

Work stress

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We live with it, deal with it, and above all worry about it. Our way of life, the area in which we live, the economy, and our jobs can cause a great deal of stress. Not everyone deals with the same level of stress and there are several factors that can impact our lives and cause us to have higher or lower stress levels. We can have stressed caused by Cataclysmic events which according to Feldman (2009) are events that can affect many people at the same time and are “ disasters such as tornado and plane crashes, as well as terrorist attacks”. (p418). Other factors are personal stressors and can be caused by events such as a divorce, death or a loved one or the loss of a job. (Feldman, 2009). The other category is what Feldman (2009) refers to as background stressors and are the things that impact our daily life. South Florida has many factors that contribute to our stress level, high unemployment rate 12. 1% , high number of families living in poverty approximately 16%, (U. S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder at (<http://factfinder.census.gov>), a housing crisis that has contributed to many residents losing their homes, overcrowded roads, high crime rate, and during hurricane season the weather. When we compare ourselves with people living in smaller cities, villages, other areas of the country or even other countries, or those whose socio economic status allows them to maintain their life style during difficult economic times we could probably see a difference in the stress level. Who has not stressed over driving in the Palmetto or I-95. Who has not stressed over the evening news or the possibility of not having a job in very difficult economic times? Who has not stressed over the possibility of being affected by the housing crisis? Who does not stress over a situation at work over which we have no control?

These are stressors we live with and deal with on a daily basis. Work Stress and Mental Health Some people have higher levels of stress because they might have a very stressful job. Police officers, fire fighters, soldiers in a war zone, health care providers, long distance truck drivers, and yes, even educators (think of a classroom full of students where you are responsible for making sure that they are learning the skills they need to succeed) have very stressful jobs. According to Elkin and Rosch (1990) workplace related stress is a major problem in the U. S. and it creates a major expense for corporations. Koeske, Kirk, and Koeske (1993) indicate that all jobs have some level of stress but jobs that are in the human services have additional stressors because they “ derive from intense involvement in the lives of others”. (p. 319). They also refer to the type of stress experienced by individuals working in human services as “ burnout” (Koeske, Kirk, and Koeske, 1993, p. 319). Another factor that can influence our stress level is how we handle life’s demands. There are different ways of reacting to the situations we face every day of our lives. We have all heard of expressions such as ‘ road rage’ and ‘ going postal’. These are terms that we have come to identify with violent reactions to stressors caused by situations all of us face every day. How many of us have experiences in the road that would cause us to display behavior that is outside of what we consider to be within a normal range? How many of us have had experiences at work with a supervisor or a coworker where we have had to use all of our self control not to respond in an appropriate manner? We all have had these experiences and how we handle them depends on different factors such as our own characteristics, or external factors that could be impacting us at any

particular moment. Symptoms of stress and anxiety caused by work

According to Tetrick and LaRocco (1987) “ work conditions can lead to perception of stress. Perceived stress, in turn, leads to job-related strains such as dissatisfaction, boredom, and turnover, and to individual strains such as anxiety, depression, and physical illness" (p. 538). There are other factors that can cause high level of stress in a job for example high demands on the part of an employer, (i. e. constant deadlines, extended work hours) and low control on the part of the employee (i. e. very little control over the day to day activities in the workplace) and low rewards for effort can increase the chances of having serious health problems such as anxiety, use of prescription or over the counter drugs to deal with stress. (Workplace Mental Health Promotion, 2010). According to Tetrick and Larocco (1987) in addition to these external factors related to our jobs and the type of work conditions we have we also have internal factors that they call “ internal characteristics (i. e., personal characteristics) and external conditions (i. e., situational characteristics)" (p. 358). Pachner (2010) stated that In response to feelings of insecurity or ineffectiveness many people can avoid social interactions with colleagues and can develop physical symptoms such as headaches, insomnia, high blood pressure and even heart attacks. Many of us have experiences these types of feelings or reactions when we have found ourselves in stressful jobs. These health related issues can impact the individual, his/her family, the workplace environment and the community in general. Higher costs for health care, incidents of road rage or workplace violence, as well as in some instances domestic violence can all be linked to stressed caused by work. Individuals at risk of experiencing conditions of

stress and anxiety As indicated before most of us are at risk of experiencing stress and a burnout feeling at any time. Those of us who are in the fields where we deal with people on a daily basis or where high demands and where we have little control of our work environment will be more impacted than others. Additionally as mentioned before certain type of personality characteristics will increase or levels of stress. Some of the internal characteristics might be our way of handling difficult situations, our need to control our environment, our need to overachieve, even our need to please others. Some individuals have a need to have control over all aspects of their lives and when decisions are made by others and they have no control over these decisions it impacts their well being. Stressful jobs such as those involving high risk or oneself, i. e. law enforcement, military duty in a war zone, can cause higher level of stress. Jobs where demands are placed in our abilities to deal with others can also create stress, i. e., healthcare professionals, customer service personnel, teachers, and other professionals who deal directly with others. The stress caused by these types of jobs can influence our health, our attitudes, and even our home life. In many instances individuals do not have the opportunity to decompress before arriving home to deal with the other stressors that we all confront. When we leave our jobs we then need to face the different challenges surrounding us in our community i. e. traffic, weather, etc. Dealing with stress and anxiety According to Elkin and Rosch (1990) To prevent burnout individuals need to monitor their mental and physical health and maintain a healthy lifestyle that includes a healthy diet, leisure time and connecting with family and friends. All of us need to understand the importance of maintaining a healthy

equilibrium between work and our own personal life. Giving in to the demands of a stressful job can only serve to create additional health problems such as heart conditions, high blood pressure, dependency on over the counter, illegal, or prescription drugs. It will also contribute to other problems such as lack of sleep, isolation, and sometimes depression.

Perhaps we need to look at how other societies live their daily lives. For example traveling in the Mediterranean, specially the Greek islands, can give you a different perspective of how life can be. The Greek Islands have a low rate of heart disease and having traveled there myself I can see how their lifestyle contributes to that low risk. They are very active and involved in activities that promote healthy lifestyles i. e. fishing. They eat healthy and most of the time is food that is prepared in a healthy way. They take time to rest during the day and they take the time to enjoy family and friends and establish social connections. We, on the other hand, because of our work schedules, the time it takes us to get to and from work, the demands we place on ourselves, rarely have time to socialize and spend time with family or friends. Perhaps corporations should take into consideration the need to provide time for employees to establish relationships at work that are not just work related but that go beyond the routine of the workplace.

Encouraging employees to have an active life style would also help the stress since physical activity reduces stress level. Having a good health insurance that promotes healthy life style such as by encouraging preventing medicine and membership in health clubs will contribute to reduce the stress level. We also need to take proactive steps to reduce the stress level caused by our jobs. One of the steps we can take is to accept that our personality

can play a major role on how we adapt and deal with the job demands and take steps to change the extra stress we create for ourselves. If we like to control what we do at all times and like to plan ahead for all events but work in a job that is constantly changing we can begin by accepting that we can control the time we leave for work, what we take for lunch, and what route we take to get to and from work and that will give us a sense of control for at least part of the day. If we like to achieve perfection or please those around us we can begin by establishing realistic goals that we can achieve every day rather than trying to be the best in all possible aspects. Understanding ourselves, our needs, our personality, and the demands of our jobs can help us to decrease the level of stress we experience. There are factors over which we have no control i. e. the crime rate in our area, the weather, the overcrowded highways, etc. However we can certainly control other aspects of our lives such as how we handle the demands of our job, the type of lifestyle we choose to live and the amount of quality time we choose to spend with family and friends who are important to us. Knowledge and Career Understanding that there is an entire group of problems that are known as “ psychophysiological disorders that often result or are worsened by stress” (Feldman, 2009, p. 421) can help us to realize that these are very real medical problems that are “ influenced by an interaction of psychological, emotional, and physical difficulties” Feldman, 2009, p. 421). Having gained some basic knowledge of the different aspects of what can cause stress in our lives such as work, environment, social demands, etc. can help us manage our lives and careers in a way that will help us to achieve our goals, maintain healthy relationships, succeed at our jobs, and maintain

a healthy life style. According to Feldman (2009) our relationship with others can help us deal with our stress. The social support we can establish can help us to lower our stress level and the support we show others can help them as well. Coping with the daily stressors we face, and doing so as a member of a group of family, friends, coworkers, or neighbors can help us to maintain a healthy level of stress and will certainly reduce the risk of health problems associated with major stress in our life. This will in turn help us to be successful in our careers because we will achieve a healthy balance of work goals, family goals, community commitment, and a sense of well being