

ROLE OF ORGANISATION IN WORK STRESS MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE'S INDIVIDUAL STRESS COPING STRATEGIES: A STUDY OF EMPLOYEES OF GUJARAT

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Abstract

Background: Job satisfaction and employee stress are closely related and instrumental in employee performance. Effective stress coping strategies aid employee retention and full potential of employees is utilized. The study aims to find out the relationship between an employee's stress level and who he finds responsible for managing it. It also aims at finding how employees cope with stress on individual level and his satisfaction with organization's stress management mechanism. **Method:** Quantitative approach was used to collect data of Public and Private sector employees of Gujarat using purposive sampling. 574 responses were collected using structured questionnaire and analyzed by cross-tabulation and cluster analysis using IBM SPSS. **Results:** Most respondents believe it is the joint effort of employee and employer to tackle occupational stress. Individual strategies included listening to music, spending time with family, and watching movies. Most respondents were dissatisfied with the organization's policies, with majorly men being dissatisfied and women being neutral or satisfied.

Keywords: Coping strategy, Employee performance, Occupational stress, Work environment

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INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress can be defined as any psychological or physiological pressure put on the employees because of their job. Job satisfaction and employee stress are closely related and are instrumental in how well an employee performs in the organization. Living a stress-free life is hard, therefore stress becomes a part of everybody's life. There can only be efforts made to minimize the stress and learn how to deal with it. Stressful conditions over a long period of time without good coping mechanism cause variety of physical and mental issues. Such conditions may also encourage habits like smoking, drinking, and drug abuse (Gomathy, 2023). It is essential for the employer to change with the business environment dynamics and understand what employees expect. An employee's occupational stress could be dealt with at two levels - a) On individual level (strategies employed by the employee himself) and b) On organizational level (What the employer does

to take care of his employee's work stress). To perform best to your potential at job it is important to have a good work life balance and good stress coping strategies. When effective stress coping strategies are in place, employee retention becomes easy and full potential of employees towards job could be utilised. This study is conducted to see how employees feel about their organization's current stress management policies and what employees do on their individual level to cope with the work-related stress.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With the increase in complexities and demands of a job in today's world, stress has become an inevitable part of both, employer, and employee's life. The work environment consists of a set of relationships that occur within a workplace between management, colleague and leaders (Noah & Steve, 2012). The employee can perform to his potential when the work environment is good and an environment is good for working when it is healthy, safe, pleasant, and comfortable for the employees (Nanda et al., 2020).

Over the past few decades there has been an increase in the ease of mobility of employees from one job to another. A good organization has to guarantee that its employees are not overworked and should ensure a good work-life balance (Mufida Ahmad et al., 2022). Employees feel satisfied with the job when they have good compensation, job content, promotion opportunities, and good working relationships with colleagues and supervisors (Biaison, 2020). Work stress is an essential aspect for organizations, especially its relation to employee performance; high and good performance can help organizations gain profits and job stress harms employee performance (Kim & Koo, 2017).

It is important to study what employee thinks about organization's policy and how he deals with all the work stress. Some researchers believe that employees can become industrious, constructive, and well-managed under stress and exercises for breathing, progressive relaxation, stretching exercises, walking, and sleeping can help reducing excessive stress (KC, 2023). Some researchers present strategies specific to Indian beliefs like- Yoga Philosophy, Indian Classical Music, and Guided Meditation to control the work stress faced by the employees (Bhattacharya & Ghosh, 2023).

When the environment is positive and stress free, employees are more creative and innovative. Researches prove that organizational climate has a positive and significant influence on innovative behaviour and innovative behaviour in turn has a significant effect on employee performance (Lathifah & Wahyuningsih, 2022). A positive work environment can make employees feel comfortable and supported at work so that employees stay in that organization (Suryathi et al., 2023).

It has been established that stress at workplace cannot be completely eradicated, therefore an attempt should be made to minimise stress to manageable levels. Effective stress management aids in relaxation, enjoyment, and reduction of stress at work which reduces work dissatisfaction, absenteeism, turnover, and low growth, among other things (Suganya, 2022). Social support coming from the workplace is integral in helping the employees cope with stress and managerial support is valued the most whereas formal employee assistance programs were non-existing in almost all the organisations (Sahni, 2020).

A strategy to cope with the occupational stress either at organizational level or at individual level is necessary for an employee to remain sane. (Wafula & Nyaboga, 2019) suggested that the stress coping strategies positively correlated to the employee's performance. Effective coping with stress at work will often require collective and individual actions (Rodríguez et al., 2019). The strategies for reducing stress at workplace, if at all employed by the organization, must be clearly made known to all the employees. Employees who are aware of the measures report significantly higher levels of job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment than those who are not aware of the measures (Pignata et al., 2016).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A problem well defined is half solved, this study aims to understand an employee's mindset about who he puts the onus of managing and resolving work stress. When it is known who should be responsible, steps in the right direction could be taken.

Since every individual is different and has different threshold limits for work pressure, naturally the way they cope with it is different. This study seeks to understand major individual coping strategies of employees.

This study seeks to find the satisfaction level of employees about current occupational stress management policies in the organisation. It is necessary to understand the current situation and what employee expects, in order to take any corrective action.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of this study, an exploratory and Conclusive Research Design was used.

Sampling Design

To obtain our sample, Purposive sampling was used.

A structured questionnaire using google forms was circulated and a sample of 574 public and private sector employees was collected. The sample was collected from Gujarat.

Pilot testing was done for 35 responses to check reliability of the items of the questionnaire. Cronbach Alpha gave the value **0.911** indicating that instrument is reliable.

Research Objectives

To fulfil the aim of this study, following objectives were identified.

1. To determine who should be responsible for managing work stress according to the employee.
2. To find how Employees cope with occupational stress on individual level.
3. To find Employee's satisfaction with organization's stress management mechanism.

Research Tools and Techniques used

TOOLS	METHODS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Microsoft Excel IBM SPSS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequency distribution Cross tabulation Cluster Analysis

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A sample of 574 employees from public and private sector of Gujarat was collected which is analysed first on the basis of their demographic profile and then an objective wise analysis has been done applying cross-tabulation and cluster analysis.

Demographic Profile

Sr. No.	VARIABLE	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
1	Gender	Female: 223 Male: 348 LGBTQ+: 3	Female: 38.9% Male: 60.6% LGBTQ+: 0.5%
2	Age	20-25 year: 227 26-30 year: 158 31-35 year: 89 36-40 year: 41 41-45 year: 23 46-50 year: 14 Above 50: 22	20-25 year: 39.5% 26-30 year: 27.5% 31-35 year: 15.5% 36-40 year: 7.1% 41-45 year: 4% 46-50 year: 2.4% Above 50: 3.8%
3	Qualification	Higher secondary: 18 Graduate: 165 Postgraduate: 275 Professional Degree: 71 Doctoral Degree: 45	Higher secondary: 3.1% Graduate: 28.7% Postgraduate: 47.9% Professional Degree: 12.4% Doctoral Degree: 7.8%
4	Job Location	Ahmedabad: 188 Vadodra: 93 Gandhinagar: 99 Surat: 93 Rajkot: 101	Ahmedabad: 32.8% Vadodra: 16.2% Gandhinagar: 17.2% Surat: 16.2% Rajkot: 17.6%
5	Sector	Public: 168 Private: 406	Public: 29.3% Private: 70.7%

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents were from private sector (70%), most of them were males (60%). LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or community. Except for a few respondents (3%) everybody was either Graduate or more qualified than

a graduate person. The working population in the age group 20- 35 years formed the major portion of respondents(82%). Around 40% of respondents were female employees and 60% were male employees.

OBJECTIVE 1: To determine who should be responsible for managing work stress according to the employee.

To achieve this objective, cross-tabulation using SPSS was run on the data for two statements/questions:

- 1) I am very stressed because of my work. [Rating from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5)]
- 2) According to you, who is responsible for managing an employee's work- related stress?

The summary of responses is presented in the table below.

		RESPONSIBILITY			TOTAL
		EMPLOYER	EMPLOYEE	JOINT EFFORTS OF BOTH	
STRESS RATING	1.00	19	9	49	77
	2.00	21	6	88	115
	3.00	22	22	164	208
	4.00	11	10	88	109
	5.00	11	7	47	65
Total		84	54	436	574

Table 2 shows that **436 (76%)** out of 574 respondents feel that it should be joint responsibility of both Employer and the employees to manage work stress of employees. Only a few respondents **54 (9.4%)** feel that it should be sole responsibility of the employee to manage occupational stress and **84 (14.6%)** respondents put the sole responsibility on the employer. The statistics show that employers should and must do something in their organization to help employees relieve the occupational stress faced by him because of the work environment. It can be clearly seen from the data that a huge number of respondents hold the employer responsible for handling and managing employee stress, either solely or in joint capacity.

OBJECTIVE 2: To find how Employees cope with occupational stress on individual level.

COPING STRATEGY USED BY THE EMPLOYEES	RESPONSES		Percent of Cases
	Count	Percent	
Exercising	229	12.4%	39.9%
Listening to music	381	20.6%	66.4%
Shopping	120	6.5%	20.9%
Binge eating	96	5.2%	16.7%
Watching movies/series	273	14.8%	47.6%
Spending time with family/friends	323	17.5%	56.3%
Keeping a journal	44	2.4%	7.7%
Meditation	139	7.5%	24.2%
Travelling	158	8.6%	27.5%
Smoking/Drinking	62	3.4%	10.8%
Other	21	1.1%	3.7%
TOTAL	1846	100.0%	321.6%

The employee at individual level, tries to cope up with the occupation stress and resort to various activities and develop various habits. Table 3 shows some the activities an employee indulges in, to keep the work pressure to the minimum. The most popular choices that can be observed from the table are - *Listening to music (20.6%)*, *Spending time with family/ friends (17.5%)* and *Watching movies/ series (14.8%)*. It can be observed that these are some of the stress busters for the employees. The employer can hold some events or dedicate a day/some hour of a day to those activities to keep the employee's mind stress free. Some of the strategies could be - playing soothing music in the office, having a movie screening occasionally or enjoying one episode daily during lunch of any sitcom. Employers can come up with their own innovative ideas.

OBJECTIVE 3: To find Employee's satisfaction with organization's stress management mechanism.

To examine how employees feel about the organization's stress management mechanism, cluster analysis has been done.

Cluster analysis is a categorization approach where the emerging groups are Heterogeneous in nature when compared with other groups and Homogeneous in terms of intra group composition. The grouping can be done for objects, individuals, and entities.

The respondents were divided into different clusters based on the homogeneity of their demographic and psychographic characteristics to examine how employees feel about the organization's stress management mechanism.

The first step in this process was to carry out **Hierarchical cluster analysis** on the characteristics of sample respondents to group them into homogenous clusters. The results of *agglomeration schedule* identified three clusters. To validate the results and obtain exact cluster membership for each respondent, **K-Means cluster analysis** was carried out leading to three clusters with the cluster compositions as mentioned in the table below.

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF CASES IN EACH CLUSTER

Cluster	Number	No. of Members	Percentage
	1	225	39.2%
2	111	19.3%	
3	238	41.5%	
Valid	574		
Missing	0.00		

Result of cluster analysis show that Cluster 3 is the largest cluster comprising of around **42%** of the public and private sector respondents, followed by Cluster 1 (**39.2%**) and the smallest being Cluster 2 (**19.3%**). The similarities and differences in the demographic structure of the clusters are summarized in table below:

TABLE 5: DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF CLUSTERS (N = 574)

Characteristics	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
Membership	225	111	238
Female	40.4%	45.9%	34%
Male	59.6%	54.1%	66%
Age	20-25 year	20-25 year	20-30 year
Qualification	Postgraduate	Postgraduate	Postgraduate
Sector	Private	Private	Private
Job location	Ahmedabad	Ahmedabad	Ahmedabad

The table above shows the category of variable that was chosen by maximum respondents in that cluster for example, in Cluster 1- maximum respondents are from Private sector in Ahmedabad and they are postgraduates aged between 20 to 25 years.

To understand the similarities between respondents *within the cluster*, frequency of responses on each anchor of the rating scale was calculated.

TABLE 6: RESPONDENT'S VIEW ABOUT STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICIES IN THE ORGANIZATION

DESCRIPTION	CLUSTER 1 RATINGS					CLUSTER 2 RATINGS					CLUSTER 3 RATINGS				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1) No help from organization	10	94	101	19	1	0	6	24	58	23	116	95	26	1	0
2) Ineffective stress management policies	14	96	98	13	4	0	5	23	65	18	104	113	19	1	1
3) Intention to switch job because of organization's environment	11	63	100	37	14	1	4	18	57	31	95	103	33	5	2
4) Employee's inability to manage work stress	6	58	99	53	9	1	7	18	61	24	66	119	34	18	1
5) No recreational activities by organization	22	85	91	22	5	3	4	23	52	29	112	110	12	4	0
6) No safe space to voice issues in workplace	7	61	96	51	10	0	10	11	54	36	79	120	29	9	1
7) Lazy response of organization to complaints of work stress	15	80	100	29	1	2	5	15	56	33	96	117	22	2	1

8) Awareness of mental health day leave.	32	78	82	21	12	8	15	27	36	25	99	97	34	4	4
9) Intention of employee to take leaves for mental health.	10	69	96	38	12	1	10	26	45	29	70	111	31	20	6
10) Organization- ignorant of work pressure	10	85	108	22	0	0	9	20	55	27	105	111	20	2	0
11) No attention from Organization in case of serious illness.	4	52	100	54	15	1	2	20	55	33	80	108	38	8	4
12) Satisfaction with organization's stress management policies	6	69	123	25	2	0	2	22	55	32	109	108	21	0	0

The above table shows all the variables considered to understand employee's feelings and perception about the organization's stress management policies. The rating scale used was a 5-point Likert scale where the ratings were- 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Neutral, 4=Disagree and 5= Strongly Disagree. The shaded part of the table represents the rating picked by maximum respondents corresponding to that cluster regarding different variables.

CLUSTER 1 (Neutral): This cluster represents 39.2% of the whole sample. All the respondents in this cluster are neutral, they are neither satisfied for dissatisfied with the organization's stress management policies or mechanism.

The statement that received most neutral responses is statement number 12 – "I am not happy with my organization's stress management policies." That means respondents had no strong opinion about this statement.

CLUSTER 2 (Satisfied): This cluster represents 19.3% of the whole sample. This cluster is represented by "Disagree" rating which means that they do not feel that organization's strategies are ineffective. This being the smallest cluster means that only few respondents feel that organization is doing good on the fronts of employee's mental well-being and work stress management. More females belong to this cluster than cluster 1 and least in cluster 3. It can be inferred from this that majority of females lie in the cluster where respondents are disagreeing to the negative statements meaning, female employees are satisfied with the organization's policies to some extent.

The statement number 2- "I think my organization's stress management policies have not been effective in retaining employees" received maximum responses of employees who disagreed to this statement. That means Respondents in this cluster feel their organization's policy on work stress management have somewhat been effective in retaining them.

CLUSTER 3 (Dissatisfied): This cluster represents 41.5% of the whole sample. Employees in this cluster Strongly agree or Agree that organizational stress management strategies are either ineffective or employer does not do anything at all. They are not satisfied with the organization's attitude and policies regarding employee's occupation stress. Maximum males lie in this cluster (representing dissatisfaction), followed by cluster 1 (representing neutral stance) and least in cluster 2 (satisfaction with organization). It could be interpreted that the male segment of employees might need more attention regarding work stress, policies and stress coping mechanism should be made in a manner where males are also included equally.

The statement number 6- "I feel that I am not able to speak about any difficulty/ issue in the workplace" received maximum number of responses of employees who agreed to this. This means a huge number of employees feel that they cannot even speak about any issue or problem they face in the office that might be the cause of their work stress. When employee does not feel safe to voice their problems, they face additional stress and that is why respondents in this cluster are not happy with the stress management mechanism of their organization.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to understand the situation of occupational stress coping mechanism in the organizations and the course individual employee in public and private sector of Gujarat takes to deal with the workload and work stress. The finding of the study clearly shows that employees feel that employer and employee should sit and talk together about stress coping strategies, and it is the combined responsibility of both to help employee cope up with occupational stress. At individual level employee try to release work stress by listening to music, spending time with friends and family, watching movies/series and travelling. Most of the respondents either strongly agree or agree to all the statements pointing towards ineffectiveness of the organizations to help employees reduce their occupational stress.

The employer should try to understand, detect, and tackle stressful situations at the early stages. He should set the organizational strategies after having an open discussion with the employees and try to identify specific problems faced by each gender.

FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Further studies can be conducted on a pan India level to understand how various organizations tackle stress management at workplace. A comparative study could be done about different work culture and level of occupational stress in different zones of India. This study founded some of the strategies that employees use at individual level to cope with the work stress, these strategies could be implemented in a focused group and its effectiveness could be studied by the researchers in the future.

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