

Good essay on workplace stress causes, issues and solutions

[Business](#), [Management](#)



Ever since the economic crisis of early 2000 the industry has been volatile and several huge companies have been hit by loss and debts that has resulted in downsizing, layoffs, mergers and bankruptcies costing millions of people their jobs and future. Adding to that, companies have become more vigilant and have incorporated stricter surveillance for their employees and limit the health and retirement plans to control the budget especially in the corporate sector. While this may give more control to the management over the corporate operations, these measures have put the employees in stressful conditions.

This paper will discuss the major causes of occupational or work place related stress, the arising consequences due to stress and possible solutions to this problem. The paper will use current available statistics and their psychological analysis to understand how stress can affect physical and mental health as well as their social living.

What is Workplace Stress?

Workplace stress is defined as the feeling of incapability or powerlessness due to harmful physical or emotional fatigue that occur if the job responsibilities are not in harmony to the abilities, wants, needs or resources of an employee.

Stress can be internal as a direct response of incapability to perform job responsibilities as well as can be external caused by other individuals in the company.

The American Institute Of Stress has conducted several surveys to show that

work place stress is the major stress for average American adults and the statistics have shown a significant rise during the past few decades. The increasing trend in workplace stress is associated with little power and more demand from job and have been shown to cause several health conditions. In major cities such as New York and Los Angeles work stress in jobs like police and heart attacks are considered to be tightly associated and any police officer diagnosed with coronary event is treated under work related injury with due compensation.

How common is Workplace Stress?

The stats show that work stress is second most work related health issues reported, the trends show that some occupations are more stressful than others however stress is generated more from some important causes rather than the type of job. While some employees believe that they felt stressed due to being overworked and long hours others believed that external factors such as harassment, bullying or rude bosses stressed them at work. The job related stress and its growing trend is an alarming condition. As the following graph shows among several other necessities of life work related stress is the primary cause of stress for American adult today;

Figure 1 sources of stress, http://www.apa.org/Images/2012-SIA-impact-sources_tcm7-149022.jpg

Some experts believe that stress is a personalized phenomenon as it solely depends upon the nature and capabilities of a person. While some people feel thrilled with challenging job demands others might be intimidated by working in a fast lane with changing and growing demands of job. However,

some factors are common that several people from the working class have reported to be stressful for them. The studies on work place stress have provided following trend as statistics:

- 40% of surveyed workers reported their job as extremely stressful out of which 25% considered their jobs as the main source of stress for them.
- 9% of respondents agreed that they had knowledge of assault, harassment or more serious act in their workplace and at least 18% had experienced something of that sort along with threats and intimidation in the past 1 year.
- The increasing eternal stress usually from a coworker is also a major source of stress in a work environment as 14% of respondents said that they felt like acting violent with a coworker (but did not attempt) in the past year.
- A large number of respondents about 80% felt stressful at their jobs and more than half of them did not know how to cope with that condition at work.

These stats show that the significant increase in work related stress is nothing to be overlooked. The growing trend of stressful working environment are not limited to mental pressures, in fact 42% of respondents agreed that verbal abuse and yelling was common in workplace due to work pressure and deadlines. About 19% people had switched their jobs due to stressed environments and considered the job environment key reason to stay with a company.

All these stats emphasize on the importance of identification of sources of stress in a work environment and proper purging techniques to provide a better workplace for the people that enables them to work at their best.

Major Causes of Stress At Work

While it is clear from the stats discussed above that work related stress is very common and increasing at alarming pace. It is equally important to understand the major causes of this stress. The work related stress can have different versions depending upon the type of industry and the type and level of job however there are some common factors that are involved in every stressful work environment including: control, demands, relationships/peers, roles, support and change. Continuous stressed situation due to any factor can affect other factors too and the person can stay in a vicious cycle for as long as it takes if he is unable to cope up with the stress. Following are the most common causes of stress based on the above factors:

Long & Hectic Hours

As business is getting globalized, the work hours and the pressure on employees to work for longer hours than committed is a common issue in most of the industries. People especially in subordinate or lower level are forced to work for longer hours without any extra compensation. Workload and working hour issues are the most commonly reported reason for work related stress and is more prevalent in retail and technology industries.

Work Demands

Working environments are becoming more demanding than ever. Employees are required to fulfill more than their responsibilities, stress is generated due to work-life imbalance, frequent relocations or transfers, lack of or no emotional connection between peers thus a feeling of isolation is developed. Front row workers such as retail/restaurant staff, secretaries, middle

managers and customer service/support staff have the most stressed jobs as they are required to continually respond and manage demands from clients and management and have little authority to make any decision by themselves. These employees have more job demands and less authority leaving them feeling powerless yet have to fulfill the demands without arising any conflicts of interests.

Volatile Business Environment

A huge number of working class especially in the middle and lower management positions feel most stressed due to volatile nature of industries. Ever since the real estate and dotcom bubble burst shut down and bankruptcies are more common than ever. Employees stay under a sense of tension and ambiguity as companies can go down any day and mostly the lower level staff are not cleared for dues in such situations.

Interpersonal conflicts & harassment

About 59% of people surveyed for work stress stated that conflicts and behavioral issues with their peers and manager/supervisors. The concept of control and authority are the primary factors for interpersonal conflicts in a work environment, these conflicts if not handled intelligently can shape into harassment, bullying and violence. The power or authority in these scenarios can be mistreated in two ways, positional power and personal power. While positional power might enable a person to exert pressure or harass a subordinate by the leverages of their position such as not giving due rewards or promotions in spite of good efforts by the subordinate, personal power is associated with the personality of the person. It is often seen that people

with intimidating personalities develop conflicts with their peers and like to handle the conflicts by bullying, harassment or miscommunications to put the other peer in difficult situations. Interpersonal conflicts are a major source of job transfers and quitting.

Interpersonal conflicts are also often due to some sort of discrimination, even though there are strict laws against any such act still a large percentage of people have experienced discrimination based on religion, gender, position or abilities as shown in the graph below:

Figure 2 reasons of discrimination, [https://www. destatis.](https://www.destatis.de/EN/FactsFigures/Indicators/QualityEmployment/_Graphic/7_2_Discrimination.png?__blob=poster)

[de/EN/FactsFigures/Indicators/QualityEmployment/_Graphic/7_2_Discrimination.png? __blob= poster](https://www.destatis.de/EN/FactsFigures/Indicators/QualityEmployment/_Graphic/7_2_Discrimination.png?__blob=poster)

Ambiguous Roles

Most of the times people are concerned more about the monetary reasons for working rather than to enjoy their job. In such scenarios there are often situations when the capabilities of a person do not meet the requirements, expectations and needs of a job. The continual failure of lack of achievement in a job puts the person in stress of not being able to deliver up to mark. In this competitive business era, companies encourage only the employees who can deliver more than expected and this can lead people with ambiguous roles in an organization to stay in stress.

Comfortable & functional Work setting

Though not considered a chief concern, however the design of the workplace and the comfort of being in that environment are one of the main reason of physical stress conditions. Absence Figure 3 physical stress factors,

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<http://www.slideshare.net/AbdulShukor1/office-ergonomics-what-how-why-an-essential-reading-for-office-workers>

of comfortable seating, lack of light, air or space can all affect the capabilities on a person and can put them in a physical stress all along. Most of the people spend the bigger part of their day at their workplace, a setting that does not allow them to freely move, sit and breathe can have damaging effects on their health. The chart shows the main factors that produce physical stress for people and can result in serious health issues, the top factors are a lack of privacy in setting and uncomfortable temperature.

Consequences of Stress

Continued stress can have serious effects on the health and wellbeing of a person. The major consequences include:

- Lower immunity: The amount of energy a person loses by just stressing their minds on work related issues decreases their defense ability against diseases. This is one of the reason people start feeling weak and fatigued when exposed to stressful working conditions for long.
- Eating/sleep Disorders: Usually highly stressed people develop disorders in their eating and sleeping habits and often result in too much weight loss or gain.
- Depression: depression is a direct consequence of stress and it leaves people in a hopelessness state where they believe that their career or life has ended and stop striving for success.
- Heart Problems: continues stress and anger result in higher level f blood pressures that can result in serious health conditions such as heart or

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coronary attacks.

- Physical/Muscular/Nerve Pains& discomforts: physical stress and too much workloads can result in physical stress such as pains, postural issues of back or neck.

Stress Management Techniques

No organization is free from stress and pressure, however successful and employee centered companies provide different mechanisms to enable their employees to cope up with any such stressful situations. Following are some of the techniques corresponding to the causes discussed previously:

Ergonomics

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that MSD(Musculoskeletal disorders) had been the most reported work related health injury and most cases were from health care, transportation and warehousing, retail and wholesale trade and construction industries. Ergonomics deals with setting up a workplace in a way to prevent physical stress and injuries. The field of ergonomics has defined rules for different industries and provides guidelines to place equipment/machines in way that the people using it are at most comfortable and safe position.

Conflict management

The HR department of any organization has the responsibility to take care of employee's interests. Organizations need to implement conflict resolutions strategies that will enable the HR authority to identify, understand and resolve conflicts at a nascent stage rather than overlooking it to develop into

a serious issue. For example, in case if a manager uses his position to harass a subordinate who might have conflicting views, the HR authority should be involved in employee performance reviews to ensure that every employee is justly rewarded and the manager cannot hide or miscommunicate the efforts. An open communication environment enables people to discuss the interpersonal issues more easily. Strict policy against discrimination and harassment have to be in place to ensure no conflicts arise due to such issues.

Open Communication

All employees like to be treated special. The management need to facilitate the employees to discuss their issues freely to report client's demands and management's limitations. Open sessions can also be good to discuss the corporate goals and milestones so that changes are not unexpected and abrupt and the employees feel they have a say in the company. The sense of power provides a self-assurance to the employees that enables them to manage frontline operations effectively.

Clarification of roles

Management should proactively clarify and define the roles and the responsibilities so that the employees understand what are they required to deliver, additionally hiring should be a competitive process that choses the right person for the right job. A right person with good attitude and personality in a wrong position that might not suit his abilities will be disadvantageous for the company and the individual.

The management can create a good psychological environment through

these simple steps that will not only motivate employees but also create a healthy workplace:

Conclusion

Workplace stress is a common issue and a growing trend as the business is getting more competitive than ever. Long work hours, work load, conflicts of interests, inability to perform or sheer pressure without authority all cause stress and can result in harmful psychological and physical health issues.

Management of an organization is responsible to provide a clean and productive work environment that motivates an employee rather than stressing them. The management should assign roles according to the abilities and stay proactively involve with their employees to understand the needs and wants of their teams in order to facilitate them to perform.

Healthy workplaces means less injuries, resignations and absentees. For management it is translated into happy and motivated workforce with better performance.

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