

ESSENCE AND CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract *Stress has been a popular field of research for many researchers working in the area of psychology, organizational behavior, health and medicine. Significant amount of empirical research has been done to analyze the relationship between various individual and organizational factors with job stress, moreover the consequences of job stress has also been analyzed by researchers. In the light of available literature, this paper attempts to discuss the key concepts in the field of job stress since its inception. Further, it attempts to propose a comprehensive theoretical model which explains relationship between individual and work related sources with job stress. The present work must be valued for documenting the advances in the field of job stress, and for depicting it's interactions with some of the important individual and organizational level variables. The model proposed can provide a foundation for further empirical research.*

Keywords: *Antecedents and Consequences of Stress, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Stress, Job Stress*

Stress is a scientific concept which has suffered from the mixed blessing of being too well known and too little understood (Selye, 1956)

The popularity of research on stress can be accounted to the importance of its impact on both individual and organizational performance and health (Motowidlo et. al., 1986; Ongori & Agolla, 2008; Tsutsumi et. al. 2009; Lim et. al., 2010; Nagar 2012). Work related stress can have negative impact on an employee's job performance, physical and psychological wellbeing, musculoskeletal functions and immune system (Wright 2007, Sackey & Sanda 2009). Stress can also adversely affect the operational efficiency of an organization; it increases employee turnover, accidents, cost of health maintenance and reduces employee motivation which might eat into the overall profitability of an organization through litigation, morbidity and mortality (Ongori & Agolla 2008). According to an estimate, stress costs some £7bn a year in the UK (The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 1998). British industry loses 40 million working days per year through stress related illness (Health and Safety Executive, HSE). Stress is expressed in the form of overwhelming exhaustion, feeling of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter 2001). This paper is aimed to discuss some of the antecedents and consequences of job stress in the light of various research findings. Further, we are proposing a theoretical model of job stress at the work place.

CONCEPTUALIZING STRESS

Discussion on stress in the modern literature can be historically traced back to the publication of a letter written by Selye (1936) to the editor of *Nature* entitled "A syndrome produced by diverse noxious agents", since then stress has been a favorite topic for researchers from the field of Psychology, Organizational Behavior, Health and Medicine (Beehr, 1996). Stress is conceptualized from three different perspectives namely, (a) stimulus perspective (b) response perspective and (c) psychodynamic perspective (Pestonjee 1999).

Stress as stimulus: As a stimulus stress has been used to describe situations in the external environment characterized as new, forceful, fast changing, demanding, sudden or unexpected (Beehr 1984; Beehr & Bhagat, 1985). Lazarus (1966) identified threat of failure, unpleasant agents, and rapid social changes as stress stimuli. We can see job stress as a "process in which stimuli in the work place cause employee to experience serious psychological discomfort or ill health" (Beehr et al. 2001, pp. 226).

Stress as response: From a response perspective, stress can be seen as an imbalance between the demands to make an adaptive response and the capacity of the individual, higher the difference between requirements and resources the higher will be stress (Srivastava 1999). Caplan et al. (1975) have used the term stress to refer the response to stressors.

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Stress from psychodynamic perspective: In the third perspective stress is described as a part of dynamic system of transactions between the individual and environment. Stress can be defined as a relationship between individual and the environment, Lazarus & Folkman (1984) has defined stress as “a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (p.19). Any environmental stimuli is not a stressor rather it becomes stressor only when the individual perceives it as a threat for him or her and thinks that it is exceeding than his or her capacity to deal with it (Long et al., 1992; Fleming et al., 1984). In a similar manner, job stress is a consequence of mismatch between job resources and job demands (Vegchel et al., 2005).

Stress: Good or Bad: Stress is seen as a “process in which some characteristics of work or workplace produce harmful consequences or response on the part of the employees.” (Beehr et al. 2001; p. 225), however stress can be viewed motivational in character and we should not describe it only in terms of stimulus or response operations alone (Lazarus et al., 1986). Studies suggest that individuals manifest stress in various ways; Selye has proposed two types of stress, ‘eustress’ and ‘distress’ (Lazarus, 1966). While the negative effect “distress” is discussed in detail Selye’s concept of eustress or “good stress” has been largely ignored in the literature (Mark et al, 2003). Eustress increases the skills and efficiency, for example through proper training an employee gets ability to face challenging work, on the other hand distress represents persistent stress which may lead to illness, or negative responses, for example escape or withdrawal behavior (Kranmer et al., 2010).

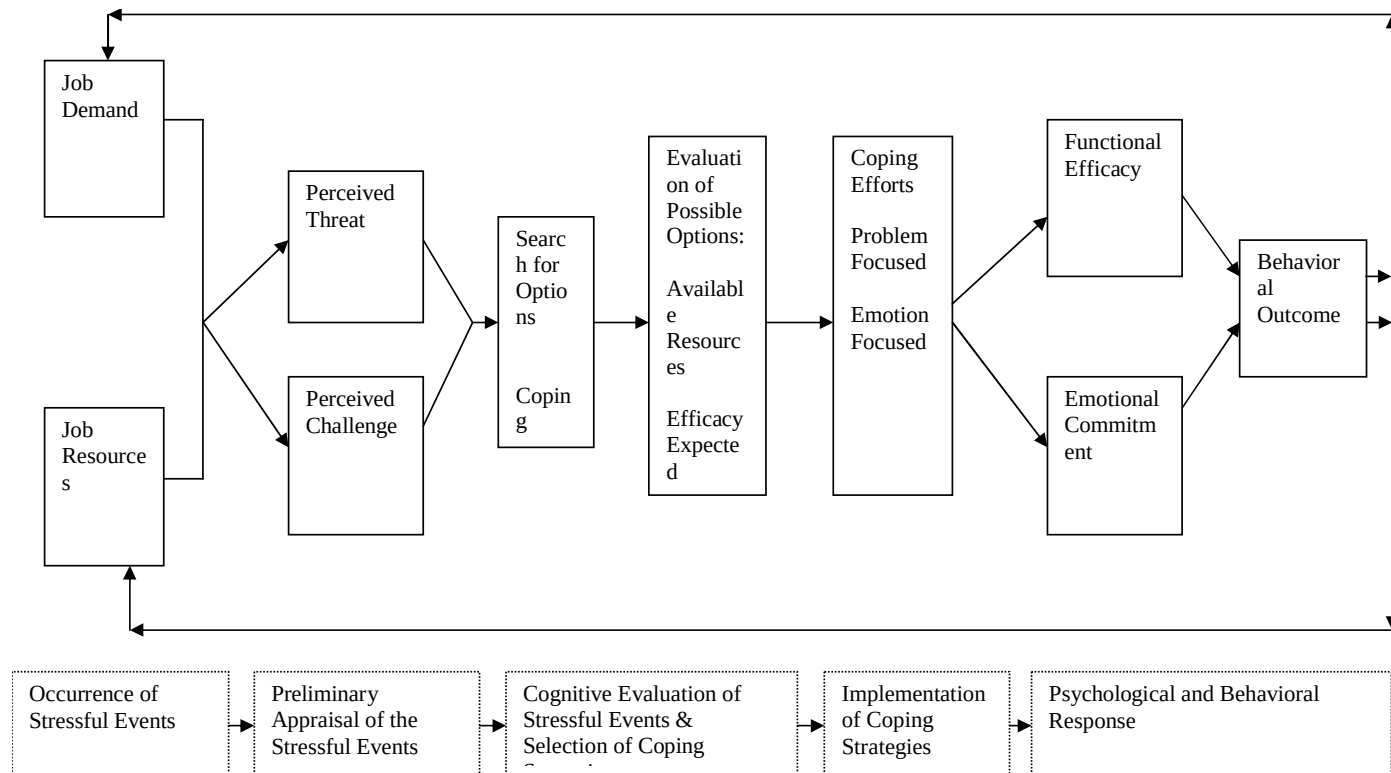
Stress and Strain: Strain is the dark side of the stress. Researchers have focused on the workplace as a potential source of stressors that might contribute to the development of strain (e.g., Glazer & Beehr, 2005). Job strain model states that the greatest risk to physical and mental health from stress occurs to workers facing high psychological workload, demands or pressures combined with low control or decision latitude in meeting those demands (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Beehr (1998) has put job stressors on two different dimensions; he has used the term chronic stressors and acute stressors for denoting long term and short term stressors respectively. It is notable that while the acute stressors tend to be short term but their effects might conceivably last longer. Job stressors can be generic to all jobs e.g. role conflict and role ambiguity or sometimes specific events (Motowidlo et al., 1986) related to a job e.g. working condition and physical environment. Further on the basis of such classification we can identify four types of job stressors: acute job specific, chronic job specific, chronic generic and acute generic; job specific stressors may have greater impact on an employee’s strain (Beehr, 1996).

Stress and Burnout: Selye (1936) has introduced the idea of General Adaptation Syndrome which consists of alarm stage, resistance stage exhaustion stage. In the last stage, stress gets converted into the form of burnout. Stress is a generic term that describes the temporary adaptation process; it is reflected through mental and physical symptoms. Long – term imbalance in the job resources and job demands may lead to breakdown in adaptation which will further result into prolonged job stress that finally creates burnout. Brill (1984) has defined burnout as a job related dysfunctional state in an individual who has worked for a long time in the same job situation and who will not recover to the original state without outside help or environmental rearrangement. It refers to “a process in which the professionals’ attitudes and behavior change in negative ways in response to job strain” (Cherniss, 1980). Schaufeli and Buunk (2002) have noted that “anybody can experience stress, while burnout can only be experienced by those who entered their careers enthusiastically with high goals and expectations” (pp. 389). Maslach and Jackson (1981) introduced a tri – component scale for measuring burnout; they considered burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is the key aspect of burnout syndrome; other aspects are development of negative, cynical attitudes and feelings towards the clients (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Model of Stress: Based on Lazarus & Folkman (1984), Slavin et al. (1991) have proposed a five component model, these components are: “(a) the occurrence of potential stressful event (b) primary cognitive appraisal of the event, (c) secondary cognitive appraisal of the event, (d) the implementation of a coping strategy, and (e) physical and mental health outcomes.” (p.157). Lazarus (1993a) has considered four parts in the process of stress: (i) a casual external or internal agent, (ii) an evaluation (by mind or psychological system), (iii) coping process, and (iv) stress reaction. Based on these studies we have proposed a model of stress (see Figure 1) which has mainly five major components.

In normal conditions employee’s job resources should match their job demands; lack of such match can cause problems, the greater the stress as job demands exceed the job resources (Sonnetag & Frese, 2003). Resources are those objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies which are required for survival or that help in achieving certain goals (Hobfoll, 2004). With respect to job stress, resources refer to work conditions within which individual characteristics can be used to attain organizational goals e.g. control at work and social support; individual resources are self – efficacy, locus of control, skills and stress coping styles (Sonnetag & Frese, 2003). A large number of outcomes can occur as a result of interaction between job demands and job resources;

Figure 1: A Model of Stress



individuals can perceive threats to mental health or job satisfaction (Sonnetag & Frese, 2003).

Coping can be defined as “ongoing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.” (Lazarus, 1993b; p. 237). Coping strategies perform two major functions: problem – focused and emotion – focused (Lazarus, 1993b). The problem – focused coping attempts to change the person – environment relationship by altering either the environment or the individual; on the other hand emotion – focused coping attempts to change either the way of attention (vigilance or avoidance) to the stimuli or the relational meaning of what is happening, which could finally mitigate the stress (Smith & Lazarus, 1990). If stressful conditions are difficult to change an individual would prefer emotion – focused coping, on the other hand problem – focused coping predominates if stressful conditions are controllable (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

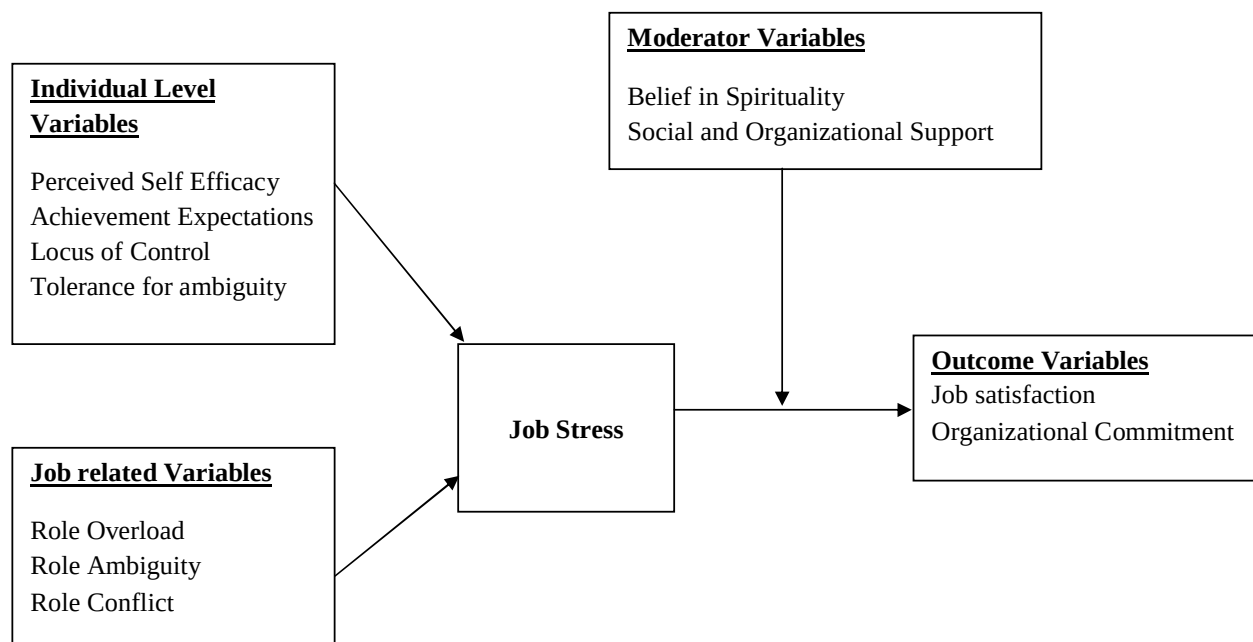
Antecedents and Consequences of Job Stress

A large number of possible factors of job stress are identified in empirical studies done on professionals working in various occupations (Gillespie et al., 2001; Nagar 2012). We can group them into three major categories (see Figure 2). The first category consists of *factors related to the individual* employee’s personal characteristics e.g. tolerance

of ambiguity, locus of control, self-efficacy, achievement expectations, major changes in family status and economic conditions, experience and other demographic factors; second category consists of *factors related to a specific job* e.g. intrinsic job factors, role in organization, chances of career development, work relationship, job security and work shift and the final category addresses the *organizational factors* responsible for the job stress e.g. little or no participation in decision making, restrictions on behavior, office politics, lack of effective consultations and management support (Cordes & Dougherty 1993, Dierendonck et al. 2001, Halbesleben & Buckley 2004). Apart from these factors social interactions at workplace as well as out of workplace can also cause job stress rather than to improve the psychological and physical health (Beehr et al., 2010). In this review, we limit ourselves to individual level and job related variables as the source of stress at the work place and then we would like to analyze the moderating impact of spirituality and social and organizational support on the relationship of job stress and individual attitude in terms of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Individual Level Variables

In this review, we are focusing on some important individual level psychological variables namely, self-efficacy, achievement expectations, locus of control and tolerance for ambiguity as potential source of stress. In this part, we are

Figure 2: A Proposed Model of Antecedents and Consequences for Job Stress

conceptualizing the impact of these personality factors on the perception of stress.

Self-Efficacy: Perceived Self-efficacy represents an individual's broad and consistent belief about his or her personal ability to perform a task effectively. It relates to the personal belief in one's capability to deal with a range of stressful conditions. Bandura (1997) has described perceived self-efficacy as people's beliefs in their competencies to attain the pre – assigned goals. A person with low self-efficacy demonstrates a low self-esteem and have negative view towards the achievement and personal growth whereas a person with high level of self-efficacy shows a high level of motivation to perform tasks and willingness to take challenging jobs as well (Tang et al. 2001). People with high level of self-efficacy can perform better in high demand, high-control situations than those who have low self-efficacy (Litt 1988). Litt (1988) has further written that low self-efficacy people may experience high distress and anxiety. When people are confident and have control on job conditions mitigate the stress (Schaubroeck & Merritt 1997). Research findings reveal that high self-efficacy would have a positive impact on the amount of efforts and persistent behavior by individuals in a stressful work condition (Luthans 1995). However, Coetzer et al. (2009) have also revealed that role stress undermines self-efficacy. In an empirical study on 458 teachers, Schwarzer & Hallum (2008) concluded that low self-efficacy precede burnout among respondents. So based on the literature review, it can be postulated that low self-efficacy will have positive impact whereas high self-efficacy will have negative impact on job stress.

Achievement Expectations: New performance norms, higher job targets and personal achievement expectations in comparison to their own personal efficacy also contributes significantly to the employees' job stress and burnout (Fives et al., 2007). Achievement expectations are learned through training programs, during the recruitment process and job conditions (Brown et al., 2008; Caligiuri, 2001, Wanous et al., 1992). Cordes and Dougherty (1993) have noted that "*Achievement expectations* are the individuals' beliefs about what they will be able to accomplish with clients." (p. 636). In a remarkable study, Jackson et al. (1986) have hypothesized the association between job burnout and unmet employee expectations and job conditions. So it can be postulated that unmet achievement expectations will have positive impact on job stress.

Locus of Control: Rotter (1966) conceptualized the term Locus of Control (LOC) to express a generalized construct of which internality and externality are opposite ends on a continuum, while summarizing several experiments he concluded that individuals may differ on the basis of generalized expectancies for internal or external control of reinforcement. The continuum represents individual's range of beliefs about personal control over their situations; on the extreme one side individuals believe in strong personal control (internal locus of control) whereas on the extreme other side there is belief of weak personal control (external locus of control) (Bernardi, 2001). Individual's locus of control influences the appraisal of stressful event and perception about the mismatch between job demands and job resources (Phares, 1976). When exposed to a stressful

event, people with high internal locus of control experience low stress (Butterfield, 1964); moreover their belief in the own competence may help them coping with stress and reducing anxiety (Phares, 1976). Individuals with high internal locus of control will perceive job related stress in a positive way and handles the situation in a mature manner (Srivastava, 2009). However, Jain, Giga and Cooper (2009) have found the positive moderating impact of external work locus of control on the relationship of well-being and employees' commitment. In a stressful condition internals work for good outcomes and they believe that the outcome is a consequence of their actions, on the other hand externals believe that they don't have control on the situation and they withdraw themselves to detrimental consequences (Nelson & Quick, 1985). Based on these studies, it can be postulated that externals, in contrast to internals, will experience more job stress.

Tolerance of Ambiguity: The ability to tolerate uncertainty or ambiguity was first identified as a stable tendency or personality variable by Budner (1962), who defined it as an individual's propensity to view ambiguous situations as either threatening or desirable. Ambiguity tolerance describes how a person perceives, interprets and reacts to ambiguous situations. Since Organizational decision making is often characterized by complex demands and considerable ambiguity (Lane & Klenke 2004). Therefore, researchers agree that ambiguity tolerance is a critical skill for making high-quality organizational decisions in complex environments (e.g. McCormick 2001). Tolerance of ambiguity has been associated with numerous markers of success, including objective and subjective supervisory ratings in selection of employees for hiring (Bauer & Truxillo, 2000) and positive attitude towards risk (Johanson, 2000; Lauriola & Levin, 2001). So it can be postulated that tolerance of ambiguity will have negative impact on job stress.

Job Related Factors

Apart from personality variables, there are numerous job related factors like Workload, Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict that can also cause Job Stress. In a study, Glazer and Beehr (2005) identified three role stressors-role ambiguity, overload and conflict and they found role stressors as predictors for anxiety, job commitment and intention to leave the organization.

Work Load: Work load is a frequent source of stress (Rogers 1977). Work load refers to the amount of work that a person is assigned to complete in a given time frame. Both qualitative work load requiring mental concentration (Diestel & Schmidt, 2009) and quantitative work load (Sonnetag & Frese 2003) affect the level of job stress. Caplan and Jones (1975) revealed that work load is positively associated with job stress and anxiety. Similar finding is noted by Collins

and Killough (1989), they concluded that "stress in public accounting system stems from an environment that requires employees to work long hours". In a study, Giga, Jain and Cooper (2009) have concluded that long working hours are the major source of job stress. Despite increasing work load, unbalanced reward and recognition, university teachers want to put high effort for the success of university (Houston et al. 2006) which further aggravates the job stress. So it can be postulated that workload will have positive impact on job stress.

Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity: Role ambiguity and role conflict increases the chance that an individual will be dissatisfied with his role, will face anxiety and will perform less effectively (Rizzo et al. 1970). Boles et al. (2003) states that role ambiguity and role conflicts affect job stress among sales people significantly, they further write that role ambiguity and role conflicts reduce job satisfaction. On the basis of a study on 1054 accountants working in various government and private organizations, Kemery et al. (1985) concluded that role ambiguity and role conflict causes job stress first and then decreases general job satisfaction. Role ambiguity and role conflict are important discriminant role stress factors among the teachers experiencing high and low stress levels (Rajrajeshwari 2010). In another study Ussahawanitchakit (2008) found that role conflict and role ambiguity have significant negative associations with job satisfaction. Anton (2009) revealed that role conflict and role ambiguity not only results into worker's dissatisfaction, but they also affect the organization's results significantly. So it can be postulated that role conflict and role ambiguity will have positive impact on job stress.

MODERATOR VARIABLES

In this section, we would like to explore the impact of some of the individual and organizational level moderator variables like belief in spirituality and perception of social and organizational support on the relationship of job stress and outcome variables.

Spirituality: Spirituality denotes an inner quality which individuals define uniquely; it facilitates connectedness with the self, others, and nature (Msugrave et al., 2002). It involves an internal process of seeking personal authenticity and genuineness, greater connectedness to self and community as a whole, and deriving meaning, purpose and direction of life; it also involves inclination towards exploring relationship with a greater power which exists beyond human existence (Love & Talbot, 1999). Spirituality consists of four factors: compassion, meaningful work, mindfulness and transcendence (Petchsawang & Duchon, 2009). Spiritual dimension gains focus when a person is confronted with emotional stress, physical illness or death; it promotes love, faith, trust, inspirations and positivism (Narayanasamy,

1999). In a survey of general public spirituality was found important in the lives of all individuals, it is essential for achieving wellness (Myers & Williard, 2003; Boswell & colleagues, 2006). In a study conducted on 136 undergraduate students Powers et al. (2007) found spirituality as a buffer between life stress and components of life satisfaction. Spirituality increases employee well-being and quality of life; it provides workers a sense of purpose and meaning at work, and a sense of interconnectedness (Karakas, 2010). In a study on academic staff, Rajendran & Theiler (2012) noted a negative correlation between high spirituality and stress, individuals showing high levels of spirituality at work reported fewer cases of ill-being and less job stress. In organizational settings spirituality trainings can be organized to improve openness among individuals, it influences their behavior of experience sharing (Asselt & Senstock, 2009). So it can be postulated that belief in spirituality will reduce the negative impact of job stress on employees' satisfaction and their commitment towards the organization.

Social and organizational Support: The work has been done to see the role of social support as a moderator of the relationship between job related stress and physical and mental health. House (1981) proposed that social support can be considered as an interpersonal transaction involving four types of support: emotional (feelings and emotions), instrumental (goods and services), informational (facts and data), and finally judgmental or evaluative (judgment, appreciation). Previous researches have indicated the "buffering" effect of different types of social support on stress/strain relationships (e.g., Parasuraman, Greenhaus, & Granrose 1992). Other studies have established the importance of social support as a coping resource in dealing with stressors in different life domains (e.g. Greehaus & Parasuraman, 1986; House, 1981). Social support has been found to be related with lower level of stress/strain and higher level of job satisfaction and commitment. It means that support acts in two ways on the one hand it reduces the magnitude of experienced stress and moderates the relationship of different stressors with indicators of well-being on the other hand (e.g., Iwata and Suzuki, 1997).

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) means recognition of an individual's socio-emotional needs, efforts, commitment, and loyalty by the organization. Organizational support theory (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986) proposed that employees develop a global belief concerning the extent to which organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Organizational support has been recognized as an important determinant of employee's health and well-being in organizations (Leather, Lawrence, Beale, & Cox 1998). In a study on Indian executives from automobile organization, Jain and Sinha (2005) have found that perceived organizational support has a direct positive impact on employee's general health. In a recent meta-

analysis, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) indicated that three major categories namely, fairness, supervisory support and organizational rewards and favorable job conditions were associated with POS. In turn, POS was related to positive outcome to individual employee (positive mood, satisfaction) and organization (affective commitment, lessened withdrawal behavior). Jones, Flynn, and Kelloway (1995) found that perceived organizational support was strongly related to job stressors, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. So based on these studies, it is postulated that social and organizational support will reduce the negative impact of job stress on employees' job satisfaction and their commitment towards the organization.

Consequences of Stress

In an effort to retain employees with high levels of performance, organizations are willing to foster positive organizational attitudes like job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Griffith, Hom & Gaertner, 2000). In this section, we propose the impact of job stress on employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Job Satisfaction: Job stress and employees job satisfaction are negatively associated to each other (Williams et al. 2000). Job satisfaction can be defined as "pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job experience" (Locke 1969). Balzer et al. (1997, p10) have defined job satisfaction as "the feelings a worker has about his or her job or job experiences in relation to previous experiences, current expectations, or available alternatives". Job satisfaction depends upon employee's perception that how well the job outcomes meet the expectations of a particular employee (Tella et al. 2007). Lack of job satisfaction increases the intention to leave the organization; it is negatively related to role ambiguity and hours of work. Many studies suggest that job stress among employees is inversely related with job satisfaction (Rehman & Waheed, 2011; Ejere, 2010). So it is postulated that job stress will have negative impact on employee's job satisfaction, however belief in spirituality and perception of support will reduce this impact.

Organizational commitment: Much literature has examined the notion of organizational commitment, and many conceptualizations and measures have been proposed and tested (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). In literature, organizational commitment is defined as a state in which an employee identifies with a particular organization and its goals, and wishes to maintain membership in the organization and its goal, and wishes to maintain membership in the organization. Iverson and Buttigieg (1999) studied affective, normative and continuance forms of commitment and how these are differently related to a set of antecedents (i.e. personal, job related and environmental)

and consequences (i.e. turnover intentions, absenteeism and acceptance of change). Researchers showed that *Stress produces negative impact on organizational commitment* (e.g., Begley & Czajka, 1993) and organizational citizenship behavior (Jain & Cooper, 2012). So it is postulated that job stress will have negative impact on employee's commitment, however belief in spirituality and perception of support will reduce this impact.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS & SUGGESTIONS

This article has focused on theoretical and empirical findings to identify the antecedents and consequences of stress. It can be concluded that job stress can be affected by individual and job related characteristics which may produce negative impact on employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. However, the belief in spirituality and social and organizational support may reduce the negative impact of job stress on these outcome variables. Job stress can produce negative impact on employees' health in the form of job strain and burnout. So job stress becomes a critical factor for any organization that is committed for the quality, innovation and employees' well-being. Many studies on stress have focused on specific occupations (Fives et al. 2007; Sethi, King & Quick 2004), however this paper has taken a general approach on the issue. This study is limited to the individual level and job related source of stress, however work environment, climatic conditions, nature of industry, ownership structure, organizational culture etc. can also be the major sources of job stress. More specifically, the impact of cross cultural environment on job stress can be an interesting area of future research. Nonetheless, the theoretical framework proposed in the paper can serve as means of purposive and well-planned empirical work. Finally, we believe that a mismatch between job resources and job demand is the source of job stress. So the employee should be provided sufficient time, support and resources to deal with the job stress in the critical phase of performance. However, it should be noted that adaptation process varies due to the differences in human personalities.

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