

# Workplace Stress: A Critical Insight of Causes, Effects and Interventions

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**Abstract - Occupational stress (Job stress/Work stress) relates to one's job. The objective of this paper is to present an exploratory study on occupational stress, to bring out its causative factors and impacts. Occupational stress has been viewed as a strong work hazard. It is found to be a multivariate phenomenon. Work related stress emerges to be a pattern of emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological reactions to adverse and noxious aspects of work content, work organization and work environment.**

**Keywords-** occupational stress, job stress, work stress, stress models, intervention technique

## I. INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress has become predominant feature of modern life. It is a growing phenomenon across the globe it has far-reaching effects on employees' behavior and adjustments as well as off the job. Among the identified potential causes of work related stress, role stress has been recognised as a significant contributor to work stress. Existing empirical evidence suggests that role stress is likely to influence an individual employee's psychological well-being, physical health and behavioural intentions which may negatively impact their job performance. Designing an effective role stress management programme requires a clear understanding of the employee experience of role stressors. Segmenting employees based on the extent of their experience of role stressors may provide a useful framework for designing an effective role stress management programme. For that reason need for systematic study of stress in organizational setting has recently increased dramatically. A considerable portion of organization research involves the study of stress relating to job. In research studies "occupational stress" has been variously termed as "job stress", "work place stress" and "organizational role stress" [1]. All

these constructs overlap each other with minor distinctiveness. Work-related stress can be defined as a pattern of emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological reactions to adverse and noxious aspects of work content, work organization and work environment [2]. It is a state characterized by high levels of arousal and distress and often by feelings of not coping.

### *Definition of Occupational Stress*

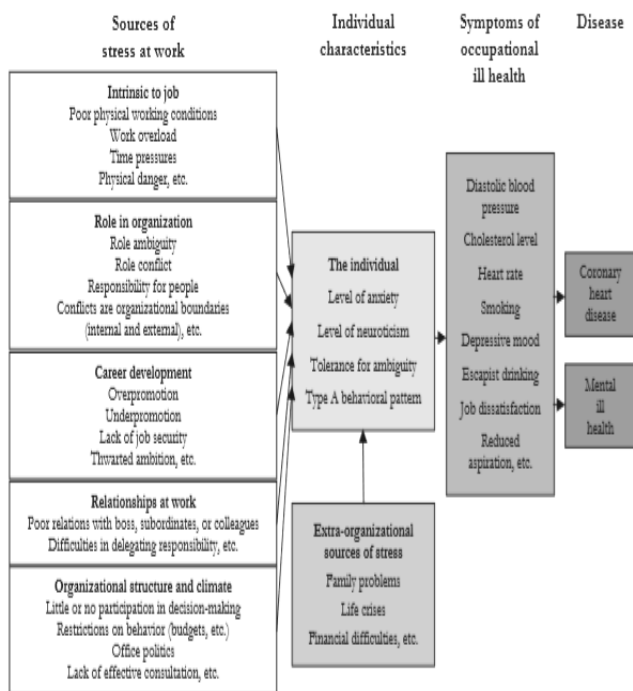
As is the case with most constructs in use in psychology, researchers employ a wide variety of conceptual definitions of the stress construct[3]-[4] refers to the work of Ivancevich and Matteson and that of Beehr and Newman for his conceptual definition of stress. Occupational stress may be stated as the harmful emotional and physical reactions that occur when the worker cannot qualify the requirements [5]. Authors in [6] described stress as when unable to cope with the demands of one's environment, and realization concern to the person, both are related a negative responses. [7] conceptualized that the meaning of stress similar with [8] which is the response of individual to demands forced them, which is individual fail to cope the demands of the environment. Stress is the result of an action against with a reaction, an emotional and physical response [9]. In particular, occupational stress is that inability to deal with pressures in workplace [10] because of the person without the ability to fulfill working requirements and working conditions [11]. Luthans[12]-[13] emphasizes the following three critical aspects of Ivancevich and Matteson's definition: 1) stress is the response or reaction to a situation or event, it does not refer to the stimulus or stressor i.e. the situation or event itself; 2) stress can be moderated or mediated by individual differences, and 3) stress is a

response to “‘excessive psychological and/or physical demands,’ because only special or unusual situations (as opposed to minor life adjustments) can really be said to produce stress”.

## II. FACTORS / SOURCES OF JOB STRESS

Generally, Job stress can arise from either the environment of work i.e. organizational or situational stress or from the characteristics of the workers themselves i.e. dispositional stress [14]

Individual characteristics	Individual life circumstances
Personality traits	Work life conflict
Demographic characteristics	Family problems
Coping skill, etc.	Personal problems
	Social problems
	Financial problems



### a) Organizational Stressors

Some sources of organizational stress include:

- 1) Work-related factors
- 2) Job or Role ambiguity
- 3) Role conflict
- 4) Organizational Structural Factors

- 5) Interpersonal stress
- 6) Organizational change

Environment specific	Organization specific	Job specific
Economic conditions	Changes within organization	Poor fit between abilities and skills needed to perform job effectively
Increased levels of competition	Reorganizations	Work overload
Technological development	Leadership	Work pace
Changes in production and products	Layoffs	Pressure to work longer hours
New forms of organization and product development	Organizational culture climate	Job characteristics
Drive for greater cost-effectiveness	Mergers, acquisitions and similar	Conflicting job demands
Networks	Changes of company ownership	Unclear job expectations
Multinationals	Workforce diversity	Pressures of responsibility
General public concern for the environment, etc.	Promotion policies	Time pressures
	Job security	Lack of information
	More training needed, etc	Working conditions
		Physical danger, etc.

### b) Dispositional Stressors

These are stressors arising from the individual characteristics of the workers themselves. One of such is the Type a personality or Type a Behavioral pattern which research has shown is characterized by excessive drive and competitiveness, a sense of urgency, impatience and underlying hostility [15]-[16]. Workers with this personality type have been found to experience or report higher stress than other personality types, e.g. Type B, under the same workload [17]-[18].

The degree of stress experienced depends on the functioning of two protective physiological mechanisms [19]:

#### 1) Alarm reaction

When confronted with a threat to our safety, our first response is physiological arousal: our muscles tense and breathing and heart rate become more rapid. This serves us well when the threat is the proverbial bull in the field rushing towards us. We either fight or flee. Present day threats tend to be more psychological.

For Example: Unjustified verbal attack by a supervisor at work. It is usually not acceptable socially to act by

“Fight or Flight” and an alternative means of expressing the resultant emotional and physical energy is required. This falls in the arena of assertive communication.

## 2) Adaptation

The second adaptive mechanism allows us to cease responding when we learn that stimuli in the environment are no longer a threat to our safety [20]. For example when we first spend time in house near airway line, our response to train hurtling past is to be started, as described above. Overtime our response dwindles, if this process did not function, we would eventually collapse from physical wear and tear and mental exhaustion.

### III. IMPACTS OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Stress affects the employees in an organization probably because shortage of time, heavy workload, conflict of roles, working condition, job and relationships between individuals [21-22] conceptualized that stress affects the individual s adjustment which is their performance and the productivity. Besides that, the occupational stress can negatively affect employee absence [23] turnover and health problems [24-27] low performance [28-31] individual workers highlighting counterproductive work behavior [32] and it described as a main managerial and economic issue. A study conducted by [33] showed that long-term exposure to stress and disease, including coronary heart disease, hypertension, some forms of cancer, depression, anxiety, stomach and strokes [34-36]. Lot of the researchers has found that occupational stress affecting individuals and organizations. In organizational settings, stress nowadays becomes a major contributor to an individual's health and performance issues, and unnecessary events and organizational costs. Hence, a lot of researchers divided occupational stress into two groups which is individual level and organizational level. There are three subgroups on the individual level:

Individual Level <sup>1</sup>	Organizational Level <sup>2</sup>
Physiological diseases - headaches, injuries and fatigue, increase pulse rate and blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, high blood sugar and high cholesterol, insomnia, skin problems, infections, and immune system suppression.	Organizational costs - reduced productivity and performance, high replacement costs (labour turnover), increased disability payments, health care costs and sick pay, , higher cost of equipment damage, complaints and compensation costs.
Psychological diseases - depression, psychological distress, boredom, anxiety, loss of concentration, self-esteem and self-confidence, impulsive feelings and social norms, dissatisfied with the work and life, divorced from reality, and emotional fatigue.	Organizations symptoms - productivity loss, poor communicate and relationships with customers, suppliers, and partners, lost customers, negative publicity, damage reputation and image, interruption of production, high accident rates and error rates, high labour turnover, loss of valuable employees, increased sick leave.
Unwanted feelings and behaviours - low motivation, job dissatisfaction , less organizational commitment, reducing the overall quality of working life, turnover, absenteeism, plans to leave the job, reduced efficiency, work quantity and quality, inability to make the right decisions, burnout, alienation, smoking and alcohol intake increases.	

### IV. THEORIES OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Because stress results from the complex interactions between large systems of interrelated variables, there are several psychological theories and models that address occupational stress.

#### A) Person Environment Fit Model

This model "suggests that the match between a person and their work environment is key in influencing their health. For healthy conditions, it is necessary that employees’ attitudes, skills, abilities and resources match the demands of their job, and that work environments should meet workers’ needs, knowledge, and skills potential. Lack of fit in either of these domains can cause problems, and the greater the gap or misfit (either subjective or objective) between the person and their environment, the greater the strain as demands exceed abilities, and need exceeds supply. These strains can relate to health related issues, lower productivity, and other work problems. Defence mechanisms, such as denial, reappraisal of needs, and coping, also operate in the model, to try and reduce subjective misfit"

#### B) Job Characteristics Model

This model "focuses on important aspects of job characteristics, such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. These characteristics are proposed to lead to ‘critical psychological states’ of experienced meaningfulness, and experienced responsibility and knowledge of

outcomes. It is proposed that positive or negative work characteristics give rise to mental states which lead to corresponding cognitive and behavioural outcomes, e.g. motivation, satisfaction, absenteeism, etc. In conjunction with the model, [37] developed the Job Diagnostic Survey, a questionnaire for job analysis, which implies key types of job-redesign including combining tasks, creating feedback methods, job enrichment, etc."

#### C) *Diathesis-Stress Model*

This model looks at behaviours as a susceptibility burden together with stress from life experiences. It is useful to distinguish stressful job conditions or stressors from an individual's reactions or strains. Strains can be mental, physical or emotional. Occupational stress can occur when there is a discrepancy between the demands of the environment/workplace and an individual's ability to carry out and complete these demands. Often a stressor can lead the body to have a physiological reaction that can strain a person physically as well as mentally. A variety of factors contribute to workplace stress such as excessive workload, isolation, extensive hours worked, toxic work environments, lack of autonomy, difficult relationships among co-workers and management, management bullying, harassment and lack of opportunities or motivation to advancement in one's skill level.

#### D) *Jobs-Demand Resources Model*

This model posits that strain are a response to imbalance between demands of one's job and the resources he or she has to deal with those demands.

**Demands:** the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort or skills. Therefore, they are associated with expenditure of time and energy [38].

**Job Resources:** the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that aid in achieving work goals; reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological cost; stimulate personal growth, learning, and development.

#### E) *Effort-Reward Imbalance Model*

This model focuses on the reciprocal relationship between efforts and rewards at work. "More specifically, the ERI Model claims that work characterized by both high efforts and low rewards represents a reciprocity deficit between high 'costs' and low 'gains', which could elicit negative emotions in exposed employees. The accompanying feelings may cause sustained strain reactions. So, working hard without receiving adequate appreciation or being treated fairly are examples of a stressful imbalance. Another assumption of the ERI Model concerns individual differences in the experience of effort-reward imbalance. It is assumed that employees characterized by a motivational pattern of excessive job-related commitment and a high need for approval (i.e., over commitment) will respond with more strain reactions to an effort-reward imbalance, in comparison with less over-committed people."

### V. DEALING WITH OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

The harmful and costly consequences of stress demonstrate the need for strategies to limit stressors within the organization [39] as well as to deal with stress that already occurred. Namely, those organizations which fully address the issue of work-related stress through problem recognition and problem-solving activities will be better placed to deal with the demands of a rapidly changing world and thus enhance their chances of gaining competitive advantage [40] fortunately, there are ways of dealing with occupational stress. Firstly, organizations and their employees should become more aware of the degree to which stress is an unnecessary cost, and a cost which they must seek to eliminate if their organizations are to survive and grow. Naturally, this awareness must start at top management level where the estimated cost of stress is sufficient to generate organizational commitment to subsequent action [41] Secondly, work-related stress should become an issue which increasingly features on the agenda of efficient managers [42]. In an increasingly competitive and fast changing business world, efficient managers should feel compelled to address the issue of work-related stress through counting the costs and taking appropriate action so as to minimize its effects

[43]. Managers should expend their efforts in reducing the significant sources of stress [44] as this leads to a higher employee satisfaction, increases the productivity of the workforce and reduces negative consequences of stress, which at the end results in higher profits. Thirdly, training and employee assistance programs dealing with stress should be on employees' disposal. Various workshops, seminars and conferences should increase employees' awareness of the costs associated with employee stress, and should teach them how to cope with stressful situations and states. As [45] explains, training can have a positive impact on tackling stress in the workplace, as it helps employees become more resilient towards stress, enables them to tackle the root causes of any problems, and helps managers who not only need to manage their own stress levels, but are responsible for their direct reports. Considering the organizational and personal costs of high stress, there is certainly an implied payoff in training managers and employees to recognize organizational factors that contribute to stress, and to take steps to alleviate them [46]. At the end, unfortunately, it has to be said that advanced organizations of the west appear to have taken actions based upon their increased understanding of the relationship between stress and organizational outcomes, while benefits which accrue from such initiatives are so far not recognized in Croatia.

## VI. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS AND OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Individual differences affect our perceptions and interpretations of events around us. They contribute to our experience of stress (primary appraisal), and our decisions what to do to deal with the stressor – our choice of coping process (secondary appraisal) [47] explain, vast individual differences in vulnerability to stress alter an individual's perception of a potential source of stress (direct effect), impact on the transformation of perceived stress into various consequences of stress (indirect effect), and ameliorate these stress consequences (direct effect). The personality variables that have been linked to stress include locus of control, self-esteem, type A behavior pattern, hardiness, and negative affectivity [48-49] among which gender, age and hierarchical level were

found to be the most significant, as further explanations reveal. A general tendency exists in the literature according to which females experience higher levels of occupational stress regarding gender-specific stressors and have different ways of interpreting and dealing with problems related to their work environment [50] found that female managers are under much more pressure than their male counterparts, and found that female teachers experienced significantly higher levels of occupational stress compared to their male counterparts. In [51], it is pointed that women experience the greater level of stress as they are more vulnerable to the demands of work to the extent that they often have more non-work demands than men. [52] notifies that, for the female professional, gender stereotyping in the workplace adds to the role conflict stress experiences, while [53] explains that role demands such as that of being wife, mother and professional provoke role conflict. Finally, the results of the bivariate analysis conducted by [54] revealed significant differences in terms of physical and psychological wellbeing amongst the male and female sample. Concerning the relationship between age and occupational stress, the ability to handle stress associated with job and organization was found to increase with age [55]. For example, researches revealed that younger staff members reported more job stress than older staff [56] that employees who are less than 30 years old experience the highest levels of stress [57] that staff between the ages 31 and 40 suffered the most from job stress [58] and that younger teachers experienced higher levels of burnout, specifically in terms of emotional exhaustion and disengagement from the profession [59]. The major explanation for such a finding is that older employees have often reached a stage where career development is not their major concern, and hence a number of job characteristics which may cause stress to younger staff, who have their career ahead of them, do not cause stress to older staff [60]. Lastly, staff employed at the higher job levels were found to be less stressed than those employed at the lower job levels. As well, different levels of management influence preference for stress coping styles, specifically, as it is progressed towards the more senior levels of management, delegation and maintaining style

relationships are considered the most useful forms [61-62].

## VII. PREVENTION FROM STRESS

A combination of organizational change and stress management is often the most useful approach for preventing stress at work. Both organizations and employees can employ strategies at organizational and individual levels. Generally, organizational level strategies include job procedure modification and employee assistance programs (EAP) [63]. Individual level strategies include taking vacation. Getting a realistic job preview to understand the normal workload and schedules of the job will also help people to identify whether or not the job fit them.

### VII. HOW AN ORGANIZATION CAN PREVENT JOB STRESS

- Ensure that the workload is in line with workers' capabilities and resources [64].
- Design jobs to provide meaning, stimulation, and opportunities for workers to use their skills.
- Clearly define workers' roles and responsibilities [65].
- To reduce workplace stress, managers may monitor the workload given out to the employees. Also while they are being trained they should let employees understand and be notified of stress awareness [66].
- Give workers opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs [67].
- Improve communications-reduce uncertainty about career development and future employment prospects.
- Provide opportunities for social interaction among workers [68].
- Establish work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job.
- Combat workplace discrimination (based on race, gender, national origin, religion or language) [69].
- Bringing in an objective outsider such as a consultant to suggest a fresh approach to persistent problems [70].
- Introducing a participative leadership style to involve as many subordinates as possible to resolve stress-producing problems-

- Encourage work-life balance through family-friendly benefits and policies [71].

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The exploration on occupational-stress/work-stress/Job-stress has been relatively a neglected area of research among industrial/organizational psychologists. Occupational stress (Job stress/Work stress) relates to one's job. Occupational stress often stems from unexpected responsibilities and pressures that do not align with a person's knowledge, skills, or expectations, inhibiting one's ability to cope. The literature review projects the idea that too much stress at work place has a toxic effect whereas too little stress may result in boredom and apathy and low performance. Job stress and job satisfaction are inversely (negatively) correlated. Occupational stress is a manifestation of environmental, organizational and individual variables. It is concluded and suggested that an empirical research in the domain of occupational stress and employee health should consider and map the impact and influences of these factors viz., 1. Environmental, 2. personal, 3. process, 4. human consequences, 5. Organizational consequences, 6. Role dynamics, 7. Timeof stress and 8. Adaptive responses. Stress is found to be additive and there is also a positive relationship between role stressors and job stress. Occupational stress (Job stress/Work stress) need to be kept harnessed and minimized to provide conducive work environment in the organization.

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