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## DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK EXPLAINING THE INFLUENCE OF STRESS IN IT SECTOR

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### ***ABSTRACT***

*In today's changing work environment stress level is accelerating and encompassing everyone. Prolonged stress, if not managed causes a number of diseases-physical, psychosomatic, physiological that affects health and productivity of an individual that in turn influences the organization.*

*Stress is a widely discussed topic in today's world. Various research studies have been done on how stress alters human behavior, work like & social life and academic life.*

*"Everyone knows what stress is, but nobody really knows."*

*A commonly held view is that chronic stress has adverse effect an academic performance. This paper attempts to build a theoretical framework with the view of previous researches to explain causes of stress among different occupations in information technology sector. This study of occupational stress focuses almost exclusively on the review of previous researches. Results prove that most of the IT sector employees are undergoing some kind of job stress due to organizational or individual problems.*

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*Stress levels in IT companies are similar to those experienced in other sectors, but draws greater attention because of the sector's growth, status and affluence. A commonly held view is that chronic stress has adverse effect a person's performance.*

*Originality/value – There is little information available that shows the relative values of stress across different occupations, which would enable the direct comparison of stress levels. This paper reports the level of stress on different occupations and job satisfaction levels. Reviews from different papers are taken and are illustrated in this paper explaining the etiology behind stressful life at workplace*

*Research limitations/implications – This is not an exhaustive research and explains only the reviews of previously done researches about stress and its relations to people at workplace.*

*The framework will help us make decision to know most important causes of stress amongst IT sector employees and its effect in their well being. With well being we refer to the quality of life of an individual. This term here is related to health. This amounts to the notion of how well a person's life is going.*

*To cope with stressful conditions knowledge about stress and the factors that lead to stress is necessary. It is suggested that the management should take a step forward and promote various activities for reducing stress level of their employees and increasing their productivity.*

*Key Words: Stress. Causes Effects, Coping Strategies, IT*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

For centuries **stressful** events have been recognized as important components in development of adverse conditions and of illness. Today's high pressure lifestyles can take a heavy toll in decreased productivity, frustrations, disease and even early mortality. The reactions of

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individuals to stressors represent a major psychological & medical problem; any attempt to assess the cost presents a formidable test. One estimate made in US, indicated that the direct costs of executive stress alone are nearly 20\$ billion per year. Direct costs refer to lost days at work, treatments and executive deaths. Indirect costs are even more difficult to creativity and accidents.

Term “**Stress**” was coined by **Hans Seyle** in 1936 who defined it as “the non specific response of body to any demand for change”.

“Stress is defined as any circumstances that threaten or perceived to threaten one’s wellbeing and thereby has one’s coping ability”. (Pamela R. Johnson and Julie Indvik, 1996)

From the above definition this can be said that psychological and physiological consequences which can be caused by physical demands of the body or by environmental and social conditions which are evaluated as potentially harmful, uncontrollable or exceeding our resource for coping. So stress can also be known as a process that deals with environmental circumstances that disrupt, or threaten to disrupt their physiological or psychological functioning. A number of factors contribute to stress among people.

Stress has sometimes been described as an increase in catecholamine levels, a change in adrenal weight, or as a score on a life event scale or subjective reaction index (Steinberg & Ritzmann, 1990)

Stress, it is argued, can only be sensibly defined as a perceptual phenomenon arising from a comparison between the demand on the person and his or her ability to cope. An imbalance in this mechanism, when coping is important, gives rise to the experience of stress, and to the stress response. T. Cox (1978). Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.

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Stress results from an imbalance between demands and resources. R.S. Lazarus and S. Folkman (1984). Stress, Appraisal and Coping. New York: Springer.

## **2. DEFINITION OF STRESS – STRAIN AND OVERWORK**

The Encarta® World English Dictionary [North American Edition] (2009) found stress to be “strain felt by somebody: mental, emotional, or physical strain caused, e.g. by anxiety or overwork. It may cause such symptoms as raised blood pressure or depression”.

the American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language (2009) defines stress as “a mentally or emotionally disruptive or upsetting condition occurring in response to adverse external influences and capable of affecting physical health, usually characterized by increased heart rate, a rise in blood pressure, muscular tension, irritability and depression.” definition of stress by the Gale Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders (2003) states “stress is a term that refers to the sum of the physical, mental and emotional strains or tensions on a person”. Stress on family may arise from both the schedule and the content of work (MacDermid et al, 1994) while White, Wilson & Pfoutz (2006) considered it unavoidable.

## **3. TYPES OF STRESS**

Not all the types of stress are harmful or negative. Stress is widely accepted to have two opposite effects on individuals. Positive aspects of stress include ‘fight or flight’ syndrome which increase the performance of an individual by providing adrenaline to increase the capacity of the body to cope; this is further described by Buchanan and Huczynski (2004) as “**eustress**” which has good effect and “**distress**” which has negative effect; “the unpleasant, deliberating and unhealthy side of stress.”

Job Stress can be defined as the inability to cope with pressures in a job. Occupational stress is a serious matter for employees, organizations and communities. The following costs of the

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problem are immense, and their effect on health and well-being is on the increase [1]. As Nhundu [2] states, occupational stress is considered to be one of the primary work-related health problems, mainly in developed-countries where the phenomenon is well documented. Occupational stress -also called work stress, job stress or stress in organizations- “is a condition wherein job-related factors interact with the worker to change, either disrupt or enhance, his or her psychological or physiological conditions such that the individual's mind and/or body are forced to deviate from normal functioning” [3]. Occupational stress symptoms are not left in the workplace at the end of the workday, but remain with the human being to impact on to the broader psychosocial domain [4].

In this era, the fastest growing sector is information technology and the fastest growing workforces are the group of information technology (IT) professionals. Bureau of Labour Statistics estimated that about 1.6 million new IT professions would be created from 2004 to 2016 [5]. Information technology is also different from other conventionally male-oriented occupational fields like medicine and accounting where female participation is rising, whereas the number of women in the field of IT is dwindling [6], [7].

Stress contains good and bad aspects (Abushaikha and Sheil, 2006). Giga & Hoel (2003) & Sheridan & Abelson (1983) have related stress with reduced worker and organizational performance.

#### **4. Trigger Factors for Occupational Stress-**

**Job stress** has been related to organization’s problems such as absenteeism, turnover, poor job performance, accidents and errors, alcohol and drug abuse. (Williams et al, 2001).

**D'Aurora and Fimian** argued that limited and manageable levels of stress provide challenges and an enthusiasm for living. Stress at work is also associated with other factors including individual, socio economic and family factors (Swanson et al, 1998).

**5. Stress at work can be divided into two major categories-**

- **Factors within the organization**
- **Factors within an individual**



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Researchers have identified five major categories of work stress-

- **Factors intrinsic to the job-** These are working conditions, physical surroundings, work shift etc can affect moods and overall mental state
- **Role in Organization-** Conflict situations can act as stress factors and lead to cardiovascular ill health risks, such as elevated blood pressure and abnormal blood chemistry ( Ivancevich and Matteson,1980)
- **Video display terminal Stress-** Along with massive increase in the use of computers and VDT's in all areas of work, researchers have found an increase in absenteeism and stress related illness related to the use of computers and VDT's (Hedge et al, 1992)
- **Relationship at work-** Selve(1974) suggested that learning to live with other people is one of the most stressful aspects of life
- **Career development-** Ivancevich and Matteson (1980) suggested that individuals suffering from “career stress” often show high dissatisfaction, job mobility, burnout, poor work performance, and less effective interpersonal relationships at work.

**Arber, Gilbert and Dale (1985)** have made the study and shows that studies, which have controlled for marital status and domestic responsibilities, have shown that women with multiple roles experience more stress with poorer mental health..

**Cooper et. al. (1988)** laid down five major categories of work stress, like working conditions, shift work and danger, new technology

**Cartwright and Cooper (1992)** said organizational culture nurture values, Attitudes and styles of work; psychologically different work environment could be reasons for stress among managers.

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**Donovan and Leiner (1994)** made emphasis on the flight and fight responses of stress. There are two type of behavior, one used to do in stressful situation.

#### **6. Resource quality and accessibility**

Existence and accessibility to resources are two different things. An individual may have abundant resources in his life and yet be unable to exploit them for coping with life complexity and dynamism as they are inaccessible to him. Accessibility of resources is dependent on the absence of physical, informational and economic (PIE) barriers. This depends upon the ability of an individual to use the resources to his benefit moderates the relationship between stress and life complexity, dynamism.

#### **7. METHODOLOGY**

A comprehensive review of literature available on stress in IT sector and related concepts was undertaken to identify the variable set having an impact on life of a personnel. Micro and macro level constructs that emerged from the literature review were integrated into the model to provide an understanding of the context in which individuals strive to know the factors of stress.

#### **8. Conclusion**

Stress does affect your overall health. According to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), in the UK alone 13.5 millions days were lost due to stress and anxiety in 2007/8. Excessive stress usually develops over a period of time and often goes unnoticed by the individual until a physical or emotional toll has been exacted. There are many reasons for development of stress among people. Particularly, in this era, when the lifestyles of people have changed, information technology is more technology oriented, leaving people more inclined towards the outer world. All this technology distracts you from developing important emotional skills, which are a sign of

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emotional maturity. Too much stress can lead to unhealthy and potentially serious physical and emotional consequences. There are inside and outside factors that could easily cause stress and it depends on each individual how these stressors would affect his life. Stress has profound effect on immune system and equilibrium of an individual. Prolonged stress influences health badly. Stress distorts emotions; people tend to be more irritable and defensive. Employers who have taken no steps to identify and reduce stress at work may experience financial sanctions (Kellaway, 1993, a). According to Cartwright and Cooper (1997), role ambiguity could also lead to mistrust of colleagues. As role conflict develops, a lowering of job satisfaction is experienced. Individuals experience job stress when they have little or no control over their jobs or when work demands exceed their abilities (Donovan and Kleiner, 1994).

When we talk about a problem we obviously need to discuss its solution. According to Folkman & Lazarus stress coping strategies can be grouped into two general types; problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is aimed at problem solving or doing something to alter the source of stress. Emotion-focused coping is aimed at reducing or managing the emotional distress that is associated with the situation. Although most stressors elicit both types of coping, problem-focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that something constructive can be done, whereas emotion-focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that the stressor is something that must be endured. Carver et al. and Carver have proposed 16 dimensions of coping: five dimensions assess conceptually distinct aspects of problem-focused coping [active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, seeking of instrumental social support]; five dimensions assess aspects of what might be viewed as emotion-focused coping. These strategies can be opted by individual at his/her own level and as well as by the organization. But Stress management skills work best when they're used regularly, not just when pressure's on. These can be grouped into two categories;

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- Individual coping strategies like Set limits; Plan your time; Don't deal with stress in unhealthy ways; Deep breathing etc
- Organizational coping strategies like Organizational development; Ergonomics and environmental design; Stress management training; Management development etc

There is need for both the sides from individual as well as from companies to make a work life balance.

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