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Potential sources and effects of work-stress: an overview

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ABSTRACT

Individuals are affected at one time or another by work-related stress. Stress at work is very common in modern lifestyle; and it is different for various people which have touched almost all professions. Here we review the possible causes and consequences of works stress to suggest the researchers to concentrate on these areas to develop adequate stress management strategies.

Keywords: Stress, Work, Sources.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals are affected at one time or another by work-related stress. Stress means many different things to many different people. Stress at work is a relatively new phenomenon of modern lifestyle; which has touched almost all professions. The nature of work has gone through drastic changes over the last century and it is still changing at whirlwind speed, and with this change stress comes inevitably. Occupational stress arises from demands experienced in the working environment that affect how one functions at work and outside work [1]. Girdano, et.al [2] stated that Swedish researchers have helped to clarify some of the broadest aspects of work-related stress. Frankenhaeuser model of job stress claims that high effort creates a condition of elevated catecholamine (epinephrine and norepinephrine) in the body, while high distress is related to elevated levels of cortisol. Conversely, low effort and low distress are related to lower levels catecholamine and cortisol. High level of both effort and distress represent the

most stressful environment, one in which the worker attempts to overcome boring routinized, repetitive or unpredictable constrains. Environmental conditions that engender feelings of loss of control, helplessness and hopelessness are associated primarily with elevated levels of cortisol and depressive syndromes; eventually, such environments give rise to extraordinary catecholamine constraints and cortisol secretion. Here we review the possible causes and consequences of work stress.

Potential Sources of Work-Related Stress

Causes of stress, its consequences for individual employees and individual differences has been identified by different researchers, thus they applied different sets of models. The most proposed models identify three sets of factors-environmental, individual and organizational factors-that act as potential sources of stress.

Environmental factors

Some physical features of the workplace can stimulate negative emotional reactions in workers such as, different ranges in temperature and sick-building syndrome [3], optimal lighting and noise [2], poor working conditions and environmental uncertainty-economical, political and technological [4].

Individual stressors

They are perhaps the greatest contributors to occupational stress, because they include human interaction, the greatest source of stress in general [2]. Employees' personal life involves family issues, such as marital difficulties, the breaking off a relationship and discipline troubles with children that create stress for employees, which employees carry with them to work [5]. Balancing the work and family roles is a significant daily task for a growing number of employed adults.

Organizational stressors

Work stressors take various forms and numerous studies have identified specific stressors and their effects. Many factors in the work have been found to influence the extent to which people experience stress in the job; several factors have been shown to be particularly strong in the researches. Job role stressors include (1) task demands which include task complexity, task meaningfulness and overspecialization. (2) Role demands include-role conflict, role ambiguity, and role scope. (3) Workload includes-work overload and underutilization. (4) Interpersonal relations and, (5) occupational differences. (6)Organizational structure which include organizational politics, group and organizational stressors, organizational leadership, change of any type, career development and lack of career guidance, lack of financial reward, responsibility for others, and aggressive behavior.

Individual Stress Moderators

Whether these environmental, individual and organizational stressors become actual stressors depends on individual differences; some individuals are better able with stressors than others; they adopt different behaviors to meet the stressor ahead. On the other hand, some individuals are predisposed to stress, that is, they are not able to adapt to stressors [6]. Many personality theorists

explained personality according to their own perspective, in which they elaborated how it will influence, if not determine, how we react to potentially stressful events in our lives. They believe that some people are more easily stressed than others because of personality type, for these researchers, stressors, or potential stressors, are less important in the stress response than the personality of the individual experiencing these events [7]. Psychologists seek to understand the characteristics that make each of us unique as individuals, by drawing upon knowledge from many other areas of psychology, they consider how learning experiences, biological factors, social and cultural influences, cognitive and development processes shape the persons we become [8]. What make people differ in terms of their ability to handle stress and to moderate their relationship between potential stressors and experienced stress are individual moderators; a moderator is a condition, behavior, or characteristic that qualifies the relationship between two variables. Stress moderators include such variables as age, gender and hardiness [6].

Although many stressors have been identified, their effect is not always as strong as might be expected. Four primary factors determine whether an individual experiences stress at work or in other situation; these include,

1. The person's perception of the situation;
2. The person's experience;
3. The presence or absence of social support;
4. The person's personality; i.e. tolerance for ambiguity, self-esteem, personality type and locus of control.

The Effects of Stress

The effects of stress are many and varied, some effects are positive, such as self-motivation and stimulation to satisfy individual goals and objectives. Nonetheless, many stress consequences are disruptive, counterproductive and even potentially dangerous. Not all individuals will experience the same consequences; for example, research suggests that one of many factors influencing stress consequences is type of employment [6]. A wide variety of physiological, psychological, and behavioral changes can affect a person who is experiencing unhealthy, chronic stress [4] as well as cognitive consequences [6].

These effects of stress have also been linked to work, thereby; their consequences clearly influence four major categories in the work environment.

Consequences of Work-Related Stress

The consequences clearly influence four major categories in the work environment, (1) stress and health, (2) stress and job performance, (3) stress and counterproductive behavior, and (4) stress and job burnout.

Stress and health

Greenberg [1], avowed that stress-related disease include hypertension, stroke coronary heart disease, ulcers, migraine headaches, cancer, allergies, asthma, hay fever, rheumatoid arthritis, backache, and TMJ syndrome. Since stress increase blood pressure and serum cholesterol, it is not surprising that studies have found it associated with hypertension stroke, and coronary heart disease. People suffering from work-related stress may experience migraines, sleeplessness, a desire for sweets, overeating, and/or for intestinal distress. Stress results in increased muscle tension and bracing, it is the phenomenon that is thought to be the cause of tension, headaches, backaches and neck and shoulder pain. If the work environment is stressful and lack incentives, and if people think their contribution are unimportant and the effort required of them is excessive, they are more likely to be unhappy and to develop health problems [10]. University managers need to be concerned about the problems of physical and mental health because of their severe consequences for both the female academic staff and the university. The costs to individuals are often more obvious than the costs to organizations and/or institutions. First, costs to employers include increased premiums for health insurance, lost work-days from serious illness or less serious illness. Second, most of individual accidents are caused by the worker's inability to cope with emotional problems worsened by stress. Third, the number of stress-related workers compensations claims is increasing at a tremendous rate. Finally, post-traumatic stress disorder is recognized as an illness or injury that may justify damage claim against an employer in courts [11]. The organizational consequences of stress are many and varied but they share one common feature: stress costs organizations money [6].

Stress and Job Performance

There has been a significant amount of research investigating the stress-performance relationship [5]. A major concern of managements is the effects of stress on job performances [12]. Stress can be either helpful or harmful to the job performance, depending on its level. Over a period of time, the stress responses exert a generalized wear-and-tear on the body, which can directly affect the five systems of the body: the endocrine, muscular, digestive, the immune systems and cardiovascular. Excessive strain on these systems results in inefficiency and gradual breakdown in their performance, followed by an increased susceptibility to a host of illness [7]. Stress does not always produce adverse effects, for example, people sometimes do seem to rise to the occasion and turn in sterling performances at times when stress is intense. Perhaps the most reasonable conclusion is that although stress can interfere with task performance in many situations, its precise effects depend on many different factors, such as the complexity of the task being performed and personal characteristics of the individuals involved [13]. The stress-performance relationship varies for different people and different tasks. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to get enough information about the job performance of full-time female academic staff in some universities and the measures involved in the appraisal.

Stress and Counterproductive Behavior

Various behavioral consequences for individuals experiencing chronic stress include sleep disorders, changes in eating habits, increased smoking, more alcohol consumption, and nervous mannerism such as rapid speech, fidgeting, and rudeness towards others [4]. Other forms of behaviorally related stress symptoms that are useful to consider from a university managerial stand point, are counterproductive behaviors that are related to prolonged stress. One of the most important counterproductive behaviors that universities' management must examine includes (1) turnover and absenteeism; others include (2) alcoholism and drug abuse and (3) aggression and sabotage.

Stress and Burnout

Burnout is referred to as the disease of modern life [14, 15]. Burnout is an individual experience

that is specific to the work context and the outcomes that have been studied have been related to job performance and health outcomes [14]. Burnout is a situation in which employees are emotionally exhausted, become detached from their clients and their work, and feel unable to accomplish their goals [16, 17]. Burnout is a response to self-induced psychological stress caused by illogical and irrational beliefs about work and job performance [7]. When job-related stress is prolonged, poor job performance moves into critical phase, known as burnout [12]. Burnout

is not an imaginary condition that is all in the mind, it's a mental and physiological condition caused by a stress overload, overtaxed emotionally, or physically exhausted.

CONCLUSION

We have discussed most possible causes and consequences of work stress to suggest the researchers to concentrate on these areas to develop adequate stress management strategies.

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