



WORK, STRESS, HEALTH AND SOCIAL ECONOMIC STATUS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the extent to which work, stress affect the socio-economic status. Stress is a general term applied to various psychologic and physiologic pressures experienced or felt by people throughout their lives. Stress is defined as “A state of psychological and physiological imbalance resulting from the disparity between situational demand and the individual’s ability and motivation to meet those needs”. Stress can be positive or negative. There are many causes of stress at work or in organization. Socio-economic status encompasses not just income but also educational attainment socio-economic status affects overall human functioning our physical and mental health. Work is central to the psychological health and well being of individuals and communities. Vocational and industrial organizational psychology have demonstrated the importance of work and how it promotes connection to the broader social and economic world. Multiple factors can affect the physical health and psychological well-being of workers Research indicates that job strain and repetitive and hazardous work conditions may have detrimental effects on physical health. Work stress has been identified as risk factor for hypertension, diabetes, upper extremity, musculoskeletal problems, back problems and cardiovascular disease. Social and familiar support is essential to the psychological well-being of those under job strain.

Keywords : Stress, Socio-Economic Status, Physical Health, Psychological Health

What is the Stress?

Stress is a general term applied to various psychologic (mental) and physiologic (bodily) pressures experienced or felt by people throughout their lives.

Definition of Stress

Stress is defined as “A state of psychological and physiological imbalance resulting from the

disparity between situational demand and the individual’s ability and motivation to meet those needs”

Dr. Hans Selye one of the leading authorities on the concept of stress, described stress as “The rate of all wear and tear caused by life”



Stress can be positive or negative

1. Stress is good when the situation offers an opportunity to a person to gain something it acts as a motivator for peak performance.
2. Stress is negative when a person faces social, physical, organizational and emotional problems.

Factors that are responsible for causing stress are called stressors.

Causes of Stress

The major causes of stress at work or in organization.

1. Career Concern : If an employee feels that he is very much behind in the corporate ladder, then he may experience stress. If he seems that there are no opportunities for self-growth. He may experience stress. Hence unfulfilled career expectations or the significant source of stress.
2. Role Ambiguity : It occurs when the person doesn't know what he supposed to do on the job. His tasks and responsibilities

are not clear. The employee is not sure what he is expected to do. It creates confusion in the minds of the worker and results in stress.

3. Rotating work shifts : Stress may occur in those individuals who work on different work shifts. Employees may be expected to work on day shift for some days and then on the night shift. That may create problems in adjusting to the shift timings and it can affect not only personal life but also family life of the employee.
4. Role Conflict : It takes place when people have different expectations from the person performing a particular role. It can also occur if the job is not as per expectation or when a job demands a certain type of behavior that is against moral values.
5. Occupational Demands : Some jobs are more demanding than others. Jobs that involve risk, and danger are more stressful. Research findings indicate job that cause stress needs



constant monitoring of equipments and devices unpleasant physical conditions, making decisions etc.

6. Lack of participation in Decision making : Many experienced employees feel that management should consult them on matters affecting their jobs. In reality, the superiors hardly ask the concerned employees before taking a decision. That develops a feeling of being neglected, which may lead to stress.
7. Work overload : Excessive workload leads to stress as it puts a person under tremendous pressure.
Work overload may take two different forms.
 - Qualitative Work overload implies performing a job that is complicated or beyond the employee's capacity.
 - Quantitative work overload is a result of many activities performed in a prescribed time.
8. Work under load : In this, case too little work or very easy work

is expected on the part of the employee. Doing less work or jobs of routine and simple nature would lead to monotony and bore dorm, which can lead to stress.

9. Poor working conditions : Employees may be subject to poor working conditions. It would include bad lighting and ventilation, unhygienic sanitation facilities, excessive noise, and dust, presence of toxic gasses and fumes, inadequate safety measures etc. All these unpleasant conditions create physiological and psychological imbalance in humans thereby causing stress.
10. Lack of Group cohesiveness : Every group is characterized by its cohesiveness, although they differ widely in its degree. Individuals experience stress when there is no unity among work group members. There are mistrust, jealousy, frequent quarrels, etc. in groups and this lead to stress to employees.
11. Interpersonal and Intergroup conflict : These conflicts take



place due to differences in perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs between two or more individuals and groups. Such conflicts can be a source of stress for group members.

12. Organizational changes : when changes occur, people have to adopt to those changes and this may cause stress. Stress is higher when changes are significant or unusual like transfer or adoption of new technology.

13. Lack of Social Support : When individuals believe that they have the friendship and support of others at work, their ability to cope with the effects of stress increases. If this kind of social support is not available then an employee experiences more stress.

Following habits can remarkably help to relieve stress.

- Regular Meditation
- Physical exercise
- Balanced diet
- Focused thinking
- Control of anger
- Managing Depression

- Maintaining calmness in stressful situations
- Having a positive attitude towards life
- Harmony towards self and others etc

Socioeconomic status (SES)

Socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses not just income but also educational attainment. Financial security, and subjective perceptions of social and social class. Socioeconomic status can encompass quality of life attributes as well as the opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society. Poverty, specifically is not a single factor but rather is characterized by multiple physical and psychosocial stressors. Further SES is a consistent and reliable predictor of a vast array of outcomes across the life span, including physical & psychological health. Thus SES is relevant to all realms of behavioral and social science, including research, practice, education and advocacy.

SES Affects our Society

SES affects overall human functioning our physical and



mental health. Low SES and its correlates. Such as lower educational achievement, poverty, and poor health, ultimately affect our society. Inequities in health distribution resource distribution and quality of life are increasing in the United States and globally. Society benefits from an increased focus on the foundations of Socioeconomic inequities and efforts to reduce the deep gaps in Socioeconomic status in the United States and abroad.

SES impacts Everyone's Level of work stress and Health

Work is central to the psychological health and well being of individuals and communities. Vocational and industrial organizational psychology have demonstrated the importance of work and how it promotes connection to the broader social and economic world, enhances well being and provides a means for individual satisfaction and accomplishment (Blustein 2006, Brown & Lent 2005, Hall 1996, Spector 2005)

Workplace stressors :

Multiple factors can affect the physical health and psychological well-being of workers. Research indicates that job strain and repetitive and hazardous work conditions may have detrimental effects on physical health. Stress experienced and perceived can affect one's psychological well-being. Work stress research has examined the psychological demands of workload. Workers perceived sense of control over their performance safety stressors, work organization and work atmosphere. (Aittomaki Lahelma & Roos 2003, Clarke 2006, Dembe Erickson Delbos & Banks 2005, Gillen Bultz, Gassel Kirsch & Vaccuro 2002, Landsbergis Cahil & Schnall 1999, MacDonald Harenstam, Warren & Punnett 2008)

Health

Work stress has been identified as a risk factor for hypertension, diabetes, upper extremity, musculoskeletal problems, back problems and cardiovascular disease.



- High demands and low decision control have predicted heart disease in white collar workers (Kuper & Marmot 2003)
 - Job strain has been shown to increase blood pressure in men of low SES. (Landsbergis, Schnall, Pickering, Warron & Schwartz 2003)
 - Exposure to cumulative job strain in white color workers revealed modest increase in systolic blood pressure (Gulmont et al. 2006)
 - Fatigue & sleep deprivation are correlated to mandatory and voluntary overtime and are also associated with work related accidents in blue collar workers. (Barger et al, 2005, Eochrane 2001)
 - Smoking prevalence among blue collar workers is double that of white collar workers. This difference may be explained by the additional psychological stressors low income brings. (Barbeau, Krieger & Scoobader 2004, Sorensen, Barbeau Hunt & Emmons 2004)
 - Male infertility has been associated with job burnout for persons working in industry and construction. (Sheiner, Canel, Potashnik & Shoham Vardi 2002)
- Family Vs Work conflict (Managing Multiple Roles)**
- In addition to workplace social supports, familiar support is essential to the psychological well-being of those under job strain. Those managing multiple roles may be at added risk of stress due to competing responsibilities at work and at home. Higher incidence of children with chronic health conditions, learning difficulties and child care issues create the added need for flexibility as parents try to balance these conflicting responsibilities. (Richman, Johnson & Buxham 2006) Quality child and elder care programs are needed to help caretakers fulfill their obligations at work and at home.
- Lower wage workers are more likely to work for small businesses and therefore less likely to have access to health insurance paid vacations, and



sick days. They are also less likely to be allowed to use paid time off for sick child care. (Richman et al. 2006)

- Higher rates of job dissatisfaction and job related stress have been observed in workers with more frequent overtime requirements, little managerial support and less work flexibility. (Richman et. al 2006)
- A study of dual-earner middle-class families revealed that the majority are not pursuing two high-powered careers in order to reduce stress and balance life-work responsibilities. (Becker & Moen 1999)
- Lower wage workers are more likely to work part-time at lower hourly rates, with few to no benefits and often mandatory part-time schedules-all of which create work life challenge for families and single parents. (Richaman et. al. 2006)
- Research on the attitudes of employers revealed that the majority did not regard flexibility as an option for their

low-wage workers and expressed little sympathy for the employees need. (Richaman et. al. 2006)

Job Insecurity & Unemployment

Job insecurity is the perception of being threatened by job loss (Mohr 2000) which can have consequences on an individual's health and well-being.

- The fear of job loss has a significant impact on physical and mental health : the effect on mental health is greater than the effect on physical health. (Sverke, Hellgren & Naswall 2002)
- A study found that physical health-decline was related to fear of job loss in blue collar workers automobile workers in particular. (Heaney, Israel & House 1994)
- Higher blood pressure for women and weight loss among those with higher job insecurity was found in blue collar workers. (Ferrie, Shipley, Stansfeld & Marmot 2002)
- Involuntary job loss for older adults was connected to health



declines and even morbidity.

(Wilson & Mossakowski 2009)

- Unemployment not only correlates with distress but also causes it. (Karsten & Moser, 2009) The negative effects of unemployment are illustrated by declines in psychological and physical health. (Wanberg 2012)

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