



ISSN: 2319-6505

Available Online at <http://journalijcar.org>

International Journal of Current Advanced Research
Vol 5, Issue 12, pp 1581-1586, December 2016

**International Journal
of Current Advanced
Research**

ISSN: 2319 - 6475

RESEARCH ARTICLE

STRESS AMONG WORKING WOMEN IN IT SECTOR

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 15th September, 2016

Received in revised form 7th October, 2016

Accepted 16th November, 2016

Published online 28th December, 2016

Key words:

Stress, working women, IT sector.

ABSTRACT

Globalization and privatization have brought new work relationships, job insecurity, insecurity regarding future working conditions and rapid obsolescence of skills are causes of stress. IT industry has become one of the fastest growing industries in India. Strong demand over the past few years has placed India among the fastest growing IT markets in Asia-Pacific region.

The reason for choosing particularly IT and ITES employees is that the level of stress these employees face is comparatively higher than other employees. Any kind of a job has targets, and an employee becomes stressed when he or she is allotted with unachievable targets and are unable to manage a given situation. The individuals working in the information technology field face more stress because they have to update their knowledge continuously

The present paper aims to focus on stress and its consequences in women's life. It also focuses on how working women in IT sector under much stress. And this paper also demonstrates tips to help manage and reduce stress levels in their working as well as personal life.

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INTRODUCTION

Stress

Stress word has been derived from physics and mechanics where it is defined as physical pressure exerted upon, and between different parts of body, when deformation occurs as a result it is called strain. Stress can be any kind of change in our daily routine or health. Stress has both psychological as well as physiological dimensions.

Stress is a natural human response to pressure when faced with challenging and sometimes dangerous situations. That pressure is not only what's happening around us, but often also about demands we place on ourselves. Experiencing stress is part of being alive and some stress helps increase our alertness and energy to meet challenging situations. If stress lasts a long time or overwhelms our ability to cope, it can have a negative affect on our health, wellbeing, relationships, work and general enjoyment of life. Stress doesn't have to control our lives. We can improve our knowledge about stress and increase our resources to become more resilient.

Hormones which release in body during stress:

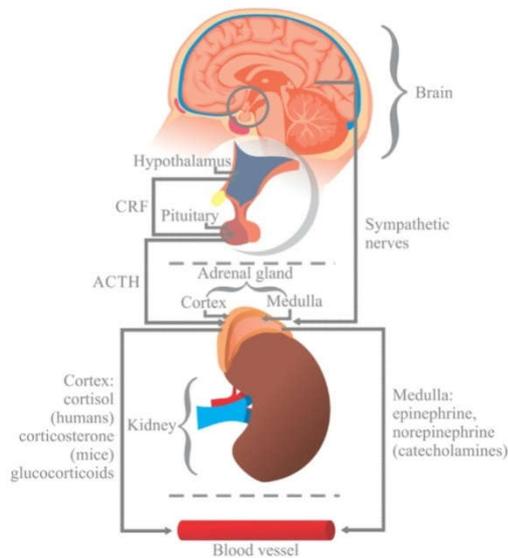
Stress is primarily a physical response. When stressed, the body thinks it is under attack and switches to 'fight or flight' mode, releasing a complex mix of hormones and chemicals such as adrenaline, cortisol and norepinephrine to prepare the body for physical action. This causes a number of reactions, from blood being diverted to muscles to shutting down unnecessary bodily functions such as digestion.

Through the release of hormones such as adrenaline, cortisol and norepinephrine, the caveman gained a rush of energy, which prepared him to either fight the tiger or run away. That heart pounding, fast breathing sensation is the adrenaline; as well as a boost of energy, it enables us to focus our attention so we can quickly respond to the situation.

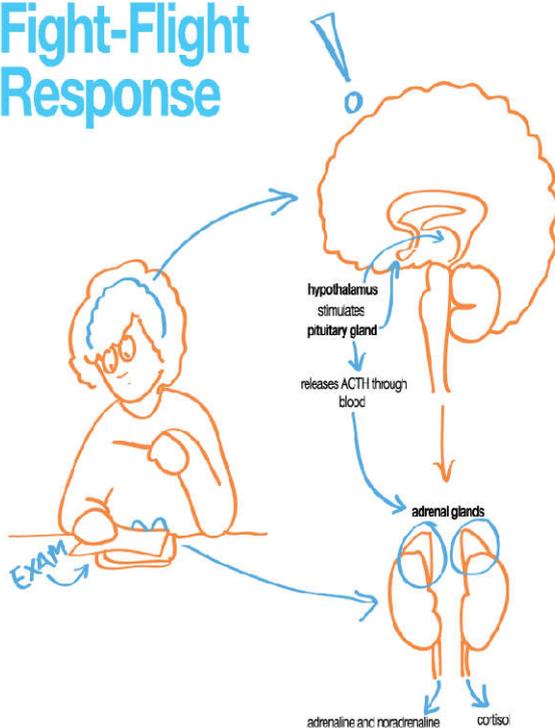
In the modern world, the 'fight or flight' mode can still help us survive dangerous situations, such as reacting swiftly to a person running in front of our car by slamming on the brakes. The challenge is when our body goes into a state of stress in inappropriate situations. When blood flow is going only to the most important muscles needed to fight or flee, brain function is minimised. This can lead to an inability to 'think straight'; a state that is a great hindrance in both our work and home lives. If we are kept in a state of stress for long periods, it can be detrimental to our health. The results of having elevated cortisol levels can be an increase in sugar and blood pressure levels, and a decrease in libido.

Fight

When our body goes into a state of stress, we may feel agitated and aggressive towards others; this can be due to our bodies' natural reaction being "fight". This can be a helpful reaction to ward off predators, but in unnecessary situations, it can negatively affect relationships and ruin reputations.



Fight-Flight Response



Flight

Some of us avoid our stressors, removing ourselves from the situation instead of tackling it. This can be a sign of the “flight” survival instinct; a function that can save our lives if we find ourselves in dangerous surroundings. However, in everyday life, this natural instinct can lead to a stressful situation escalating, and increase our stress levels when we realize that the stressor isn’t going away and we need to face it.

Freeze

Unknown by many, there is a third mode that stress can cause; freeze. For some people, becoming stressed sets the stage for ‘dysregulation’. The energy mobilized by the perceived threat gets “locked” into the nervous system and we ‘freeze’. This response sometimes reveals itself when we breathe. Holding our breath and shallow breathing are both forms of freeze. The occasional deep sigh is the nervous system catching up on its oxygen intake.

Types of Stress

Acute Stress

Acute stress occurs only at a very short period of time; these symptoms might only come out when the stress has already accumulated:

Emotional distress, such as anger, anxiety, irritability, and acute periods of depression.

Physical problems, such as headache, pain, stomach upset, dizziness, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, hypertension and bowel disorders

Episodic Stress

The symptoms of episodic stress are found in Type A persons. These include:

- Longer periods of intermitted depression, anxiety disorders and emotional distress
- Ceaseless worrying
- Persistent physical symptoms similar to those found in acute stress
- Coronary heart diseases, or other heart problems

Chronic Stress

Chronic stress is the total opposite of acute stress; it’s not exciting and thrilling, but dangerous and unhealthy.

Serious illnesses like stroke, heart attack, cancer, and psychological problems such as clinical depression and post-traumatic disorder can originate from chronic stress.

Common physical signs and symptoms of chronic stress are:

- dry mouth
- difficulty in breathing
- pounding heart
- stomach ache
- headache
- diaphoresis
- frequent urination
- tightening of muscles

Mental signs and symptoms include:

- sudden irritability
- tension
- problems with concentration
- difficulty in sleeping
- narrowed perception
- frequent feelings of fatigue

Stages of work stress

According to Pestonjee (1992) work stress progresses through a series of five stages.

1. **The honeymoon stage:** Euphoric feeling of excitement, enthusiasm, challenges and pride on getting a new job. Dysfunctional processes include the depletion of energy reserves in coping and adapting to the new environment.
2. **The full throttle stage:** Going full swing leads to a depletion of resources. Other symptoms include dissatisfaction, sleep disturbances, overeating, drinking or smoking.
3. **The chronic symptom stage:** Development of chronic symptoms like physical illness, anger and depression.

4. **The crisis stage:** Persistence of symptoms leads to disease, chronic backache, headache, high BP, insomnia, etc., would develop.
5. **Hitting the wall stage:** No person can continue under strain for too long and one may reach the end of one's professional career. Burnout stress syndrome takes over.

Causes of Stress

There are various expected and highly individual reasons of stress. It depends on numerous variables including type of her personality, attitude towards life, analytical skills, and societal and family's cooperative environment. By every individual, stress can be handled in different manner like it can be stressful in negative manner for someone. All those reasons are known as stressers, which create lots of pressure and demand on an individual to perform. There can be so many causes of stress as below:

- Work At Home Long working hours
- Working environment
- Job security
- Workload
- Salary
- Transfer
- Lack of recognition
- Conflict
- Grievance regarding problem
- Lack of promotion
- Strict policies
- Lack of resources
- High demands of the job.
- Relationship with colleagues.
- Excessive work pressure.
- Excessive Commuting Time
- Decease of husband, family member, close friend or relatives.
- Sickness of any close one.
- Split up from partner.
- Noncompliance by children's
- Children's academic performance.
- Pregnancy or birth of a new baby.
- Disturb marital life.

Symptoms of Stress: Stress is a universal phenomenon; women may be different in degree and level of its experience. Thus it is important to identify and determine the stress among women. To point out working women experiencing stress, some of the signs are as follows:

- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Insomnia
- Easily loses temper
- Failure to achieve targets
- Faulty decisions
- Frequent physical complaints like headaches or stomach aches
- Shift jobs frequently
- Heart diseases, high blood pressure
- Higher absenteeism
- Impatient with idleness
- Job dissatisfaction and depression

- Lack of concentration
- Poor performance
- Negative attitude
- Persistent sadness and hopelessness
- Poor self-esteem
- Work place aggression
- Lack of focus
- Lack of energy

These symptoms indicate development of stress level and make it essential to find out causes contributing.

IT sector in India

Information technology (IT) industry in India has played a key role in putting India on the global map. IT industry in India has been one of the most significant growth contributors for the Indian economy. The industry has played a significant role in transforming India's image from a slow moving bureaucratic economy to a land of innovative entrepreneurs and a global player in providing world class technology solutions and business services. The industry has helped India transform from a rural and agriculture based economy to a knowledge based economy.

Internet has made revolutionary changes with possibilities of e-government measures like e- health, e-education, e-agriculture, etc. Today, whether its filing Income Tax returns or applying for passports online or railway e-ticketing, it just need few clicks of the mouse. India's IT potential is on a steady march towards global competitiveness, improving defense capabilities and meeting up energy and environmental challenges amongst others.

Working Women in India

After independence, women in India have come a long way. From just an expert homemaker/housewife, she not only has acquired skills and abilities to being a perfect housewife but being at same level with their spouse or life partner. Now, women wants to follow up their dream career and this is the new propagation of working women. At the same time, women are suffering from many symptoms of stress. More difficulty arises with those women, who are working. They have to fulfill the assorted demand at workplace and home.

Today, maximum married couples are working to create a balance with occupational life as well as their personal life at home with their children. But it is no that easy for a women as she has to take on multiple roles right from a cook, a tutor, a housemaid who take care of the home, a care taker as well as cater to fulfill requirements at home. At this place, a working woman can be strained and restless; especially when family is not very cooperative. Working women, no matter whether they are single or married, face higher strain and contrary health effects. Working women most probably feel accented because of their diverse workload. Most studies of employed married women in India have reported economic need as being the primary reason given for working.

Stress among working women in IT sector

For some people, a stressful job is no issue, but for others it can be draining and even become a health issue. And science backs this up; numerous studies have suggested that stress at work can shorten the life span and cause negative health problems. According to the American Psychological

Association (APA), "Along with its emotional toll, prolonged job-related stress can drastically affect physical health. Constant preoccupation with job responsibilities often leads to erratic eating habits and not enough exercise, resulting in weight problems, high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol levels."

The APA also cites a loss of mental energy in addition to the health problems that can stem from a negative working environment or a stressful job. It can also perpetuate a negative and cynical attitude, leading to problems with depression, which can ultimately reduce overall immunity.

CareerCast released a list of the most stressful and least stressful jobs for 2016 across every industry. For technology, there were eight jobs on the list that were categorized as being the most stressful jobs in the industry. The study looked at 11 stress factors including the amount of travel, growth potential, deadlines, working in the public eye, competitiveness, physical demands, environmental conditions, hazards encountered, own life at work, life of another at risk and meeting the public. Respondents were asked to rate each category on a scale of 1 to 10 to find the **"stress score" of each job.**

Web Developer: The most stressful tech and IT job on the list was for Web developer, which might be associated with its rapid growth. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, web developer jobs are expected to grow by 27 percent by 2024, which is much faster than average. The average salary for a web developer is \$63,490 per year and the typical entry-level worker has at least an Associate's degree.

Technical Writer Next on the list is the role of a technical writer, which the BLS predicts will grow 10 percent by 2024. The average salary, according to the BLS, is \$69,030 per year and the average entry-level technical writer has at least a Bachelor's degree. It's typically a full time job that requires working closely with engineers to develop instruction manuals, how-to guides, journal articles and other documentation.

Computer Systems Analyst Computer Systems Analysts are responsible for studying the computer systems at a company and the procedures around IT in order to increase efficiency. But it's also one of the more stressful jobs in IT, especially as more businesses rely on fast changing technology. According to the BLS, computer systems analyst jobs are expected to grow 21 percent by 2024, which is faster than the national average for most industries, and the average salary for this job is \$82,710 per year.

Network and Computer Systems Administrator Network and Computer Systems Administrator jobs aren't growing as fast as other tech jobs, with the BLS predicting just an 8 percent increase by 2024. But that hasn't stopped it from being one of the more stressful jobs in tech. Responsible for the overall operations of technical networks for companies, Network and Computer Systems Administrators earn, on average, \$75,790 per year.

Data Scientist Data has exploded in the last few years, which has left businesses scrambling to hire data professionals, only to face a lack of qualified candidates. In fact, this job is so new that the BLS doesn't even have data on the exact position, just similar roles. But CNN Money states that the potential

10-year growth for this role is 18.7 percent with a median salary of \$124,000 per year.

Computer Service Technician: With a rise in technology comes a greater need for people to help troubleshoot and fix computers and other devices at work. So it's no surprise that Computer Service Technician is on the list of most stressful tech jobs. The BLS predicts that this role will grow 12 percent by 2024 and cites the average salary as \$50,380.

Software Engineer Software Engineers are tasked with creating computer programs, meeting deadlines, dealing with clients and answering to a businesses' expectations for developing software and programs. All of that, combined with fast growth -- the BLS predicts this job will grow 17 percent by 2024 -- makes for a stressful career in tech. However, the salary might make up for it for some, with the average Software Engineer earning \$97,990 per year.

Computer Programmer Computer Programmers are held to similar expectations as Software Engineers, but they write, test and code the applications and software developed by the engineers. Surprisingly, this job is actually on the decline, with the BLS predicting an 8 percent decline in growth by 2024. The BLS cites the average salary for this role as \$77,550 per year.

While these jobs may be stressful, the study also emphasizes that stressful jobs can be rewarding. Only we can know how we respond to and deal with stress, and if we can handle it, these jobs can lead to a long, rewarding and successful career.

Simple tips to help manage and reduce stress levels

Avoid Caffeine, Alcohol, and Nicotine

Avoid, or at least reduce, consumption of nicotine and any drinks containing caffeine and alcohol. Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants and so will increase the level of stress rather than reduce it. Alcohol is a depressant when taken in large quantities, but acts as a stimulant in smaller quantities. Therefore using alcohol as a way to alleviate stress is not ultimately helpful.

Swap caffeinated and alcoholic drinks for water, herbal teas, or diluted natural fruit juices and aim to keep body hydrated as this will enable body to cope better with stress.

We should also aim to avoid or reduce intake of refined sugars - They are contained in many manufactured foods (even in savoury foods such as salad dressings and bread) and can cause energy crashes which may lead to feel tired and irritable. In general, try to eat a healthy, well-balanced and nutritious diet.

Indulge in Physical Activity

Stressful situations increase the level of stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol in the body. These are the "fight or flight" hormones that evolution has hard-wired into our brains and which are designed to protect us from immediate bodily harm when we are under threat. However, stress in the modern age is rarely remedied by a fight or flight response, and so physical exercise can be used as a surrogate to metabolize the excessive stress hormones and restore our body and mind to a calmer, more relaxed state.

When we feel stressed and tense, go for a brisk walk in fresh air. Try to incorporate some physical activity into our daily

routine on a regular basis, either before or after work, or at lunchtime. Regular physical activity will also improve the quality of sleep.

Get More Sleep

A lack of sleep is a significant cause of stress. Unfortunately though, stress also interrupts our sleep as thoughts keep whirling through our heads, stopping us from relaxing enough to fall asleep. Rather than relying on medication, our aim should be to maximise relaxation before going to sleep. Make sure that bedroom is a tranquil oasis with no reminders of the things that cause stress. Stop doing any mentally demanding work several hours before going to bed. Try taking a warm bath or reading a calming, undemanding book for a few minutes to relax the body, tire eyes and it help us forget about the things that we are worry. We should also aim to go to bed at roughly the same time each day so that mind and body get used to a predictable bedtime routine.

Try Relaxation Techniques

Each day, try to relax with a stress reduction technique. There are many tried and tested ways to reduce stress so try a few. For example, try self-hypnosis which is very easy and can be done anywhere, even at our desk or in the car. One very simple technique is to focus on a word or phrase that has a positive meaning to us. Words such as "calm" "love" and "peace" work well, or we could think of a self-affirming mantra such as "I deserve calm in my life" or "Grant me serenity". Focus on our chosen word or phrase; if we find our mind has wandered or we become aware of intrusive thoughts entering our mind, simply disregard them and return our focus to the chosen word or phrase. If we find our self becoming tense again later, simply silently repeat our word or phrase. Don't worry if we find it difficult to relax at first. Relaxation is a skill that needs to be learned and will improve with practice.

Talk to Someone

Just talking to someone about how we feel can be helpful. Talking can work by either distracting us from our stressful thoughts or releasing some of the built-up tension by discussing it. Stress can cloud our judgment and prevent us from seeing things clearly. Talking things through with a friend, work colleague, or even a trained professional, can help us find solutions to our stress and put our problems into perspective.

Keep a Stress Diary

Keeping a stress diary for a few weeks is an effective stress management tool as it will help s become more aware of the situations which cause to become stressed.

Note down the date, time and place of each stressful episode, and note what we were doing, who we were with, and how we felt both physically and emotionally. Give each stressful episode a stress rating (on, say, a 1-10 scale) and use the diary to understand what triggers our stress and how effective we are in stressful situations. This will enable us to avoid stressful situations and develop better coping mechanisms.

Take Control

Stress can be triggered by a problem that may on the surface seem impossible to solve. Learning how to find solutions to problems will help us feel more in control thereby lowering

our level of stress. One problem-solving technique involves writing down the problem and coming up with as many possible solutions as we can. Decide on the good and bad points of each one and select the best solution. Write down each step that we need to take as part of the solution: what will be done, how will it be done, when will it be done, who is involved and where will it take place.

Manage Our Time

At times, we all feel overburdened by our 'To Do' list and this is a common cause of stress. Accept that we can not do everything at once and start to prioritise and diarise our tasks. Make a list of all the things that we need to do and list them in order of genuine priority. Note what tasks we need to do personally and what can be delegated to others to do. Record which tasks need to be done immediately, in the next week, in the next month, or when time allows.

By editing what might have started out as an overwhelming and unmanageable task list, we can break it down into a series of smaller, more manageable tasks spread out over a longer time frame, with some tasks removed from the list entirely through delegation. Remember as well to create buffer times to deal with unexpected and emergency tasks, and to include time for our own relaxation and well-being.

Learn to Say 'No'

A common cause of stress is having too much to do and too little time in which to do it. And yet in this situation, many people will still agree to take on additional responsibility. Learning to say "No" to additional or unimportant requests will help to reduce our level of stress, and may also help us develop more self-confidence.

To learn to say "No", we need to understand why we find it difficult. Many people find it hard to say "No" because they want to help and are trying to be nice and to be liked. For others, it is a fear of conflict, rejection or missed opportunities. Remember that these barriers to saying "No" are all self-created.

We might feel reluctant to respond to a request with a straight "No", at least at first. Instead think of some pre-prepared phrases to let other people down more gently.

CONCLUSION

Stress in the workplace is a commonality throughout the world in every business. Managing that stress becomes vital in order to keep up job performance as well as relationship with co-workers and family members. Changing the work environment relives work stress. Making the environment less competitive between employees decreases some amount of stress.

Employees working in IT industry are prone to develop a lot of health problems due to continuous physical and mental stress of their work. Diseases are induced, sustained or exacerbated by stress. Thus, it is necessary that the management of IT organizations to take remedial measure to overcome the negative effect of stress on their employees.

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