

## EMPLOYEE STRESS MANAGEMENT: CAUSES, INDICATORS AND COPING STRATEGIES

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### **Objectives**

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

- Define the term stress
- Understand the different causes of stress
- Explain the coping strategies to overcome stress

### **Introduction**

In this competitive world every individual is experiencing stress in his or her life. Stress is an inevitable phenomenon which cannot be fully ignored. There are so many factors which are responsible for stress in your life as death of loved one, getting married, unrealistic expectations, financial obligations and heavy workload etc. The term stress is always taken as a negative term but it is not always like that. Sometime the stress motivates the individual to perform well and to achieve the target, but if we look at the negative side the stress affects the physical and mental health of individuals

#### **1.1 Stress- Meaning and Definition**

Stress may be defined as physical or mental pressure which an individual feels while meeting the challenges in the environment. Everybody is under stress in his or her life due to some unavoidable reasons. A state of psychological and physiological imbalance resulting from the discrepancy between situational demand and the individual's ability and motivation to meet those needs.

#### **STRESS DEFINITION**

**Skinner** in 1985 defined stress as “a reaction of a particular individual to a stimulus event”.

In 1990, **Steinberg and Ritzmann** considered that “stress can be defined as an underload or overload of matter, energy or information input to, or output from, a living system”.

Further in 1996, **Levi** in his research concluded that “stress is caused by a multitude of demands (stressors), such as an inadequate fit between what we need and what we are capable of, and what our environment offers and what it demands of us”.

Then in 1998, **Roger** described stress as a “pre-occupation with the negative emotion following the event”.

#### **1.2 Characteristics of Stress**

The characteristics of stress are as follow:

##### **1. Effects different individual differently**

Stress affects the different person differently. The reaction to stress may be different for the same situation due to different personality traits of individuals. Some people are very brave by birth and ready to cope up with different challenging situations, but some

people are not very brave to cope up with challenging situations in life due to some factors.

**2. It may be short-run or Long-run**

The stress may be short run or long run by nature. It may be temporary or can prolong for long time depending upon the situations of your life. But if the stressful situation lasts for long time then it can create chronic physical or mental issues.

**3. Stress may be positive or negative**

Stress may be positive or negative. Stress is not always bad. Positive type of stress always increases our efficiency, motivation and productivity. Positive stress always helps an individual to achieve the goals. Negative type of stress is responsible for depression, anxiety, and fear for an individual. It may affect our physical or mental health.

**4. Stress is pervasive phenomenon**

Stress is pervasive in nature. It is a normal part of everyone's life. The people of every culture and society feel stress in their life. No one can truly avoid stress in their life.

**5. Stress is Inevitable**

Stress is unavoidable or inevitable aspect of life. Stress is considered as normal part of everyone's life. But the way people deal with stress may be different for different individuals. Some people easily accept the new challenges which are taking place in the environment, but some others are not able to cope up with these challenges and they feel stress.

**1.3 Different Types and Causes of Stress**

Stress is basically of two types:

**(1) Eustress / Positive Stress**

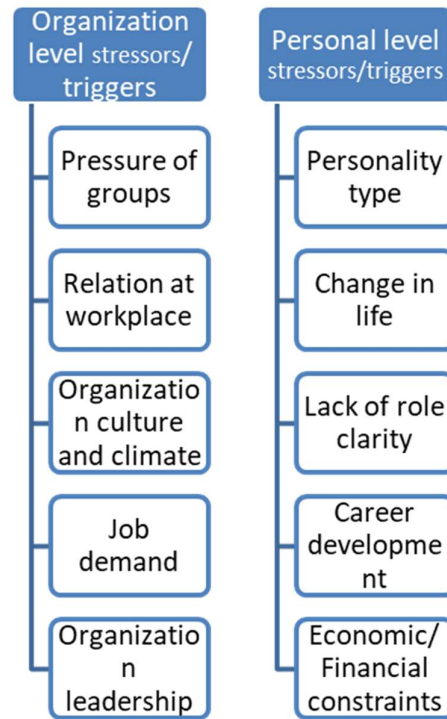
This is positive type of stress. Positive stress is helpful in increasing the efficiency and productivity of employees. If this type of stress is not there on employees, then they will not work hard to achieve their goals.

**(2) Distress/ Negative Stress**

This is negative type of stress. This type of stress creates frustration and tension among employees. It leads to different kind of physical and mental illness.

**Causes of Stress**

There may be so many causes for stress in individual's life. The causes which are responsible for stress in life are known as stressors. These stressors may be different for different individuals. Some stressors are related to organization or your workplace which are known as organization level stressors and some stressors are related to individual's personal life which is known as personal stressors.



#### 1.4 Indicators of Stress

Stress may have a negative impact on the physical and mental health of the individual which indicate that the person is under stress. The different indicators which indicate that the person is under stress are as follow:

##### (1) **Physical Indicators**

Stress can have a negative impact on our body like:

- Problem related to digestion
- Insomnia
- Headache
- High Blood Pressure
- Tightness in Chest
- Lack of Appetite
- Abnormal Heartbeat
- Sudden weight loss or gain

##### (2) **Non- Physical Indicators**

Stress not only impacts our physical life but it also impacts our cognitive or thought process. Some of the psychological indicators which indicates that people are under stress are as follow:

- Depression/ Anxiety
- Concentration/Focus problem
- Not interested in life
- Feeling neglected or lonely
- Difficulty in decision making

- Demotivation
- Lack of confidence for problem solving
- Problem in remembering

### **1.5 Coping strategies to overcome Stress**

The very first step to cope up with stress is to identify the stressors which are responsible for stress in our life. Some suggested strategies to cope up with stress at individual and organization level are as follow:

#### **Coping Strategies at Individual Level**

The efforts done by individual to cope up with stress at personal level are as follow:

- **Meditation**  
Meditation is considered as an important way to overcome stress in life. It gives us peace and inner strength to overcome the stress. It helps in focusing our attention and providing directions to our thoughts. Meditation can be of any types as mindfulness, spiritual and focused meditation.
- **Time Management**  
Poor time management is considered as one of the significant stressor in individual's life. We may feel stress in life if everything is not going according to the set schedule. It is important for an individual to prepare TO-DO list and work according to that list. Time management can be done by setting the priority of work.
- **Physical Exercise**  
Physical Exercise is an important mode to cope up with stress effectively. Physical exercise helps the brain in producing feel-good neurotransmitters, called endorphins. Physical exercise is helpful in improving our sleep and mood.
- **Social Networking**  
The social network which includes your family, friends and peers can be a critical measure to overcome stress in life. Isolation and loneliness are considered as main stressors in individual's life. But social networking helps in improving our physical as well as mental health. We have to follow some suggestions to nurture our social network as never compete with your friends, be good listener, express your feelings and be available when they need you.
- **Proper Diet**  
Balanced or Proper diet is an important measure to overcome stress in life. Stress cannot be fully avoided in life but we can reduce its negative effect on our physical and mental health by balanced diet. The food items which are highly nutritious and helpful in overcome stress are dark chocolate, herbal tea, avocados, nuts and citrus fruits.
- **Relaxation and Recreational Activities**  
Recreational activities may be the best cure for stress. Individuals can overcome stress by performing such kind of recreational activities like swimming, dancing, jogging, gardening and yoga. Such kinds of activities are helpful in boosting the feel good endorphins and help the individuals to cope up with all the challenges of life in cool and calm manner.

### Coping Strategies at Organization Level

There are so many types of stressors which are related to organization like no scope for open communication, lack of support from management, lack of participation in decision making, organization leadership etc. Some of the efforts which organization can perform to overcome stress level of employees are as follow:

- **Open Communication System**

Open communication system in an organization is an effective tool to manage stress for an employee. Lack of open communication system is considered as biggest stressor for employee working in any organization. Open communication system not only help the employees to overcome stress but it also helps to increase productivity, motivation and morale at workplace.

- **Clarity of Role**

Employees feel stress as they have no clear idea about role, duties and responsibilities associated with their jobs. They are not aware about the expectations from them. Lack of role clarity creates a tension and stress in the life of employees. An organization can opt different ways to clear the role of employees in the organization like conducting survey, motivating them to accept their role and carefully identifying the skill gap in their existing employees.

- **Job Redesign**

Job redesigning can also contribute to overcome the stress in individual's life. If the employee is feeling stress in job then organization can restructure the duties and responsibilities attached with this particular job to cope up with the stress.

- **Stress Management Program**

Organization can conduct the stress management programs for its employees to manage the stress. By conducting such kind of management programs organization can educate the employees about stress education, can arrange meditation classes on job etc.

- **Guidance and Counseling**

Proper guidance and counseling helps the employees to find out the main stressors in life. It not only helps the employee to know himself very well, but it also suggest some healthy and workable strategies to cope up with stress. A counselor must provide a open environment to the employee, so that he can freely discuss about the main stressor in his or her life.

- **Personal Wellness Program**

Organizations can conduct different types of personal wellness program to motivate its existing employees for healthy lifestyle. These programs can be conducted in variety of ways with different tools to promote overall wellbeing of employees.

- **Set Realistic and Achievable Goals**

Sometime the goals set by the organization are not realistic or achievable in nature. If the employee is not able to achieve the unrealistic or unachievable goal then he may feel stress in life which leads to frustration or depression. So the organization must set the goals and objectives in real manner which can be achieved in stipulated time period.

#### 1.6 Summary

- Stress is a very common phenomenon now days. All most every individual is under stress due to different factors. Stress can be defined as a bodily pressure.
- Stress can have positive as well as negative impact on physical and mental health.
- Stress cannot be fully avoided but we can manage it with the help of some kinds of coping strategies at individual at organizational level.
- According to a report every one person out of 5 is having such kind of depressive disorders.
- In present scenario the covid-19 pandemic is big contributor for increasing the stress and anxiety level among individuals.

### **1.7 Key Concepts**

**Stress:** Stress may be defined as physical or mental pressure which an individual feels while meeting the expectations of real world.

**Stress Management:** Stress management means the process of managing the stress with the help of different means and ways.

**Characteristics of Stress:** a) Effects different individual differently b) It may be short-run or Long-run c) Stress may be positive or negative d) Stress is pervasive phenomenon e) Stress is Inevitable

**Indicators of Stress:** Physical Indicators: Problem related to digestion, insomnia , headache, high blood pressure, tightness in chest, lack of appetite, abnormal heartbeat, sudden weight loss or gain

Non-Physical Indicators: Depression/ anxiety , concentration/focus problem, not interested in life, feeling neglected or lonely, difficulty in decision making, demotivation, lack of confidence for problem solving, problem in remembering

**Coping strategies to overcome Stress** Coping Strategies at Individual Level: Meditation, time management, physical exercise, social networking, proper diet Coping Strategies at Organization Level: Open communication system, clarity of role, job redesign, stress management program, guidance and counseling, personal wellness program, set realistic and achievable goals