

## Managing stress at workplace

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### Abstract

Stress is generally indicated as a deviation from normal functioning of body and mind. Stress can approach in an organization due to many reasons such as control over work, managerial style of manager etc. Stress in limited quantity is beneficial to organization and employee as well. It helps to achieve personal as well as goals of organization. But stress in excess quantity can cause harmful effects on the body, mind and psychology of employees. Stress can be measured by using psychological methods involving use of questionnaires. Physical measurement involve measuring of various physical constants of body such as blood pressure. Physiological measures include measurements of various hormonal levels etc. And the measures to relieve this stress include sports, music, dancing, hobbies etc. Excessive stress can be reduced by help of professional counsellors. But the stress at workplace is an important issue must be dealt with to achieve progress. Day by day challenges for human is increasing in many different fields as if progress in turn creates new problems. Slowly the nature of working has been changed and still these changes are in progress. Because of these changes, number of illnesses has been increased, morality and human aspects are faded and new problems are occurred every day, so that we are facing job stress which called "illness of the century". As a measure to minimize stress, delegating some work, share burden with colleagues, leave and time off work with family and love ones, as well as reducing work overtime ranked highest as strategies for stress management. Findings of a number of studies on this aspect says that stress has a great impact on the professionals and thereby affects the level of productivity. Thus it is recommended that professionals should exhibit self-control and good self-esteem; engage in continuous professional development on skills for better organization, integration of work within specified project constraints and delegation of assignment, authority and breaking work into manageable parts so as to be able to cope with stress.

**Keywords:** Stress, Stress management, Causes, Measures, Effects.

### Introduction

In our everyday lives we get to hear the word 'stress' from our peers, colleagues, teachers and doctors. Even the word 'stress' can be heard now a days in the news, in the magazines and on other social media too. But exactly what is stress?? In the layman's language stress is 'frustration or anxiety or nervousness or change in regular function of mind or body due to negative or positive influences around us'. So the definitions of stress by different experts are as follows- Arnod (1960) thinks that "Stress is any condition that disturbs normal functioning".

Selye (1974) defines stress as "Stress is a non-specific response of the body to any demand".

According to Beehr & Newman (1978) "Stress is a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning".

A recent report by the National Association of Mental Health distinguishes stress from pressure, where pressure can be defined as a subjective feeling of tension or arousal that is triggered by a potentially stressful situation. But, where pressure exceeds an individual's ability to cope, the result is stress.

### Most stressful jobs

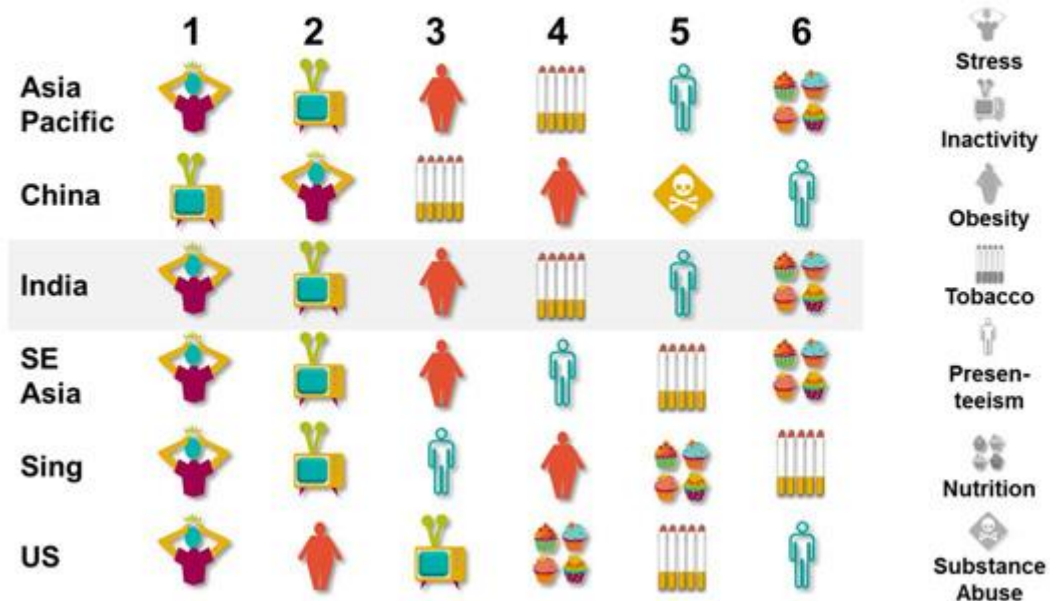
Sr. No.	Job	Stress score
1	Fire-fighter	71.59
2	Military personnel	70.78
3	Military general	63.11
4	Airplane pilot	60.46
5	Police officer	50.82
6	Actor	50.33
7	Broadcaster	50.30
8	Event coordinator	49.33
9	Photojournalist	49.22
10	Newspaper reporter	48.76

### Types of stress

Based on its impact on body mind and performance, stress can be categorized into two types-

1. **Eu-stress-** Eu-stress is just a reasonable amount of stress that an individual can take. This stress has positive after effects. Eu-stress can create passion for work. It may be able to provoke hidden abilities and talents. It inspires humans to take on new activities. Such well quantified stress can lead to success.
2. **Distress-** Distress is an excessive quantity of stress. This amount of stress is harmful to the individual. Distress can cause negative effects on body and mind of individual. Such stress causes effects as depression, heart attack etc.

**In India, as well as regionally and globally, stress was ranked across the region as the most pressing lifestyle risk factor**



Source: Towers Watson's 2013/14 Staying@Work survey

### Causes of stress at workplace

Causes of stress can be divided into two categories based upon the source of the cause. Two major classifications are-

**Internal causes-** These causes involve an individual's mind-set, way of thinking etc. These causes are originated from within the individual and lead to stress. These internal causes are based on perception of an individual. Even if no threat exists in the surrounding a person may feel a person or a situation threatening and may get stressed.

**External causes-** These causes include many external factors within an organization which affect an individual's performance in organization which are-

1. **Job insecurity-** When an employee works in an organization, fear of losing his/her job leads to chronic stress which causes reduced work quality.
2. **Working hours-** Very odd working hours may lead to many physiological problems in employees which may lead to stress during work.
3. **Control at work-** This refers to extent of control an employee has over his/her work. If employee has no or very little control over the work then he/she loses interest in the work and feels stressed to meet expectations of superiors.
4. **Managerial style-** The controlling style of managers effects stress of the employees. Managers with autocratic style of control give very little freedom to the employees in decision making

and planning. So, employees working under such managers are stressed due to very less control over their work and very high restrictions.

5. **Over load & under load-** Overload of work means performing a large amount of work in a very short time. Such heightened expectations from any individual may lead to stress. Elsewhere under load is very short amount of work to do and time available is too much. Here employee questions his/her capacity and feels stressed.
6. Sometimes situations requesting behavioural changes may put an employee under stress due to need of behaving in a way which is not natural for the employee.

**Top causes of work-related stress:** When quizzed on sources of stress, Indian employees rank unclear or conflicting job expectations (40%), inadequate staffing (lack of support, uneven workload or performance in group) (38%) and lack of work/life balance (38%) as the top three reasons according to Towers Watson's Global Benefit Attitudes Survey that polled 22,347 global workers out of which 7,094 workers are in Asia Pacific (2006 workers are based in India).

In Asia Pacific, the top contributors were inadequate staffing, low pay (or low increase in pay) and lack of work/life balance. Globally, inadequate staffing is common as the single most important contributor to work-related stress.

**Top causes of work-related stress for employees**

	<b>India</b>	<b>Asia Pacific</b>	<b>United States</b>	<b>EMEA</b>
Unclear or conflicting job expectations	40%	29%	36%	33%
Inadequate staffing (lack of support, uneven workload or performance in group)	38%	41%	52%	49%
Lack of work/life balance (excessive workloads and/or long hours)	38%	32%	24%	28%
Organizational culture, including lack of teamwork, tendency to avoid accountability and assign blame to others	32%	31%	33%	31%
Low pay (or low increases in pay)	29%	37%	38%	28%
Technologies that expand availability during nonworking hours (e.g., mobiles, notebooks)	27%	16%	8%	9%
Lack of supervisor support, feedback and not living up to their word	26%	23%	23%	22%
Lack of technology, equipment and tools to do the job	18%	18%	13%	15%
Fears about job loss, too much change	16%	16%	20%	22%
Fears about benefit reduction/loss (e.g., lower value or loss of health care coverage, reduction in retirement benefits)	12%	16%	11%	7%

**Source: Towers Watson's 2013/14 Staying@Work survey**

**How to measure stress?**

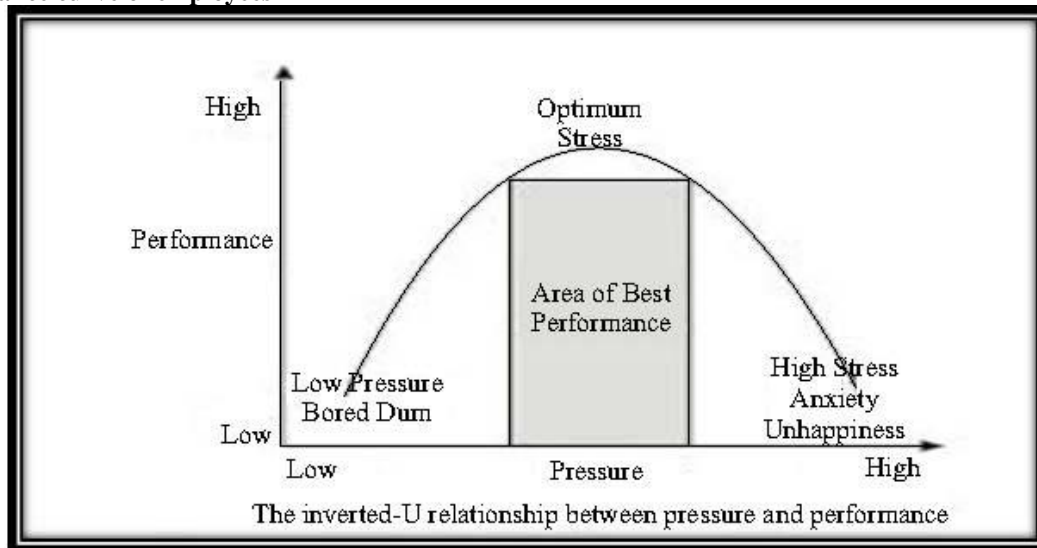
There are many methods to measure stress. Measuring stress is quantifying the response by the body responds to a stressful situation. These indicators for stress involve measurement of an array of properties of body which are changed during stress.

- 1. Psychological measurements-** These measurements measure stress based upon psychological observations. Each person has a different psychology and way of reacting towards any stressor. Hence to gather those responses in stress many questionnaires were prepared which contain questions which measure response to stress.
- 2. Physiological measurements-** When someone comes across any situation which induces stress, the HPA axis of the person is activated which contains Hypothalamus, Pituitary, Adrenal glands of endocrine system. On stimulation, these glands produce their hormones i.e. Cortisol and catecholamines. Elevated levels of those hormones are found in blood, urine and plasma of the person undergoing through stress.

- 3. Autonomic measures-** These include changes in various constants of body and concentration of various enzymes.

- **Blood pressure-** When a person is undergoing through stress, blood pressure is elevated from its normal 120/80 values.
- **Vagal tone-** Vagal tone is a parasympathetic response which leads to prevention of reducing heart rate during sleep or rest. Which means that during sleep, the person's heart beats with the same force as it beats when he is awake.
- **Salivary alpha amylase-** This enzyme in saliva is major indication for stress. The levels of this enzyme are elevated during exercise. And the link between level of catecholamines and salivary alpha amylase is proven. Also this enzyme can be used to measure action of parasympathetic nervous system.
- **Salivary Cortisol-** Salivary Cortisol represents amount of Cortisol not bound with any receptor. This concentration can pass through blood brain barrier and alter high order cognitive functions such as learning, memory, emotional processing.

### Performance curve of employees



**Explanation of performance curve:** When pressure on an employee to perform a task is low then employee gets bored due to lack of enough motivation due to pressure from superiors. At optimum pressure, employee is highly motivated to do his work and shows best performance. But when levels of stress exceed the optimum level, employee is unable to cope up with such a high stress and employee faces various disorders like anxiety. Hence according to above curve, in an organization, optimum pressure must be put on employees so that they give their best performance.

### Effects of stress

Humans are most intelligent animals on earth. But still they fall prey to stress created by their own organizations and companies. This situation is equally dangerous for companies because excessive stress in employees cause employee turnover. Highly stressed employees choose to remain absent to avoid stressful environment in organization. Employees who are highly stressed lack motivation.

When body encounters any threatening or stressful situation, body shows three distinct phases to combat the stress-

1. **Alarming stage-** Here body prepares to execute fight/flight action. Here blood pressure increases, blood vessels are dilated, process of digestion slows down, and breathing is faster and deeper. Body stores energy for upcoming response.
2. **Resistance-** Here the stimulus of threat persists. The body adjusts towards the stimulus and tries to reduce the effects of stress. Body uses its capability of adaption as a shield to fight against the threat. Body becomes habituated towards the stimulus of stress and is able to tolerate it.
3. **Exhaustion stage-** In this stage, the body cannot cope up further with stressing stimulus. The

adaptation power of body decreases and body is susceptible to symptoms of stress.

**Physical consequences:** Stress can manifest itself into various physical observations in the form of altered functioning of system. Altered functioning of cardiovascular system causes high blood pressure. Stress on musculoskeletal system causes headaches and tension. Stress causes change in motility of GIT hence causing constipation or diarrhoea. Stress may affect CNS of employees to cause light headedness, fainting or dizziness. It also causes sudden ringing in ears. Stressors can increase sweating and cause clammy souls and palms. Even the respiratory system is affected by stress causing difficulties in breathing and sighing. Stress also affects our immune system which makes us susceptible for infections such as common cold etc. Unexplained and/or frequent allergy attacks are common in stressful condition due to sensitized body. Stuttering or stammering while talking is commonly seen in stressed individuals. Belching or flatulence is seen. Grinding and gritting teeth are present in stressed individuals.

**Psychological problems:** Constant stress causes altered psychology of individual. A chronic stress may present itself into varieties of observations. Stress causes decreased confidence of an individual hence it creates nervousness. Stress causes excessive anxiety where person always worries over minute things. Stressed person always shows guiltiness due to his reduced work capacity. Stress causes insomnia. Stress gives a person his worst nightmares. Stress makes a person devoid of sleep. Stress causes occurrence of disturbing dreams. Stress causes disturbed concentration. Stress causes racing thoughts through the mind. Stress increases forgetfulness. Stress makes you more emotional. Stress causes fear and anxiety. Stress for a long time causes

depression. Capacity to take decision is hampered. Stressed people are susceptible to dementia and Alzheimer more than healthy individuals.

**Behavioural problems:** Stress causes induced behavioural changes which can be directly seen into stressed individuals. Stress causes short temperedness of an individual. Stress causes frustration in stressed individuals. Such frustrated individuals become more hostile due to feeling of depression. Stressed

individuals seem to be more forgetful in remembering small details. People suffering through stress are disorganized. These people are more confusing in taking even a small decision. Stressed people cannot learn new things very easily. Stressed people often feel lonelier than other people. They often show feeling of worthlessness. These people show suicidal tendencies. People undergoing stress are more confused. Stressed people show more possibility of obsessive/compulsive behaviour.



### How can you combat stress?

There are many effective ways which help an individual to combat stress and live a happy and healthy life. These methods include-

- **Get more sleep-** which provides proper rest to body and helps combat the effect of stress.
- **Enter in physical activities-** physical activities boost the mind and body and help to regain the confidence which is lost due to stress.
- **Relaxation techniques-** such as arts, dance, music help people to get more creative and relieves the stress.
- **Talking to a close one-** talking to a close one helps to relieve stress and provides comfort.
- **Time management-** allows efficient usage of time. And which helps persons to organize his/her activities. And which helps to maintain daily course of activities and it reduces stress.
- Say 'NO' to additional unimportant request- taking additional, unimportant requests which are not necessary, increases the workload and causes additional stress.
- **Take adequate rest** if you are ill- taking adequate rest helps people recover from the symptoms of stress and helps to improve the mood.
- **Avoid habits** such as smoking, alcohol etc. - these products cause dependence and further induce stress by need of continuous consumption of these products.
- **Facing the cause-** facing the cause of stress is one of the major solutions to reduce the stress. When you face the stressor, the reason of stress is no more and the person is free from stress.



### Organisational Measures to Combat Stress

The following measures can be taken by organisations to combat stress:

- A. **Reducing Long working hours:** Organisations should see that long working hours of employees should be reduced and proper time management techniques are taught to them.
- B. **Teaching Employees to do Work-Life balance:** Required trainings should be given to employees to maintain the work-life balance.
- C. **Use of Technology:** The organizations should use the available technology and provide specialized training courses on any topic required for work advancement.
- D. **Communication** - The organizations should encourage communication and always asks for feedback, where the HR manager should always directly accessible to any employee to listen to. The organization always try to follow up with all corporate and business news, in addition to new studies published regarding work stress, how to spot it and solve it.
- E. **Security Fears** - The Organizations should take efforts in making employees and people feel safe by applying laws for security checks, checking identities of visitors to the firm and not allowing unauthorized people to enter.
- F. **Introduction of Retirement Plans** - Applying Social Security system and pension funds, which is a great insurance and relief for employees in order not to worry about their retirement any more.
- G. **Job stability and fear of downsizing** - The Economic Crisis is very complex. Unfortunately, layoffs and downsizing are forced on many organizations, and there is nothing that management can do internally to stop this issue.
- H. **Workplace Diversity** -The firms should hire all kinds of experiences from all ages, genders, and from all levels of educations.

### Top 10 steps taken by employers to manage stress

	India	Asia Pacific	United States	EMEA
Flexible working options	50%	40%	51%	50%
Stress mgmt interventions (e.g., workshops, yoga, tai chi)	43%	38%	39%	16%
Education and awareness campaigns	41%	41%	40%	26%
Promotion of employee assistance program (EAP)	40%	24%	85%	29%
Specialised training for employees	30%	26%	23%	39%
Training for managers	23%	24%	34%	41%
External resources used to design and deliver program(s)	16%	12%	23%	18%
Expanding EAP and other services to dependents	15%	10%	46%	25%
Anti-stress space	12%	10%	10%	4%
Written guidelines on stress	10%	9%	7%	9%

## Conclusion

Now we can conclude that stress is an important factor for the employees in any organization. Stress within a specific limit helps to achieve necessary objectives. But if stress exceeds any particular limit then it shows its harmful effects on the body, mind and behaviour. Now the ways to cope with the stress include adequate sleep, sports, talking to a close one, relaxation habits and quitting of addictive products. These all must be used to get relief from stress. Workplace stress plays a significant role in physiological and psychological well-being of employees. It also affects the productivity and performance of organisations. The various results of workplace stress like physical problems, mental disturbances, emotional imbalance, lifestyle disturbances and behavioural problems lead to disturb the climate of the organisation. These issues create interpersonal conflicts, decreased productivity, low organisational commitment, increased absenteeism and more attrition etc. By facilitating the employees with effective training, the management can provide them with platform to solve their stress related problems. Yoga, meditation, exercise and recreational activities can provide better environment to control stress. Even time management skills help to manage stress in an effective manner. These simple but useful steps can pave the path for improved efficiency of employees and increased productivity of organisation.

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