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"An Empirical Study on Stress Levels Among Software Professionals in the City of Chennai "

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ABSTRACT

Stress is not only a phenomenon of western world but also in Asia. India ranks only after Vietnam, South Korea, Thailand, China, Singapore and Japan at the rate of 6.1 on a ten-point rating scale. Stress in India can take many forms, for example, executive stress, marital stress, unemployment stress, job stress, etc. People working in the field of IT, termed as Gold - collar employees, go through a lot of anxiety, depression and loneliness because of work environment and often exhibit feeling of inadequacy, lowered self-esteem and dissatisfaction. This results in various health hazards like simple headache to severe heart problems. An attempt has been made in this paper to study the relationship between stress and self-esteem and impact of job stress on personal health of the employees working in IT industry. Study results show employees with high and medium self-esteem experience high level of stress. Long working hours, work pressure, erratic food intervals, Anxiety were found to be the reasons affecting personal health.

KEYWORDS: Gold Collar Employee, Stress, Self-Esteem, Personal Health

INTRODUCTION

One finds stress everywhere, whether it be within the family, business organization or any other social or economic activity. Right from the time of birth till the last breathe drawn, an individual is invariably exposed to various stressful situations. Stress is a subject hard to avoid. The term is discussed not only in our everyday conversations, but, has become of a public issue to attract widespread media attention.

With the advent of the information revolution, knowledge has become the means to sustain competitive advantage and knowledge employees, by this virtue, the mainstream resource. This gold collar category of employees (software professionals), with their high level of skill and expertise are extremely valuable to their companies and therefore has created their own demand in this society. Driven by the new ideas and creations, they place a high priority to individual goals and professional growth. As a result, they have a different set of needs, aspirations and expectations than the other categories of employees. This brings greater challenges for the knowledge organizations to adopt innovative people management approach, which can attract, motivate and retain them.

Life in the fast lane, business competition, deadlines and staff constraints stresses out a majority of corporate employees. About 70% of these employees coping the work pressure suffer more from mental stress than physical strain.

Stress in not something new in 21st century. Stress has been experienced since time immemorial, but its toll is higher than ever before.

CONCEPT OF STRESS

The word, "STRESS" has been derived from Latin word, "Stringere" which means to draw tight. The term is used to refer to hardship, strain, adversity or affliction. Various terms have been synonymously used with stress such as anxiety, frustration, and pressure.

Arnod (1960) "Stress is any condition that disturbs normal functioning"

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

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"

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is evident from the review of research that many researchers have studied the concept of stress among employees in different industries. Now only some researchers are trying to study the stress level among IT professional and its impact on their health.

Three studies on computer professionals conducted by Pestonjee and Singh (1983, 1987) and Singh (1987) have been discussed here.

In general, the findings of these studies are in contrast to the findings of similar studies conducted abroad. For example, Couger and Zawacki (1978) predicted that job dissatisfaction and the rate of turnover is on an increase among computer professionals. On the contrary none of the three Indian studies reported such findings. Instead, the mean Job Satisfaction score of computer professional was found to be within the range of satisfied to highly satisfy in all the three Indian studies.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the level of stress among the Gold collar employees in Chennai city.
2. To study the relationship between self-esteem and stress.
3. To ascertain the impact of job stress on personal health of employees.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

Descriptive research design has been adopted in this study. The purpose of choosing descriptive design is to achieve new insights into the phenomenon of stress, to formulate a complete and comprehensive picture of stress affecting the well being of gold collar employees.

The study focuses on stress experienced by Gold Collar Employees (IT Professionals). Judgment Sampling has been adopted in this study. The purpose of choosing judgment sampling is to exercise judgment or expertise, in choosing the elements to be included in sample because researchers believed that they are representative of the population of interest. A total of 300 Gold collar employees were selected for the study. The study was undertaken in Chennai which is capital city of Tamil Nadu, where many top notch IT companies are located and from which data has been collected.

Instruments used in the questionnaire

In order to measure the job stress and other selected variables, the following standardized instruments were found to be appropriate. Hence, they were used for soliciting information from the IT professionals

1. Self - esteem scale developed by A.H. Eagly and adapted from J.R. Robinson and P.R. Shaver, Measures of Social Psychological Attitudes
2. Personal Health Questionnaire developed by Debra Allcock, 1995

HYPOTHESES

The Hypotheses may be stated as

1. There is a relationship between the profile of the respondents and the level of job stress.
2. There is a relationship between self-esteem and stress.

3. There is a relationship between Gender and Personal health.
4. There is a relationship between marital status and personal health.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

❖ Profile of respondents and level of job stress

1. Out of 300 employees, 228 are male and 72 are female. The percentage of male (76%) is more than female (24%) in IT industry.
2. 72% of the employees are in the age group of 20-25, 18% are in age of 26-30, 6% are in 31-35 and only 4% of the employees are in age of 35-40 years. Thus the majority of the employees are young.
3. It is found that 88.7% of the employees are unmarried, 11.3% of employees are married. It shows that majority of the employees are single.
4. 58% of the employees have experience of less than 1 year, 12% of them have 1-3 years of experience, 24% of employees have 3-7 years of experience and 6% of them have more than 7 years experience.
5. Employees are categorized based on three levels of stress – low stress, medium stress and high stress. It is inferred from the research that 34% of the employees have low stress, 66% have high stress and none of them have medium stress.

(a) Gender and level of stress

From the data collected, 63.16% of male respondents have high level of stress and 36.84% of males have low stress levels. Most of the female respondents (75%) have high stress levels and 25% have low stress levels.

It can be inferred that both male and female employees experience high levels of job stress.

(b) Marital status and level of stress

From the data collected, 65.42% of the respondents who are unmarried, have high stress while 34.58% of them have low stress. Also, 70.58% of married have stress and 29.42% have low stress.

It can be inferred that married employees comparatively experience high stress than unmarried.

(c) Experience and level of stress

From the data collected, 75.86% of the respondents having less than 1 year experience, have high stress and 24.14% have low stress. In the category of 1-3 years of experience, 33.34% have low stress and 66.66% have high stress. In the category of 3-7 years of experience, 50% have low stress and 50% have high stress. Respondents with more than 7 years of experience, 66.66% feel low stress and 33.34% feel high stress.

It can be inferred that respondents with less experience have high levels of stress.

Based on chi-square test, chi-square value is 0.000 which is significant. Hence, null hypothesis is rejected, and so, it can be inferred that there is significant relationship between experience and stress.

(d) Age and level of stress

Of those in the age group of 20-25, 30.55% of respondents feel low stress and 69.45% of them feel high stress. In the age group of 26-30, 44.44% feel low stress and 55.56% feel high stress. In the age group of 31-35, 33.33% feel low stress and 66.67% feel high stress. While the respondents in the age group of 36-40, 50.0% feel low stress and 50.0% feel high stress.

It can be inferred that young employees experience more stress than aged employees.

❖ Self Esteem and level of stress

From the data collected, respondents with low-self esteem, 44.44% feel low level of stress and 55.56% feel high stress. Among respondents with medium self esteem 30.31% feel low stress and 69.69% feel medium stress. On the other hand, among respondents with high self esteem, 37.5% feel low stress and 62.5% feel high stress.

It can be inferred that employees with all levels of self-esteem contribute more to high stress than low stress.

Based on chi-square test, chi-square value is 0.129, which is not significant. Hence the stated hypothesis "There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and stress" is accepted. That is each variable doesn't influence each other.

❖ Personal health and Gender

(a) Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis was carried out to determine which of the Personal Health variables among males explain more about stress. R2 value is 0.374 which means 37.4% of variants on stress is explained by Beer, Painkiller, Pan Pouches, Food Overweight, Safety and First aid. The most contributed variable is Beer. Beta value is 0.375, the obtained "t" value is 6.079 is highly significant.

(b) Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis was carried out to determine which of the Personal Health variables among females explain more about stress. R2 value is 0.753 which means 75.3% of variants on stress is explained by time spent with family, TV, exercise, Pain killer, long hours and desk work. The most contributed variable is time spent with family. Beta value is 0.556, the obtained "t" value is 5.590, is highly significant. Therefore, the hypothesis "there exists a significant difference between Personal health and stress among female is accepted."

❖ Personal health and Marital Status

(a) Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis was carried out to determine which of the Personal Health variables explain more about stress among unmarried. R2 value is 0.261 which means 26.1% of variants on stress is explained by Beer, Cigarettes, Long hours, Sleep, Stairs climbed, Fall sick, Pan Pouches, Hard Liquor and Depression. The most contributed variable is Beer. Beta value is 0.290, the obtained "t" value is 4.916 is highly significant. Therefore, the hypothesis "there exists a significant difference between Personal health and stress among unmarried is accepted."

(b) Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis was carried out to determine which of the Personal Health variables explain more about stress among married. R2 value is 1.000 which means 100% of variants on stress is explained by Long working hours, Time spent with family, Anxiety, Task completion, TV, Pain killer, Cigarettes, Sleep, Exercise, Pan Pouches and Depression. The most contributed variable is Long hours of work. Beta value is 0.726, the obtained "t" value is 5.980 is highly significant. Therefore, the hypothesis "there exists a significant difference between Personal health and stress among married is accepted."

RECOMMENDATIONS

To overcome stress, the gold collar employees could cope with role stress by adopting 'approach' strategies, which confronts the problem of stress of a challenge, and increase the capability of dealing with it.

Social and emotional support should be made available to employees. They should be allowed to maintain close interpersonal relationships with peers, immediate boss, subordinates and family, which would help them to effectively cope with stress.

IT companies should play a charismatic role in envisioning, empowering and energizing their employees.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Stress is the concept given much importance in any organization because it creates high impact on the individual performance and the overall performance of the organization. Roles are critical in integrating employees with their organization. The study reveals that organizational role stress contributes high stress among IT professionals. In the present day, gold collar employees are constantly met with problems of stress and strain in everyday life, because of high-pressure environment of working and living and they easily fall victims to disease and illness. Therefore these employees need to be treated differently. HR strategies must be relaxed and should be designed with proper understanding of their expectations and unique preference that demonstrates proactive strategy. With proper stress combating techniques individuals as well as organizations can become happy and healthy.

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