

Stress Management

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Abstract— The multinational culture, seamless borders, increasing exposure, and expectations have resulted in a competitive market arena. This demands better performance, higher scores, and improved achievements. Everyone is struggling to excel. All this has resulted in an environment of anxiety, uncertainty, pressure, and tension. This mental state of tension is more specifically known as 'Stress'. Stress is, in fact, our body's automatic reaction to some opportunity, challenge, difficulty, ambiguity, or trauma in life. This has become so prevalent and unavoidable these days that it is often considered normal. Everyone has to deal with it, but different people have different ways to deal with and manage it. Some may perform better in a stressful situation whereas some may collapse. Generally, it is considered a negative emotion and adversely affects the physical, psychological, and professional well-being of people. Along with the well-being of people, it also affects their behaviour and performance at work. So, it is a matter of concern not only for the general people or the employees but also the employers and the organizations. Given the prevalence of stress and its impact on our day-to-day lives, it is important to understand various aspects of stress so that people can benefit from learning about their condition. By understanding the status, they can initiate take action to control or manage it.

Key Words: Anxiety, Anger, Distress, Eustress, Mental and Emotional Wellbeing, Positive Experience Index (PEI), Swamped Stress, Worry.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is notably a universal phenomenon and has become an inevitable part of everyone's life nowadays. All human beings, irrespective of the differences among them, experience it sometimes during their lives. The level of uncertainty in each field, peer pressure, competition, shortage of resources, and various professional and personal factors are among the major stressor of the current times. The increasing population and availability of qualified professionals offering their services in the job market have increased the pressure on scarce resources and limited employment opportunities. So, there is a

mad rush to prove themselves among the millennials. This has resulted in tough competition, a sense of rivalry among them, and increasing frustration, anger, and anxiety. Almost everyone, be it the students, the working population, the job aspirants, the managers, the officials, or the businessmen is facing the stress of one kind or the other.

Stress, in a literal sense, is a force exerted on any object that tends to change the originality of that object. In terms of organizational culture, stress can be defined as a state of being, in which the efficiency, productivity, behaviour, and conduct of a person change because he is exposed to various challenges and works under a lot of pressure. All this changes the way, he feels, behaves, acts, or performs. It can be understood as a sense of mental and physical unease or turbulence. It may result from unpleasant thoughts, an uncontrollable happening, or a situation that makes him feel restless, irritated, angry, sad, nervous, or burnt out. Thus 'Stress can be defined as the body's reaction to an event, thought, feeling, situation, pressure or challenge'. Everyone experiences stress, and to a great extent, it has become a normal and unavoidable part of human life. It can be positive (known as eustress) which helps to excel and achieve better. It may be due to an upcoming event, performance, wedding, or the holidays about which people get excited, and motivated but stressed as well. On the other hand, negative stress (known as distress) causes anxiety, unease, concern, and continuous pressure leading to various physical, mental, behavioural, and professional challenges. Though stress, generally, is used to refer to the second one.

WORLDWIDE IMPACT OF STRESS

Stress is one of the most common negative emotions, affecting almost one out of three, irrespective of age, sex, region, religion, caste, or creed. The widespread prevalence of this state of mind forces us to consider it more seriously and take the required action to control it.

According to 'The State of Global Workplace report 2022', the Stress (or negative emotions, or low positive emotions) experienced by the world's workers was at 43%, this percentage went even higher in 2021 to 44%

of the workers experiencing stress regularly, impacting the workplace effectiveness.

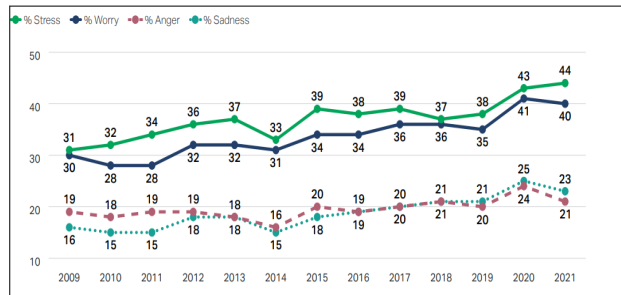


Fig 1- Daily Negative Emotions experienced by the worldwide workers

The above diagram shows that negative emotion including stress is impacting the lives of people all over the globe and is continuously on a rise. Globally, almost 35% of people in general are experiencing a lot of stress (lowest positive experience or high negative emotions) during their daily routine.

There is a decline in the average PEI all over the world, indicating an increase in low or negative emotions and feelings. Stress being an important constituent of negative emotions is also on a rise. The Trend Line shown below depicts the year-wise PEI status of the Lowest Positive Index worldwide.

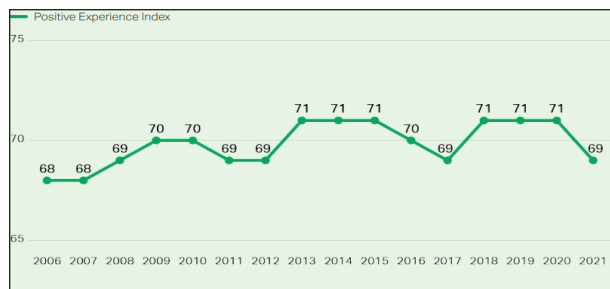


Fig 2- Average Positive experience index worldwide (PEI)

Moreover, the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of people has further worsened the situation over the past years. Following are the countries with the lowest positive experience index according to Gallup 2022 survey.

Lowest Positive Experiences (high on Stress, Sadness, Anger or Pain) country wise

Country	Positive Experience Index (PEI)
1. Georgia	60
2. India	60
3. Morocco	60
4. Sierra Leone	60
5. Ukraine	60
6. Algeria	58

7. Bangladesh	58
8. Jordan	58
9. Tunisia	57
10. Nepal	53
11. Egypt	52
12. Turkey	42
13. Lebanon	37
14. Afghanistan	32

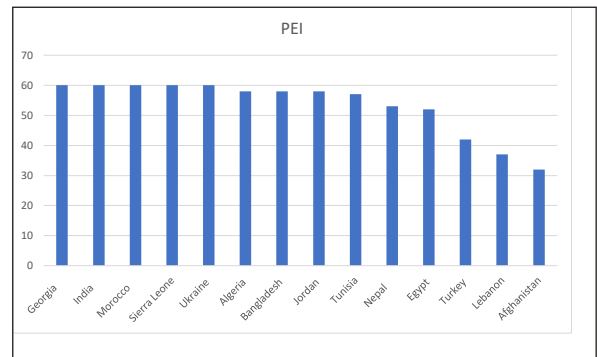


Fig 3- Lowest PEI Countries Worldwide

The Positive Experience Index scores (higher the better) globally ranged from the highest 85 in Panama to the lowest 32 in Afghanistan, the lowest score that Gallup has measured for any country till now. Where the higher scores positive score points to the fact that positive emotions are more common in a particular country than negative emotions. These scores are based on the people's perceptions of different countries about their emotions, freedom, and their living standards. This leads to increase the concern to understand the most common stressors and develop suitable stress management techniques to live stress free and happy life.

CAUSES OF STRESS

Although many people experience stress in their day-to-day routine, the cause of the stress may vary from person to person.

Whatever causes your stress, might likely be something very familiar to you or completely unknown to you. Moreover, sometimes what causes your stress, may not be a stressor for someone else because of the differences in the perceptions of the two! For instance, one person may get upset when he got stuck in a traffic jam, whereas another might just switch on his favourite music and start relaxing in the middle of the jam by counting it as a mild disruption. But on a serious note, it causes more harm than one may think. According to the Gallup report 2022, stress levels have culminated as reported by the respondents (44% of people reported their stress at a workplace for most of the time during the day).

So given the damages, it may cause to your professional or personal life; it is very important to understand the causes of stress and chalk out a road map to manage and control it to the extent possible.

The most common causes of stress are:

1. Relationship Stress

We all are social beings. We need relations at every stage of our lives. Our parents, siblings, life partners, kids, friends, co-workers, social networking friends, etc. all are an important part of our lives. We want to have healthy and cordial relations with them. But the difference of opinions, communication gaps, misunderstandings, lack of time, unmet expectations, etc. create problems and cause stress. The stress caused due to these relations put us under constant psychological pressure and affects our mental, physical, and professional well-being. Moreover, this may lead to relationship failure, or adversely affect our performance at work or our appraisal or under extreme circumstances, we may lose our job.

2. Parenting Stress

This kind of stress is very common these days because almost in every household, both parents are professionally qualified and working. They often find themselves coping with their hectic schedules, managing their professional demands, household chores, and the requirements of the kids. Even though they try to maintain a work-life balance, still quite often they experience high levels of stress in bringing up their kids and justifying their job responsibilities. The prolonged results in their poor performance, frustration, arrogant behaviour, and conflict in their relations. Moreover, the kids also feel deprived of their parent's time and attention and develop various personality and behavioural disorders.

Single parenting is also an added concern for parenting stress, and it is on a rise these days.

3. Professional Stress

The professional work environment has changed drastically after the introduction of multinationals in our country. No doubt, professionals have a lot of exposure and opportunities these days but are also exposed to exorbitant professional competition and rivalry, creating a lot of stress. Moreover, after the digital revolution and the post-pandemic new normal, there are no defined working hours. Rather, the working hours have stretched into the personal time and space of the people, leaving behind very less or no time for self or family.

According to the 2022 Gallup report, based on a survey of 112,312 business units. The main causes of feeling “burned out” at work are unclear commands and lack

of necessary support from managers, unfair treatment at workplace, excessive workload, and unjustified timeline. Moreover, the survey reports that the women employees reported higher levels of stress compared to their counterparts consistently across the globe.

The person with professional stress experiences anxiety, depression, mood swings, frustration, lack of trust, and chronic fatigue leading to poor performances, low efficiency, accidents, conflicts, lack of coordination, blame game, and a lot more. This stress affects the personal well-being and the health of the person along with affecting his efficiency and productivity at work. Furthermore, the adverse impact of workplace stress impacts the employer as well because happy and satisfied workers may increase profits by up to 23% compared to those with ‘stressed’ employees (Gallup 2022 report) because of higher efficiency at work, lower accidents, absenteeism, and turnover.

4. Financial Stress

Money is one of the main causes of stress. Shortage of funds can be a big reason for continuous stress. People need funds for everything starting from necessities to luxuries. It is needed in all walks of life. Moreover, the requirement of finance is continuously increasing due to the increasing cost of living and to maintain a standard of living. According to the Gallup report 2022, from a global perspective, only 22% of people felt they were comfortably living on their current income.

Furthermore, it is also required to build a public image and face peer pressure. Lack of funds may create a lot of stress which may express itself through chronic headaches, upset stomach, high blood pressure, insomnia, consistent lack of well-being, and frequent arguments and conflicts with loved ones.

5. Swamped stress

This is a very recent but culminating cause of stress. Nowadays people, especially the millennials, are getting overloaded with so much to manage that they just get strangled by stress. They are busier than ever to meet the increasing demands of their profession, family, and kids and to meet financial expectations of themselves and family. In some cases, busyness is due to some urgency or important work to be done, such as the need to earn more to meet the necessities of kids and family. But some other times, it may be due to a perfectionist attitude, unnecessary competition, an inferiority complex, peer pressure, or some guilt, etc. All of this leaves little time for the self or family, which further leads to various health issues, and family or social issues, adding to the stress in their lives.

Along with the above-mentioned causes, there are some less severe but routine-type stressors causing regular inconveniences. They may include indiscipline, mismanagement of things, postponing work, forgetfulness, etc. These are quite insignificant hindrances, but their frequency may become a major cause of unease, anger, irritation, and anxiety affecting physical, mental, and professional efficiency and well-being.

CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

Stress has a much deeper and more severe impact on the lives of people than one can think. Though it affects different people in different ways and gets reflected through their physical body ailments, mental issues, thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. The stress also deteriorates efficiency, productivity, conduct at work or home and their life as a whole.

Therefore, it is very important to understand and identify the causes as well as symptoms of stress so that timely action may be taken to manage it efficiently.

1. Physiological Out-Turn

Stress affects our bodies in more than one way. Depending upon varying personality types, people may experience frequent headaches, high blood pressure, muscle pain, and other related muscle problems. Under highly stressful situations body may collapse and one may experience as severe symptoms as a heart or brain stroke taking a toll on their life.

2. Psychological Out-Turn

Stress may result in various psychological reverberations like chronic tension, mood swings, irritability, aggression, job dissatisfaction, insomnia, depression, Emotional fatigue, etc. All these may result in mental, physical, and professional collapses.

3. Behavioural Out-Turn

Negative stress, also known as distress, unfavourably affects the way people interact and behave with others. It impairs their ability to remember vital information, work-related efficiency, and take timely and effective decisions. It also leads to frequent mistakes and accidents at the workplace. Stressed-out people generally misuse authority and shirk responsibility, and their absenteeism from the office increases because the stress results in a varying degree of physical and mental sickness. The general stress reaction is either fight or flight. Absenting from work or avoiding responsibility, is a way of temporarily avoiding a stressful situation to find time to strengthen and revitalize themselves, which is considered as 'flight' mode. Whereas aggression is considered a fight reaction to stress more

often resulting in verbal conflicts or sometimes leading to workplace hostility as well.

4. Quality of Work Life

Low quality of work-life or job burnout is a recently identified special type of work-related stress. It may be defined as the quality of an employee's work-life in an organization.

To some extent, it may be affected by the core characteristics of a person such as personality traits, cultural background, family life, etc. It is a type of chronic physical or emotional fatigue resulting in reduced efficiency, poor sense of accomplishment, and a feeling of lost personal identity. Excessive work pressure, increasing work demands, lack of role clarity, communication gap, biased behaviour at work, etc. results in interpersonal and role-related stressors and hence become the major causes of job burnout.

According to Michelle Cadieux in his '29+ Latest workplace Statistics, 2022' reports cited that Employees experiencing a lot of Daily stress - 44%

The topmost reasons for workplace stress as cited by employees

- Toxic corporate cultures as a reason for quitting jobs- 62% of employees
- Close Monitoring causing stress -60% of people
- Pay package hasn't kept up with inflation- 71%
- Financial concerns -31%
- Work-life balance -29%
- Feeling stress from reasons outside work -29%

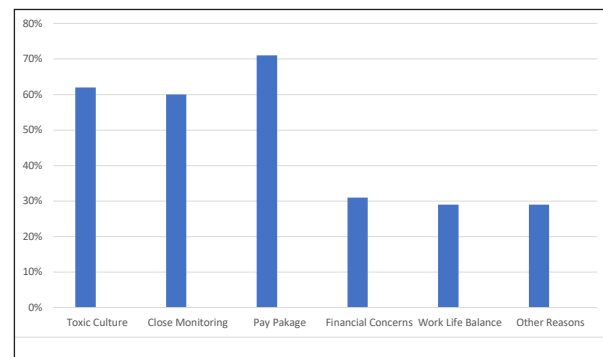


Fig 4- Topmost reasons for Workplace Stress

QWL leads to satisfied and motivated employees which results into improved productivity and other business outcomes. It also solves the problem of job burnout, employee turnover, and absenteeism. Hence, QWL benefits both the employees (their personal and professional lives) and the organizations. So, it is good

for every employer to look for the specific reasons for job burnout in their organizations and find out the ways to correct them.

Life Changes

Certain life-changing events such as physical injury or illness, death of loved ones, loss of job, divorce, etc. can trigger acute stress and adversely impacts the mental and emotional wellbeing of a person along with affecting his productivity at work.

Stress Management

After understanding how widespread and harmful stress is, it has become important to look forward to managing it in such a way that its impact can be minimized both for the employee and employer. Stress management means devising ways to deal with stress so that its unfavourable effects on the health, performance, efficiency, and conduct of the person may be eradicated or at-least minimized and he may become a healthier, happier, and more efficient person. Understanding one's stress and its causes are the first step toward its management. The process of stress management comprises a range of strategies to deal with it and minimize its impact on one's life. Following are some approaches to stress management.

Approaches of Stress Management

1) Time management

People have various responsibilities which need their time and attention. Time management helps to prioritize tasks and ensure the timely fulfilment of professional and personal commitments. Failing to do this gives a lot of stress. So, it is important to learn time management techniques to help to manage a lot of stress.

2) Problem-Solving and Decision-making skills

Problems are an inevitable part of life. No one can run away from problems, so it is important to learn problem-solving and decision-making skills. These skills give a lot of empowerments and help to prevent unnecessary stress. When you are capable to handle critical situations and take timely decisions, you become more efficient and confident. So, in that case, stress becomes easy to manage.

3) Work-life balance

Recent research indicates that having a proper work-life balance can significantly reduce stress in the workplace and your heart. Work-life balance means balancing the time between your professional requirements (work) and other personal aspects of life like spending time with your loved ones, doing things you like, attending to the household chores, etc. It is also about creating a supportive and healthy work environment so that the

employees have a balance between work and personal life resulting into better employee performance, higher productivity, and loyalty.

4) Stress management Workshops

These workshops train employees and managers about the ways to recognize and manage stress. After the workshop, the employees will be able to identify the symptoms of their stress such as increased frustration, anger, chronic headaches lack of concentration, insomnia, poor

productivity, etc. once they recognize the causes, the managers can help them to relieve their workplace stress.

5) Empathetic Attitude

Developing a culture of empathy and understanding in the organization can be a good idea to reduce the level of stress. Because empathetic attitude helps a person, both the employer as well as employee, to understand the problems of others and help them solve their problems by giving a helping hand. This will lead to a supportive and collaborative workplace and help to reduce workplace stress.

6) Reassess your standards

The concept of perfection is always luring and commended. In a mad rush to be perfect in everything they do, people are unduly adding lot of stress for themselves. But it's not good to penalize yourself for the sake of perfectionism. Rather it's better to readjust your performance standards to a legitimate and rational level to control your stress levels. Furthermore, working in a stress-free environment would rather result in improving your performance.

7) Developing tolerance to ambiguity and adversity

Ambiguity, uncertainty, and adversity are a part of the personal as well as professional world. So instead of getting stressed, it is better to develop resilience skills to handle them.

8) Communication

Open and honest communication is a key to various problems both at work and in personal lives. The communication gap or misinformation may lead to a lot of confusion and conflict in personal as well as professional relations. Healthy and balanced relations are our strength and help to enhance our professional productivity along with personal well-being.

9) Mindfulness based stress reduction techniques

It is helpful for people to learn and practice mindfulness-based meditation and relaxation techniques for clarity of thought, enhanced tranquillity, a balanced mind, and stress-free life.

It is clear that, stress has crept into the daily lives of the masses and becoming a silent killer. The only way to protect the overall well-being of people is to understand the causes of stress and choose the best way to manage it so that it does not adversely hamper their efficiency & productivity at work, and it does not shatter their mental, physical, and emotional well-being.

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