

## THE PROBLEMS OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS, CAUSES AND COPING STRATEGIC

### Introduction

One of the new complications of life is the existence of stress in working environment. During the recent century, the very nature of the work has accepted lots of alterations and these changes are still advancing with an indescribable speed. Variations are evident in all areas of employment, ranging from the responsibilities of artists to surgeons and have overshadowed everyone's careers so that no one in any field is exempted from this, not only sales managers but also Chief Executing Officers and everyone else are required to meet and accept these changes. Human personalities are such that inevitably, changes lead to stress. Occupational stress is one of the main reasons for the reduction in production, staff absenteeism and as a result an abrupt collapse of organizations. Excessive overtime working and insufficiency of the trainings needed are among the hidden reasons for turnover which are caused by high levels of stress in working conditions (1).

One of the definitions of the occupational stress is as follows: "Generally, accumulation of known factors or conditions commonly associated with stress." Another definition of occupational stress is a stress a particular individual is undergoing over a certain job. In the latter definition, individual characteristics as well as both occupational factors have been implicated. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health defines the occupational stress as the lack of coordination between the business requirements with the individual capabilities, abilities and wishes.

Special working conditions, expansion of work pressure, and working periods raise mental and physical illnesses (2). Health and Safety Executive regards stress as: reactions during which individuals present against extreme pressures or demands which are in contrary to their expectations (3). Today, job stress has become the most common and costly issue in the workplace and hence, a great deal of most recent researches are dedicated to this problem. Workers Compensation Institute in California reports that stress toll has increased for almost 700 percents between the years 1979 and 1988 (4).

Psychologists from the University of Texas suggested two categories of complications for occupational stress as physiological and psychological effects (4). Cooper & David sons (1987) appended four main sources of occupational stress including: inner factors, organizational role, relations in working conditions, and organizational atmosphere (5).

### Problem Statement

Occupational stress is a phenomenon addressing which is essential in order to maintain the physical and mental well-being and health of people and increasing the efficiency of various organizations. Occupational stress has a variety of sources that can be all divided up into two categories:

1. Individual factors and characteristics
2. Working factors and characteristics (6)
3. Jex & Beehr (1991) classified the reactions expressed by people dealing with stress as the following two elements:
4. Psychological reactions such as anxiety, anger, frustration, and job dissatisfaction
5. Physical reactions such as smoking, high blood pressure, and so on (7).

Ross & Altmaier believe that despite the difficulty of evaluation of the costs of occupational stress, one can achieve assured data about it. They also believe that if we look at this stress from the aspect of reactions shown by individuals regarding their employment conditions, we encounter data illustrating the impacts of common emotional and behavioral reactions with numbers and figures; for instance, alcoholism puts over two hundred million dollars on American industries annually. A mental illness such as depression that may be caused by occupational stress makes damages in forms of medical expenses and loss of working hours and production. Other costs resulting from stress, indeed, evaluate the effects of employees' performances at work, for example, absenteeism from work is estimated as a really costly problem. In fact, four percents of working hours are lost due to employees' absenteeism and the estimated financial loss is millions of dollars. Another effect of occupational stress is the destruction of close family members, particularly wives, children and other relatives that leads to loss of job opportunities and achievements and hurts the quality of life (8). Stress has a close relationship with lack of financial stability and working forces, especially the lack of financial security and its volatilities are among the factors affecting the occupational stress. Nowadays, the economic volatilities exert various influences on global markets and industry, among which one of the most prominent impacts is on manufacturing centers, businesses, markets, and employees at lower levels centers and is a factor for the growth of occupational stress (9).

Cooper & Caret Wright (1996) also believe that each career is a potential environmental source of stress. One of the major types of stress, whose addressing seems of great importance today in order to provide welfare and physical and mental health to individuals and increase productivity in various organizations, is occupational stress. Ross & Altmaier have offered some classification in this field that includes six factors as: inner job, agents, communication in the workplace, career development, organizational factors, and the conflict between work and the house (10). In a survey carried out by Princeton Survey Research Association in 1997, servants have also been under

job stress comparing the previous generation at a degree of three fourth. In 1992, one of the insurance companies of the US reported that 25% of servants know their job as the first factor resulting in stress (11). Occupational stress, depression, and familial crisis are the three major obstacles in organizations. National Mental Health Association knows stress as the source of more than 90% of diseases that costs the organizations a fortune (12). According to Health and Safety Executive's reports, almost half million people in Britain experience stresses resulted by their careers and this leads to lots of illnesses for them and the trend is still upward (13).

Occupational stress has many physical symptoms for individuals. Being disposed to stress for a long period of time leads to numerous physical disorders, as a matter of fact, 70 to 80 percents of illnesses are related to stress like Cornell vascular damage, cancers, Migraines, and warts which all are the most associated with stress. Similarly, high level of stress in women causes Insomnia, wounds, and intense anxiety (14). Documented cases suggest various problems associated with occupational stress and consequently, clarified the need for the research.

### **Causes of Occupational Stress**

Occupational stress is resulted from various sources. These sources can be located either within or outside the organization or can be related to groups affecting employees or the individuals themselves (6). Stressors are variously categorized in researches and are going to be pointed out:

According to a classification, stressors are categorized into four groups:

1. Organizational factors (policies, structures, visual conditions, procedures and processes)
2. Communal factors (lack of group cohesion, lack of social support)
3. Individual factors (Ambiguity and role conflict in organizations, A-type characteristics)
4. Beyond-organizational factors (Social, familial, financial, and technological changes)

Another classification of stressors is as follows:

1. Time stressor factors: These factors refer to high work load and short amount of time, are counted as the most frequent and the most predominant source of stress which are usually faced by managers of companies and organizations. One of main reasons is the sensitivity and awareness of cultures toward time and this sensitivity is increasingly growing on an annual basis and this delicacy to time makes it a stressor. Too much work in the same rank and time pressures as well as psychological and physiological differences lead to stress. Accordingly, employees suppose they are under time pressure and they are forced to meet their responsibilities in a short amount of time and not having the required time to do these tasks is usually harmful (15).
2. Confrontational stressor factors: These are the factors rising from interpersonal interactions which are usually common and similar and mostly are

caused by three types of conflict: Role conflicts in which group members play incompatible roles. Topic or issue conflicts in which the way a problem is defined is controversial. Interaction conflicts in which individuals due to mutual hatred and hostility are defeated from progression and competency in fulfilling the tasks (15). In a survey, confrontational stressors were introduced as the main reason for exhaustion and leaving work. This research was carried out on 1291 employees in 37 organizations of the private sector (6).

3. Positional stressor factors: These factors are originated from living environment and personal circumstances among which one of the major types is unpleasant working conditions. Among the examples of these factors, continuous crisis, long working hours, being isolated from colleagues and quick comprehensive and incremental changes can be named. Downsizing or reorganization done in most of the industrialized nations has been one of the positional stressor factors (15).
4. Expectational stressor factors: These factors are the potentially incredible and unpredictable events whose occurrence threatens us. An unpleasant thing that hasn't happened yet, but may take place, and hence, stress is resulted from fear of its predictive occurrence (16). In a report in 1986, Shayne also determined fear of severe punishment among psychological and physiological pathology of American prisoners in case of Korean War as one the most influencing factors (6). Robert A. Karasek, in 1979, presented the famous control-demand theory. According to this theory, occupational stress occurs when the level of psychological work needs is high and decision domain, i.e. control over work, is limited. Accordingly, some careers have low levels of stress while some have high levels of it. On the other hand, the major dominant work done toward increasing self-control includes encouraging employees to participate in communal work.

Cooper & Cartwright determined six primary stressors related to work that are:

1. Job's internal characteristics
2. Organizational roles
3. Working relationships such as relation with supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates
4. Work promotion
5. Organizational factors such as structure and atmosphere of the organization
6. Work interfering with home

#### **Coping with Occupational Stress**

Surveys done on stress demonstrate this is a growing belief that adjustment is the main factor relating stressors and the stress itself; however, little article has been written about the state of adjustment or major adjustment factors. Similar to the definition of stress, numerous definitions of adjustment are presented that include: Adjustment is defined as a psychoanalytical process, as a

feature, personal characteristics and approach, a kind of position-specific strategy, and as a process. Adjustment is known as a relatively stable characteristic or a sustainable and durable behavior. Regarding the importance of adjusting with occupational stress, the following therapy- learning methods are offered.

### **Applying Transactional Model in Work Environment**

Transaction model considers adjustment as thoughts and actions commenced in a response to a particular confrontation and these thoughts and actions are changed by evaluating efforts and consequences over time. This indicates a dynamic interaction between surroundings and the individual; i.e. the individual does a special assessment from the environment and in contrast, the environment impacts this evaluation. And this illustrates the reality that efforts on a particular matter affect the subsequent evaluations, therefore, increases in efforts are resulted. According to the transaction viewpoint, one can define adjustment as: "Those behavioral and cognitive efforts for controlling, reducing or tolerating the internal requirements that are caused by the work and stressful interaction". Efforts made for the adjustment can be differentiated from the consequences of these efforts mentally (18).

### **Educational Model**

One of the ways to cope with stress is the educational model. This model involves practice, homework and direct guidance. In fact, educational model improves the performance in organizations. Educational approaches make learning faster and more principled for reducing stress in organizations (20).

Training skills in this model include: listening activities, objective questionnaires, providing direct assistance, and applying reflection. In this mode, instructor is responsible for achieving determined educational objectives and tries for success. Organizations' reasons to increase competence, business capabilities, improving motivation and job satisfaction, and solving problems by educating is to direct employees toward increasing productivity. This model states the important cases assisting in lowering occupational stress such as social support, cognitive appraisal and goal orientation that are going to be explained briefly:

### **Social Support**

Usually one of the important indicators of social support at work is relation in the working environment. Those who feel separated from others face lots of obstacles in this manner. One of the most important exercises in this approach is communication skills education. For instance, this is of great use for individuals accepting reports and orders out of the scope of the job and are suffering challenges regarding others' behaviors (20). Social support is important for two reasons: 1) Social support has a direct impact on the moods and behavioral reactions. 2) This acts as a protective shield preventing negative consequences of stressors (21).

One of the ways to increase social support is the use of cognitive schemes which has a direct relation with it. Beliefs and schemes are values and assumptions directing individuals' behaviors. Unless these beliefs are not negative and traumatic, stress is resulted (Piaget, 1971). So, trainings along recognition of negative schemes encourage individuals to lower stress by reducing them. Some of the experts suggest trainings and creation of special courses as the fundament for providing social support (22).

### **Cognitive Appraisal**

This is an adaptation process including attempts against negative feelings and stressful events that are exactly caused by individuals' cognitive appraisal. In the beginning of the evaluation process, they measure the values by the help of lessons. Firstly, mistakes resulted from false recognitions are identified and then, the proper values and assumptions replacing them are evaluated and the resulted differences are figured out. Training leads to applying potential capabilities by individuals by the help of making them aware along the self-identification process (23).

### **Goal Orientation**

In this approach, business objectives need to be clear, special, attractive and most importantly strategic and accessible. Mutually, the objective itself also has a direct impact on individual efforts. If the goals have the required properties and application, individuals are self-directed toward its realization and progress to achieve it. One of the applications of this is that this helps individuals to commit themselves to their trainings and vocation and find the motivation to reach to the goal. Educational model have positive effects on increasing the efficiency and enhancing their motivation to learn resulting in self-belief (24).

Educational model can assist in the reduction of occupational stress by the help of its unique features. This approach offers appropriate therapeutic interventions for different groups. Nevertheless, other factors also intervene in education and treatment that are occasionally out of control such as certain personality characteristics, for example, extraversion, openness to new experiences, dutifulness, etc. One also cannot neglect the various impacts of surroundings as education is not conducted in an ideal situation and great deals of factors take part in it.

Corporate culture demonstrates the influences of adaptation and stress; the structure of organizations or in general the society state solutions for stressful situations, in other words, by changing the institutional culture, occupational stress can be reduced in organizations (25).

### **Conclusion**

Occupational stress is one of the complications of life in this century that creates many obstacles for organizations and even families. Occupational stress is a major reason for the decrease in production, the absence of staff, disintegration and disorganization. Excessive overtime working and



insufficiency of the trainings are among the hidden reasons for turnover which are caused by high levels of stress in working conditions whose existence is due to various factors involved. Among these factors, conflicts among individual needs, individuals' characteristics with working conditions, family environment, external environment and genetics are among the most influencing ones. Occupational stress is the main reason for depression and physical and mental illnesses. There are a lot of methods of psychological learning strategic such as: exchange model, educational model, cognitive assessment, social support, orientation of the goals which all have influential roles.

## References

1. Carsten, J (2006). The 7 hidden reasons employees leave: How to recognise the subtle signs and act before it is too late.
2. Pascale Carayon, Michael J. Smith, Maria C. Haims. (1999). Work Organization, Job Stress and Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders ; by Journal article; Human Factors, Vol. 41.
3. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (2001). Tackling work-related stress: A manager's guide to improving and maintaining employee health and well-being. Suffolk, HSE.
4. Kingama & Mireille, ICN on occupational stress and worker ealth, nursingMatters; 2002; pp;1-5
5. Miller, david (2001). ; Dying to Care? work ,stress and burnout in HIV/ AIDS; Routiedge.Published, (2001). pp :14-27
6. Zahrakar,Kianoosh(1384).Tarining of Stress Inoculation in decrease of psychological disorder (depression, anxiety , burn out , Job dissatisfaction) resulting from job stress of Iran khodro personnel, Ph.D dissertation, Azad university, science and research unit.
7. Jex ,S.M , Beeh,T.A (1991). Emerging theoretical and methodological issues in the study of work related stress. Research in personal and human resources management , pp ; 319
8. Rass& Etal ,job Stress ,Translate by Khajepoor,Gholamreza(1375), First Edition,Tehran: Industrial Management.
9. Nasurudin, Aizzat Mohd ; Ramayah, T. ; Beng, Yeoh Chee (2006). : Immediate Online Access ; Publication: International Journal of Commerce and Management
10. Cooper,C.L., & kare wright ,s.(1996). Mental health and the work stress in place : A Guide for employers. London:HMSO
11. Sauter,etal.stress at work, DHHS (N.I.O.S.H) publication NO; 99-101; pp; 1-11; <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh>
12. Butcher .David R(2007). On-the-Job Stress Tips ; [www.ThomasNet.com](http://www.ThomasNet.com)
13. Jones, J R, Huxtable, C S, Hodgson, J T, Price, M J (2003). Self-Reported Work-Related Illness in 2001/02: Results From A Household Survey. Norwich, HMSO
14. Martin.D. (2007) ; work estress- why your job may be killing you 2007 ; [www.estresshelp.com](http://www.estresshelp.com)
15. Cole D ,Nelson (2001). stress at work; the relationship between hope and health in hospital nurse.psychosotial nursing .pp 7-18
16. Cahill ,Janet & etal (1995) Reducing Occupational Stress ; Department of psychology Rowan College of New Jersey .
17. Cooper,C.L., & kare wright ,s.(1996). Mental health and stress in the work place : A Guide for employers. London:HMSO
18. Lazaruse RL (1966). Psychological stress & coping stress.New york; MC Graw – Hill.
19. Cooper,Cary L.;Philip j.Dewe;Micheal P.O,driscoll (2001). organizations stress : A review & critique of theory ,reserch ,& applicatitios, sage publication ,Inc.
20. Gyllensten, K, Palmer, S (2006). Experiences of coaching and stress in the York: Grove/Atlantic Press.workplace: An interpretative phenomenological analysis, International Coaching Psychology Review, 1 (1) p86-98

21. Boumans, N P G, Landweerd, J A (1992). The role of social support and coping behaviour in nursing work: Main or buffering effect. *Work & Stress*, 6 (2) p191-202
22. Janoff-Bulman, R (1989). Assumptive worlds and the stress of traumatic events: Applications of the schema construct. *Social Cognition*, 7 (2) p113-136
23. Locke, E A, Latham, G P (1990). *A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall .
24. Bandura, A (1977). *Social Learning Theory*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice
25. Lansisalmi, H, Peiro, J.M, Kivimaki, M. (2000). Collective stress and coping in the context of organizational culture. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 9 (4) p527-559

### Մասնագիտական սթրեսի խնդիրները, պատճառները և դրանց վերացման ռազմավարությունը

Ներկայումս ձեռնարկություններում եւ գրասենյակներում գոյություն ունեցող և իր լուծումը չստացած հարցերից է մասնագիտական սթրեսը: Հաշվի առնելով արդյունաբերության և գործարար ոլորտներում տեխնոլոգիական աճը, մասնագիտական սթրեսը դիտարկվում է որպես հիմնական խնդիրներից մեկը: Մասնագիտական սթրեսը ուղեկցվում է տարբեր ֆիզիկական և հոգեբանական հետևանքներով, որն ի վերջո իր բացասական ազդեցությունն է թողնում անձնակազմի հաճախումների վրա, ինչը հանգեցնում է ձեռնարկությունների կողմից կատարվող գերծախսերի և նվազեցնում է արտադրողականությունը: Համաձայն ուսումնասիրությունների, որոշ մասնագիտություններ առաջ են բերում առավելագույն մասնագիտական սթրես, որն իր հերթին բերում է սթրեսի մակարդակի ավտոռեգուլյացիայի աշխատակիցների մոտ: Մասնագիտական սթրեսը պայմանավորված է անհատի կարիքների, նրա ժառանգական առանձնահատկությունների եւ աշխատանքային պայմանների միջև տեղ գտած հակասություններով, ինչպես նաև տվյալ կազմակերպությունում իր զբաղեցրած դերով, աշխատանքի առանձնահատկություններով, աշխատանքային հարաբերությունների, ձեռնարկություններում ինչպես նաև ընտանեկան միջավայրում տիրող մթնոլորտով: Եթե մասնագիտական սթրեսը կրում է երկարատև բնույթ, ապա դա բերում է աշխատանքի վատթարացման և անհատի աշխատանքից ազատման, որը վնասում է թե՛ աշխատակցին և թե՛ ձեռնարկությանը: Ճիշտ վարված հոգեբանական ռազմավարությունը նպաստում է մասնագիտական սթրեսի նվազեցմանը: Այն ներառում է հետևյալը՝ փոխանակման մոդել, կրթական մոդել, կոգնիտիվ գնահատում, սոցիալական աջակցություն և նպատակասլացություն: Տվյալ աշխատանքում հետազոտողների կողմից վերլուծվել և գիտականորեն հիմնավորում են ստացել վերոհիշյալ մեխանիզմները: