



A study on work stress amongst employees of various public and private sector organizations in India

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Abstract

In today's economic upheavals where downsizing, layoff, mergers, and bankruptcies have become quite common, stress in the work place has increased considerably. The pressures that an employee faces are technological change, working in changing shifts, low social status, fewer benefits, less number of holidays, no recreation, work pressure, poor relations with superior and subordinates have led the way to stress. Employees at every level are experiencing increased tension and uncertainty, and employees at risk for physical illness, marital strain, anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Since there is no single level of stress that is optimal for all people, all individuals have unique requirements. All of us differ in our physiological and psychological responses to stress. As such stress has different meaning to different people. A big question is whether sources of stress are different for public and private sector employees? Secondly how employees cope up with the stress Against this backdrop the present study has tried to identify the sources of stress, and coping mechanism used by different people working in various public and private sector organisations.

Key Words : Stress, Stress in Public Sector, Stress in Private Sector, Coping with Stress, Stress and Productivity

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Introduction

Some of the early research on stress (conducted by Walter Cannon in 1915) established the existence of the well-known “fight-or-flight” response. His work showed that when an organism experiences a shock or perceives a threat, it quickly releases hormones that help to survive.

Hans Selye (1936), the recognized father of stress studies, first introduced the concept of stress in the life sciences. He clinically defined stress as “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it”. He called this phenomenon the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS).

Ivancevich and Matteson (1994) stated that stress is an adaptive response; mediated by individual differences and/or psychological processes, that is a consequence of any external (environmental) action, situation, or event that places excessive psychological and/or physical demands upon a person.

From above definitions it is clear that stress is the condition that arises in the individual due to any change in environment, which creates deviation from normal.

According to Michailidis and Georgiou (2004), Stress has been called the “wear and tear” of our body as we adjust to the continually changing environment; it has physical and emotional effects on people and can create positive or negative feelings.

Therefore stress can be divided under two categories

Physical Stress: It is most common in human beings caused by heavy work pressure or illness, no time to relax, which prevents people to work up to the potential.

Psychological Stress: The several reasons associated with psychological stress are family problems, strenuous relationship at work place, monotony in job, role ambiguity and conflict, less wages and benefits, emotional break up etc.

One of the major outcomes of both categories of stress is reduction in working capacity. Therefore in nutshell stress can be defined as mental or physical state where a person cannot perform up to his/her real potential.

There are two kinds of stress that are distinguished by Selye (1975), viz. Eustress, which is synonymous with healthy essential stress produced, for example, by joy, or by any other kind of positive impulse, sensible recreational activities, sports, hobbies etc. and the other is Distress, synonymous with morbidity, stress that has to be controlled e.g. continuous mental or physical strain of any kind, anger, frustration and states of tension seemingly without hope.

Beehr and Newman (1978) defined job stress as a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning.

Causes of stress are known as Stressors. They are defined as the external demands of life or the internal attitudes and thoughts that require an individual to adapt (Charlesworth et.al.1997).

Pestonjee (1992) believed that sources of stress must be viewed in the light of social system to which we belong. Paine (1982) discussed Burnout Stress Syndrome (BOSS), the consequence of high levels of job stress, personal frustration, and inadequate coping skills.

Holmes and Rahe (1967) gave Social Readjustment Scale by which a person's probability of getting ill can be measured. In the scale, some numerical values are assigned to different stressors and then the sum is taken for the result.

Marshall and Cooper (1979) mentioned boredom, physical working conditions, time pressures and deadlines, promotions, lack of job security, poor relationships with peers, subordinates and superiors, financial difficulties, role conflict etc. as main source of stress.

Batlivala (1990) in his research recognized insubordination, environment, transfer of jobs, inadequate training as typical stressors in Indian Managers.

Gillespie et. al. (2001) identified lack of funding, resources and support services, work overload, poor management practice,

insufficient recognition and reward and job insecurity as causes of stress among universities' staff.

Kumar and Kulkarni (1996) in their study on commercial pilots indicated lack of career opportunities, lack of management support, inadequate pay and perks, lack of management support etc. as major reasons for stress.

According to Greenberg and Baron (2003) the accumulated effects of stress, primarily deviations from normal state of performance resulting from exposure to stressful events is referred as strain. They further stated that there is a very strong link between stress and personal health, and concluded that health related effects of stress are extremely serious and can play a major role in determining the physical and/or psychological health of an individual, as well as the success of an organisation. The impact on the organisation for which that individual works for could be detrimental and could range from high turnover, absenteeism, poor performance etc.

Stress and Productivity

Productivity can increase as one spends more time and energy, but only up to a critical point. Past this point, additional time and energy become counterproductive. The emotional, physiological and behavioural responses to experienced stress are greatly influenced by personal attributes and experiences, which, in turn, may influence an individual's productivity.

A.K. Srivastava (1985) has tried to develop the relationship between stress and productivity. He hypothesized that employees with high productivity would perceive and experience mild role stress as compared to those with low production capacity. The study was conducted on a group of 60 skilled workers with equal number of high and low producers. The findings of the study established that employees who maintained a constantly high production level by virtue of their attributed productivity perceived and experienced less role stress as compared to employees with low production capacity.

Quick et.al. (1992) suggested that high levels of stress adversely affect physical health and psychological well being and many aspects

of task performance. Macklin et.al. (2006) in their research on work stress concluded that there is no significant difference in sources and levels of stress in public and private sector employees in Australia. These evidences make a strong case for understanding and examining work stress in public and private sector.

Stress and Coping

It is known that positive stress adds anticipation and excitement to life, and everyone thrives under a certain amount of stress. Deadlines, targets, competitions, confrontations, and even frustrations and sorrows can leave an individual in the condition of distress. Goal is not to eliminate stress but to learn how to manage it and how to use it for the betterment of physical and psychological well being. According to Kruum (2001), the best method of managing stress depends upon both the individual and organisation. Some of the methods commonly used by individuals are exercise, meditation, relaxation, yoga etc. Palsane et.al. (1993) focused more on yoga as stress coping technique.

According to Pestonjee (1992), relaxation, exercise, walking, yoga, meditation, biofeedback, recreation including music and entertainment, gardening, painting, fishing etc. are tools which are used for coping with stress.

Present Study

Many myths surround stress, in the present study the researcher has tried to find out the validity about various facets of employee stress, including source and coping mechanisms used by different people working in different sectors. Following hypothesis are formulated for the study:

Sources / Reasons of Stress

Hypothesis:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between Public and Private Sector in sources / reasons for stress.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the reason

Coping Tools for stress

Hypothesis:

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between Public and Private Sector in coping tools for stress.

H₀₄: There is no significant difference among the coping tools.

Methodology

Both Primary and secondary data have been collected for the research. Primary Data are collected through questionnaire and researcher has gone through the research done on stress management in the past, various books, journals, internet and gathered secondary data required for the study. Quota sampling is done in this research. In the study a total sample of 150 respondents is taken in which two quotas Public and Private sector of 75 respondents each are made. The study is conducted in India and samples are drawn from different levels in various organisations. Socio-demographic factors have also been considered while selecting the samples.

Descriptive Analysis

1. 37% of the total respondents are in the age group of 20-30 years. 31% of the total respondents are in the age group of 30-40 years. 22% are in the age group of 40-50 years and 10% of the total respondents are in the age group of 50-60 years. 78% of the total respondents are male and remaining 22% of the total respondents are female.
2. 6% of the total sample feel they are always under work related stress, in quota sample of public sector, 8% always feel the work related stress but in private sector it is only 2%. 85% of the total sample feels they sometime feel under stress, separately it is 79% and 92% in public and private sector sample quota respectively. Only 9% of the total sample feel they are never under work stress, separately it is 13% and 4% in public and private sector sample quota respectively.
3. Twelve reasons for stress were identified and responses were taken on these reasons. In public sector, slow growth, less benefits, poor support from subordinates, work pressure and no source of recreation were the main reasons for stress and in private sector more working hours, work pressure, insensitive attitude of seniors, less

benefits, work pressure and no source of recreation were considered as main sources of stress. (Table 1)

4. 11% of the total respondents felt that the stress always hampers productivity and it is 16% and 7% in public and private sector respectively. According to 67% of the total respondents stress sometime hampers productivity separately it is 60% and 73% in public and private sector respectively. 22% of the total respondents say that stress never hampers productivity, further it is 24% and 20% in public and private sector respectively.
5. According to 18% of the people stress is always negative and it is 17% and 19% in public and private sector respectively. According to 57% of the total respondents stress is sometime negative separately it is 48% and 65% in public and private sector respectively. 25% of the total respondents say that stress is never negative, further it is 35% and 16% in public and private sector respectively.
6. 21% of the total respondents opined that the stress always has ill effect on health and it is 24% and 17% in public and private sector respectively. According to 53% of the total respondents stress sometime has ill effects on health separately it is 49% and 57% in public and private sector respectively. 26% of the total respondents say that stress never has ill effect on health, further it is 27% and 25% in public and private sector respectively.
7. 27% of the total respondents felt that the stress always leads to healthy competition and it is 35% and 20% in public and private sector respectively. According to 46% of the total respondents stress sometimes leads to healthy competition separately it is 41% and 51% in public and private sector respectively. 27% of the total respondents say that stress never leads to healthy competition, further it is 24% and 29% in public and private sector respectively.
8. 23% of the total respondents were of the view that the stress is always necessary for the attainment of the goals and it is 28% and 17% in public and private sector respectively. According to 50% of the total respondents, stress is sometimes necessary for the attainment of the goals separately it is 47% and 53% in public and private sector respectively. 27% of the total respondents say that stress is not

necessary for the attainment of the goals, further it is 25% and 29% in public and private sector respectively.

9. According to 40% of the total respondents stress can always be relieved and it is 45% and 35% in public and private sector respectively. According to 55% of the total respondents stress can sometime be relieved separately it is 49% and 61% in public and private sector respectively. 5% of the total respondents say that stress can never be relieved, further it is 5% and 4% in public and private sector respectively.

10. The techniques for coping stress differ from individual to individual. The most common and widely used stress coping tools are meditation, time management, counseling, movie, music, long drive, reading, relaxing including sleep, physical exercise, socializing etc. Among Public sector employees Meditation, Time Management, Relaxing including sleep, music, socializing and playing outdoor/indoor games were considered good methods for coping with the stress and private sector employees felt that meditation, time management, counselling, relaxing including sleep, music, reading playing outdoor/indoor game and socializing are good activities for coping with the stress.

(Table 2)

Other methods for coping stress

The respondents also suggested few other tools for coping stress which include Gardening, Playing with kids or pets, Self-suggestion, Focussed Approach, Positive Attitude, Manual Work, Solitude, Making Love, Travel, Spending Time with family and friends, Cracking jokes, Dancing, Yoga, Gossiping, Watching TV, dancing etc.

Hypothesis Testing (ANOVA)

ANOVA has been used in this study to know the variance between two samples (Public and Private) and within the sample. Here ANOVA has been applied on sources of stress and coping techniques for stress management.

Table 3: ANOVA Table: Reasons for stress

Sources of Variation	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean Sum of Squares	F value	Table Value of F at 5% level of significance
Between Column (Samples)	4959.38	1	4959.38	2.837	4.84
Between rows	101178.13	11	9198	5.262	2.80
Residual or Error	19228.12	11	1748		
Total	125365.63	23			

Table value of F at $v_1=1$ and $v_2 = 11$ at 5% level of significance is 4.84 that is more than the computed value (2.837). Hence H_0 is not rejected that means there is no significant difference in Public and Private sector as far as reasons are concerned.

Table value of F at $v_1=11$ and $v_2 = 11$ at 5% level of significance is 2.80 that is less than the computed value (5.262). Hence H_0 is rejected that means there is significant difference among reasons of stress.

Table 4: ANOVA Table: Coping tools for stress

Sources of Variation	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean Sum of Squares	F value	Table Value of F at 5% level of significance
Between Column (Samples)	368.18	1	368.18	0.0189	4.96

Between rows	195070.46	10	19507.05	4.900	2.97
Residual or Error	39806.82	10	3980.69		
Total	235245.46	21			

Table value of F at $v_1=1$ and $v_2 = 10$ at 5% level of significance is 4.96 that is more than the computed value (0.0189). Hence H_0 is not rejected that means there is no significant difference in Public and Private sector as far as reasons are concerned.

Table value of F at $v_1=10$ and $v_2 = 10$ at 5% level of significance is 2.97 that is less than the computed value (4.9). Hence H_0 is not accepted that means there is significant difference among reasons of stress.

Conclusion

It is evident from the above that most of the working people feel work stress. Very few respondents countable on fingertips say that they do not feel stress. This shows that in today's working environment stress is rampant. The reasons for stress are irrespective of the sectors but differ from individual to individual. Although it is said that there is slow growth in public sector but in this study, respondents from private sector have rated slow growth as one of the sources of stress, the probable reason may be there is cut throat competition as far as growth is concerned in private sector.

It can be stated from above that stress leads to healthy competition but again there is an optimum level of stress for every individual which can bring positive results once the level is crossed, stress always has ill effect. And the individual can only decide the optimum level for himself or herself. The coping tools, which are rated very high by the people, are Meditation, Time Management, Relaxing including sleep, Music, Reading, Socializing etc. There are other coping methods which have been suggested by the respondents like manual work, gardening, etc. It is clearly evident from the study that there is no difference among public and private sector as far as reasons and coping tools of stress are concerned therefore it can be concluded that reasons and coping techniques don't depend on the

sectors. But significant difference is seen in reasons and coping tools, some reasons are rated very high by the individuals and some very low, same with coping methods.

It can also be concluded from above that every individual has his/her own reason(s) for stress and coping tools which can be conventional or non conventional ones. Therefore every individual should identify his/her the reason(s) for stress and best possible way to reduce the effect of stress.

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Annexure

Table 1: Reasons of Stress

Reasons for Stress	Public Sector			Private Sector			
	Often	Some time	Never	Of ten	Som etim e	Never	Total
More Working Hours	14	27	34	14	34	27	150
Less Number of Holidays	12	15	48	14	25	36	150
Low Salary	11	24	40	13	31	31	150
Insensitive Attitude of seniors	9	36	30	10	29	36	150
Poor Support from Subordinates	9	33	33	8	27	40	150

Inharmonious relations with Colleagues	5	27	43	5	26	44	150
Slow Growth	16	28	31	17	35	23	150
Less Benefits	15	32	28	17	39	19	150
No Source of Recreation	14	22	39	15	32	28	150
Low Social Status	7	16	52	4	12	59	150
Changing shifts	5	17	53	6	12	57	150
Work Pressure	15	38	22	17	30	28	150
Total	132	315	453	140	332	428	1800

Table 2: Stress coping techniques

Coping Techniques	Public Sector			Private Sector			Total
	Good	Average	Poor	Good	Average	Poor	
Meditation	50	17	8	52	15	8	150

Time Management	51	18	6	52	21	2	150
Counselling	24	36	15	25	37	13	150
Relaxing including sleep	52	20	3	43	27	5	150
Watching Movies	14	38	23	14	32	29	150
Music	37	28	10	41	21	13	150
Reading	24	31	20	34	28	13	150
Playing Outdoor/Indoor or Games	35	24	16	32	25	18	150
Physical Exercise	29	30	16	34	28	13	150
Long Drive	16	24	35	28	27	20	150
Socialising	31	29	15	39	28	8	150
Total	363	295	167	394	289	142	1650
