus, the effectiveness and efficiency of teachers measures the success of school. The productivity of teachers can also be assessed in terms of student's achievement. The teachers will be involved in various research activities as well. Therefore, the productivity of teachers involves assessment of both teaching productivity and research productivity.

Conclusion:

The detailed review of literature was done to determine the factors causing stress to university and college teachers and thereby affecting their productivity. It has been established that the organisational causes are the foremost reasons for work stress in teachers causing dissatisfaction and decreased productivity in their job. They include work overload, nonobservance by students and roles other than teaching, low salary, attitude of the management towards the teachers and the relationship between teachers. The productivity of teachers is dependent on various factors such as professional training, education infrastructure, academic background, and staff development programs (Ndugu, 2014). The motivational tactics adopted by the principals, monetary and non-monetary rewards, incentives, positive commendations, and effective communication also have an effect on the productivity of teachers. Various other factors such as physical conditions of the workplace, workplace facilities, work atmosphere, practices adopted by the management, familiarity of the superiors with the teachers,

discrimination among teachers, participation in seminars, and training, clear definition of roles and responsibilities, and in-service training and courses are some of the other factors that affect the productivity of teachers (Jafari & Moghaddam, 2015).

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