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RESEARCH ARTICLE

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS; CHALLENGES AND REMEDIAL MEASURES.

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Abstract

Work is the core part of human life. Occupational stress occurs when there is a mismatch between the demands of the job and the resources and capabilities of the individual worker to meet those demands. It challenges their ability to cope with work. This includes not only situations where the pressures of work exceed the worker's ability to cope but also where the worker's knowledge and abilities. The issue of occupational stress closely related to the impact of advanced technology in the workplace, is making new demands on workers for creative strategies. The problems last far longer than the time spend at work and are not easily left behind at the end of the day. This paper has focused on major stressors and their remedial measures.

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Introduction:-

Stress in the workplace or occupational stress is a growing concern in the current state of economy , where the employees increasingly face conditions of overwork , job in security, low levels of job satisfaction. work place stress has been shown an adverse effect on the health and well -being of the employees as well as negative impact on productivity and profits. When the demands of the workplace become too much to handle, employees generally display signs and symptoms that indicate they are feeling stressed out. work-related stress is the response of people when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope. Stress occurs in a wide range of work circumstances but is often made worse when employees feel they have little support from supervisors and colleagues and where they have little control over work or how they can cope with its demands and pressures. stress affects different people in different ways. The experience of work stress can cause unusual and dysfunctional behaviour at work and contribute to poor physical and mental health. In extreme cases, long-term stress at work may lead to psychological problems and be conducive to psychiatric disorders resulting in absence from work and preventing the worker from being able to work again. When under stress, people find it difficult to maintain a healthy balance between work and non -work life. Stress may be defined as "a state of psychological and / or physiological imbalance resulting from the disparity between situational demand and the individual's ability and / or motivation to meet those demands". Stress is not an illness – it is a state. However, if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged, mental and physical illness may develop. Stress can be positive or negative. Stress can be positive when the situation offers an opportunity for a person to gain something. Stress is the body's reaction to a change that requires a physical, mental or emotional adjustment or response. It can be caused by both good and bad experiences. When people feel stressed by something going on around them, their bodies react by releasing chemicals into the blood. These chemicals give people more energy and strength, which can be a good thing if their stress is caused by physical danger. But this can also be a bad thing, if their stress is in response to something emotional and there is no outlet for this extra energy and strength.

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Occupational Stress:-

Work-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope. "The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures/other types of demand placed on them at work is known as occupational stress. Stress results from a mismatch between the demands and pressures on the person, on the one hand, and their knowledge and abilities, on the other. It challenges their ability to cope with work. This includes not only situations where the pressures of work exceed the worker's ability to cope but also where the worker's knowledge and abilities are not sufficiently utilised and that is a problem for them. A healthy job is likely to be one where the pressures on employees are appropriate in relation to their abilities and resources, to the amount of control they have over their work, and to the support they receive from people who matter to them. As health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity but a positive state of complete physical, mental and social well-being (WHO, 1986), a healthy working environment is one in which there is not only an absence of harmful conditions but also the policies which promote health.

Causes Of Occupational Stress:-

Poor work organization, that is the way in which the jobs design and work systems, and the way we manage them can cause work stress. Excessive and otherwise unmanageable demands and pressures can be caused by poor work design, poor management and unsatisfactory working conditions. Similarly, these things can result in workers not receiving sufficient support from others or not having enough control over their work and its pressures. The situations and pressures that cause stress is known as stressors. Most of the causes of work stress concern the way work is designed and the way in which organizations are managed. Because these aspects of work have the potential for causing harm, they are called 'stress related hazards'.

Factors that cause stress are called Stressors. The following are the source or causes of an organisational and non-organisational stress.

1. **Career Changes:** When a person suddenly switches over a new job, he is under stress to shoulder new responsibilities properly. Under promotion, over promotion, demotion and transfers can also cause stress. If an employee feels that he is very much behind in corporate ladder, then he may experience stress and if he feels that there are no opportunities for self-growth he may experience stress. Hence unfulfilled career expectations are a major source of stress.
2. **Role Conflict:** It takes place when different people have different expectations from a person performing a particular role. It can also occur if the job is not as per the expectation or when a job demands a certain type of behaviour that is against the person's moral values.
3. **Work Overload:** : Excessive work load leads to stress as it puts a person under tremendous pressure. Work overload may take two different forms :-Qualitative work overload implies performing a job that is complicated or beyond the employee's capacity. Quantitative work overload arises when number of activities to be performed in the prescribed time is many. Stress may occur to those individuals who work in different shifts. Employees may be expected to work in day shift for some days and then in the night shift. This may create problems in adjusting to the shift timings, and it can affect not only personal life but also family life of the employee.
4. **Unexpected changes in the life cycle:** Life changes can bring stress to a person. Life changes can be slow or sudden. Slow life changes include getting older and sudden life changes include death or accident of a loved one. Sudden life changes are highly stressful and very difficult to cope.
5. **Personality:** People are broadly classified as 'Type A' and 'Type B'. Type A Feels guilty while relaxing, gets irritated by minor mistakes of self and others, impatient and dislikes waiting, does several things at one time. While the 'Type B' people are exactly opposite and hence are less affected by stress due to above mentioned factors.
6. **Poor employer - employee relationship:** Some managers creates stress for employees by Exhibiting inconsistent behaviour, Failing to provide necessary support Providing inadequate direction, Showing lack of concern and Creating high productivity environment. 4
7. **Lack of Group Cohesiveness:** Every group is characterised by its cohesiveness although they differ widely in degree of cohesiveness. Individuals experience stress when there is no unity among the members of work group. There is mistrust, jealousy, frequent quarrels, etc., in groups and this lead to stress to employees

8. **Lack of Participation in Decision Making:** Many experienced employees feel that management should consult them on matters affecting their jobs. In reality, the superiors hardly consult the concerned employees before taking a decision. This develops a feeling of being neglected, which may lead to stress.
9. **Conflict :** Interpersonal and intergroup conflict takes place due to differences in perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs between two or more individuals and groups. Such conflicts can be a source of stress to group members.
10. **Lack of Social Support:** When individuals believe that they have the friendship and support of others at work, their ability to cope with the effects of stress increases. If this kind of social support is not available then an employee experiences more stress.
11. **Workplace disputes:** Workplace violence is a very serious interpersonal stressor. Individuals who experience violence have symptoms of severe distress after the violent event. Workplace violence is also stressor for those who observe the violence.
12. **Sexual Harassment:** This refers to un-welcome conduct of a sexual nature that affects the job related performance of an employee adversely.
13. **Organisational Climate:** A high pressure environment that places chronic work demands on employees fuels the stress response.
14. **Occupational Demands:** Some jobs are more stressful than others. Jobs that involve risk and danger are more stressful. Research findings indicate that jobs that are more stressful usually requires constant monitoring of equipments and devices, unpleasant physical conditions, making decisions, etc.
15. **Working Conditions:** Employees may be subject to poor working conditions. It would include poor lighting and ventilations, unhygienic sanitation facilities, excessive noise and dust, presence of toxic gases and fumes, inadequate safety measures, etc. All these unpleasant conditions create physiological and psychological imbalance in humans thereby causing stress.
16. **Technological Changes:** When there are any changes in technological field, employees are under the constant stress of fear of losing jobs, or need to adjust to new technologies. This can be a source of stress.
17. **Caste and Religion Conflicts:** Employees living in areas which are subject to caste and religious conflicts do suffer from stress. In case of religion, the minorities and lower-caste people (seen especially in India) are subject to more stress.
18. **Economic Factors:** Changes in business cycle create economic uncertainties. When the economy contracts, people get worried about their own security. Minor stress also cause stress in work force.

Major Outcomes Of Occupational Stress:-

- Cardiovascular diseases
- Ulcers, sexual dysfunction, headaches
- Burnout
- Weak performance, accidents, decisions
- Absenteeism -- due to sickness and flight
- Workplace aggression
- Poor concentration
- Inability to make sound decisions or any decisions at all
- Mental blocks
- Anxiety
- Frustration
- Apathy
- Lowered self-esteem
- Aggression
- Depression
- Moodiness
- Emotional fatigue

Occupational Stress Management:-

- 1) **Time management:** Time management is the act or process of planning and exercising conscious control over the amount of time spent on specific activities, especially to increase effectiveness, efficiency or productivity. Time management may be aided by a range of skills, tools, and techniques used to manage time when accomplishing specific tasks, projects and goals complying with a due date. This set encompasses a wide scope of activities, and these include planning, allocating, setting goals, delegation, analysis of time spent, monitoring,

organizing, scheduling, and prioritizing. Initially, time management referred to just business or work activities, but eventually the term broadened to include personal activities as well. A time management system is a designed combination of processes, tools, techniques, and methods. Usually time management is a necessity in any project development as it determines the project completion time and scope.

- 2) **Meditation:** Meditation is a practice in which an individual trains the mind and/or induces a mode of consciousness to realize some benefit, although it can be argued meditation is a goal in and of itself. The term meditation refers to a broad variety of practices (much like the term *sports*), which range from techniques designed to promote relaxation, contacting spiritual guides, building internal energy, receiving psychic visions, getting closer to a god, seeing past lives, taking astral journeys, and so forth, to more technical exercises targeted at developing compassion, love, patience, generosity, forgiveness and more far-reaching goals such as effortless sustained single-pointed concentration, single-pointed analysis, and an indestructible sense of well-being while engaging in any and all of life's activities.
- 3) **Relaxation technique:** A relaxation technique (also known as relaxation training) is any method, process, procedure, or activity that helps a person to relax; to attain a state of increased calmness; or otherwise reduce levels of anxiety, stress or anger. Relaxation techniques are often employed as one element of a wider stress management program and can decrease muscle tension, lower the blood pressure and slow heart and breathe rates, among other health benefits.
- 4) **Role Analysis Technique (RAT):** The Role Analysis Technique helps both the manager and the employee to analyse the requirements and expectations from the job. Breaking-down the job into various components clarifies the role of the job for the entire system. This also helps to eliminate reduction of work and thus lowering down the stress level.
- 5) **Employee Assistance Program:** Another widely used strategy is the employee assistance Programs, which offer a variety of assistance to employees. These include counselling employees who seek assistance on how to deal with alcohol and drug abuse, handling conflicts at the work place, dealing with marital and other family problems.
- 6) **Career Counselling:** Career Counselling helps the employee to obtain professional advice regarding career that would help the individual to achieve personal goals. It also makes the employees aware of what additional educational qualifications or specialized technical training, if any, (hat they should acquire. By becoming knowledgeable about the possible avenues for advancement, the employees who consider their careers to be important can reduce their stress levels by becoming more realistic about their options and can start preparing themselves for it.
- 7) **Delegation:** Another way of coping with job stress is to delegate some responsibilities to others. Delegation can directly decrease workload upon the manager and helps to reduce the stress.
- 8) **Coaching:** Some new employees have to spend more time on a job than necessary because they are not sure what they are doing. So it is necessary that some help should be provided before doing the work that would lead to much efficient, effective work. It would also reduce anxiety and stress among the employees
- 9) **Job Relocation:** Job relocation assistance is offered to employees who are transferred, by finding alternative employment for the spouses of the transferred employees and getting admissions in schools for their children in the new place. These arrangements help to reduce the anxiety and stress for the moving family.
- 10) **Supervisor Training:** Another type of stress management Program that organizations are experimenting with is supervisor training. The emphasis on supervisory training Program is how to prevent job stress. Managers are trained to give better performance appraisals, to listen to employees' problems more effectively, and to communicate job assignments and instructions more clearly.

Conclusion:-

Occupational stress is a real challenge for workers and their employing organizations. As organizations and their working environment transform, the level of stress problems that employees may face increases. It is important that your workplace is being continuously monitored for stress problems. Further, it is not only important to identify stress problems and to deal with them but to promote healthy work and reduce harmful aspects of work. Work in itself can be a self-promoting activity as long as it takes place in a safe, development- and health-promoting environment. Major causes of occupational stress are the work overload, working environment and the pressure from the employer. There is a close relationship between the performance of the employee and the level of occupational stress. As the level of stress increases the performance level decreases. Increased level of occupational stress results into work life imbalance of the employees. There has to be some sort of balance between work and personal life. Work-life balance can promote creativity and out-of-the-box thinking. Stress plays an important role in changing the employee behaviour along with organizational goals fulfilment if it used in a positive way, but it is

very essential to keep the level of stress at optimal level and always to avoid negative effects of stress. Stress is more related with the performance of employees .stress affect the employee both mentally and physically and it clearly reflects in their productivity. So every organization should take necessary steps to overcome the occupational stress then only they can grow both economically and physically.

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