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OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG THE IT PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT

The Information Technology professionals are forced to change the entire paradigms amidst constant uncertainty and high risk. These working conditions lead to high stress in the professionals. Organizations have started recognizing high stress as a worthy area to address well-being and growing attrition rate. A lot of research work has been done in the past decade addressing various issues of this sunshine industry. Currently, managing stress is the focus area for information technology organizations to address the significantly high attrition rate and well-being of the professionals in the industry. Therefore, the aim of the study is to analyze the occupational stress experienced by the informational technology professionals and its impact on job satisfaction. The results of the study reveal that the middle level and high level professionals have been exposed high level of overall occupational stress, whereas lower level professionals have experienced a moderate level of overall occupational stress. Similarly, the study reveals that the higher and middle level professionals have low job satisfaction, whereas lower level professionals have moderate job satisfaction.

KEYWORDS : Occupational Stress , Information Technology professionals , Organizations.

INTRODUCTION :

Stress at work is a relatively new phenomenon of modern lifestyles. The nature of work has gone through drastic changes over the last century and it is still changing at whirlwind speed. They have touched almost all professions. Kids of kindergarten, boys in school, students of university and

colleges, and everyone in the academic field experiences stress everyday. All office goers experience stress of one or the other kind. Entrepreneurs and labourers experience a different kind of stress. Homemakers also experience stress in managing their home affairs.

Thus the reason for stress differs from person to person. But at the same everyone experiences stress. The stress people's experience should not be necessarily treated as harmful. An optimum amount of stress can always act as an energizer or motivator and propel people to apply the efforts and complete the work. But a high level of stress can be a serious threat to the personality traits of the individual and can cause physiological and social problems.

From an individual's point of view, stress is the human body's physical, mental and chemical reactions to circumstances that frighten, confuse, endanger or irritate us. If taken positively, stress is a friend that strengthens the individual for the next encounter, but if, taken negatively, it can have an adverse effect on both physical and psychological factors. Stress affects not only the individual but also his/her environment. It has an adverse effect on the individual's family, work and society.

The term stress has been derived from the Latin word "Stringer" which means 'to clutch',' compress', or 'bind'. In the seventeenth century the term stress was used to mean hardship, strain, adversity or affliction. In the eighteen and nineteenth centuries the term was used to mean force, pressure, strain or strong effort with reference to an object or person.

The concept of stress was first introduced in the Life Sciences by Hans Selye in 1936. There are different views of different persons on the basis of their personal experiences. For some business men it is a frustration or emotional tension. Some suggest that it is a physical or mental pressure. However, stress restricts and acts as a hindrance in the performance of an individual. It is a kind of pressure that people feel in life due to their reaction to the situation. Hans Selye defines stress as an "adaptive response to the external situation that results in physical, psychological or behavioral deviation for organizational participants." It is a condition arising from the interaction of people of their job and is characterized by changes within the people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning. There are two sides of stress - a positive and a negative side. A force that deviates from the normal functioning is distress, a negative side. A positive side is called as Eutress, which refers to healthy, positive and constructive outcome of stressful event. It is an experience that motivates people to achieve goals and attain success in every field of their life.

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Occupational stress has become a common problem throughout the industrial world. Over the years its prevalence has increased, thus affecting the individual's mental health and well being. Occupational stress poses a threat to physical health. Work related stress in the life of organized workers, consequently, affects the health of organizations.

Occupational stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Selye [1936] defines stress as "a dynamic activity wherein an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand". According to United States National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, Cincinnati, (1999), Job stress can be defined as "the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury.

According to a discussion document presented by the United Kingdom Health and Safety Commission, London, (1999), "Stress is the reaction of people who show excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. On the basis of experience and research, NIOSH favors the view that

working conditions play a primary role in causing Occupational stress. However, the role of individual factors is not ignored. According to the NIOSH view, exposure to stressful working conditions (called Occupational stressors) can have a direct influence on worker safety and health.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The information technology (IT) industry has become one of the most robust industries in the world. Information technology industry is a key driving force of global economic growth. Economies of scale and insatiable demand from both consumers and enterprises characterize this rapidly growing sector.

The Indian IT industry has played a key role in putting India on the world map. The industry has attracted more than 10 per cent of total FDI flowing into India. The industry has also led in the development of the Indian organizations as global multinationals with over 400 delivery centres (outside India), the industry has presence in 52 countries, and 200 cities with more than 10 organizations listed on overseas stock exchanges and more than 400 Fortune 500 customers. The spectacular growth performance in the IT industry in the last decade has helped the industry contribute substantially to India's GDP.

The industry is likely to continue growing from strength to strength, as local players incorporate the best in class practices from global counterparts whilst retaining their edge in terms of lower cost of labor and focused governmental investments. New graduates with degrees in related fields such as electrical engineering and computer science can hope to achieve significant professional growth and a healthy remuneration from companies looking to hire the best talent available.

The Indian workforce in the information technology industry has earned an image of 'low cost' but 'high quality' technical workers, helping Indian information technology industry to keep a promising growth rate. The Indian information technology industry has brought a fundamental change in the market of information technology services globally by presenting a tough competition to American and European information technology related jobs in the current decade. The productivity, efficiency, and low cost are centre stage issues for management of information technology.

Information Technology industry in India got a tremendous boost in the past decade due to factors like liberalization and globalization of the Indian economy coupled with favorable government policies. This sector of the sunshine industry brought a new work environment and sea changes in the employment trends. Service providers characterized this sector by adhering to strict deadlines set by their customers, working in different time zones, interdependency in teams, multitasking, increased interaction with offshore clients and extended work hours. Information Technology professionals are constantly under pressure to deliver the services efficiently as well as to remain cost effective. The customer expectation in terms of skills required for processing jobs keeps changing and forces professionals to upgrade/adapt very fast to their demands. At times Information Technology professionals are forced to change the entire paradigms amidst constant uncertainty and high risk. These working conditions lead to high stress in the professionals. Organizations have started recognizing high stress as a worthy area to address well-being and growing attrition rate. A lot of research work has been done in the past decade addressing various issues of this sunshine industry. Currently, managing stress is the focus area for information technology organizations to address the significantly high attrition rate and well-being of the professionals in the industry. Therefore, the researcher attempts to study the occupational stress experienced by the informational technology professionals and its impact on job satisfaction.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Stress is now common in organizations because of increasing job complexity and economic pressure. Particularly occupational stress has become a common and costly problem, leaving few workers untouched. It should be noted that not all stress is bad. Learning how to deal with and manage stress is critical to maximize job performance; staying safe on the job and maintaining physical and mental health. Survey of the literature on occupational and perceived stress reveals that there are a number of factors related to job, which affects the behaviour of the employees and as a result of it, normal life is disturbed.

The rapid growth of IT industry as a whole is having a deep effect on the socioeconomic dynamics of India. IT sector has led to the creation of IT workforce, which has its distinct forms of work, employment, organizational, and management along with its distinct work culture that have emerged which has its effect on lifestyle, sociality and identity that are taking place within this new global workforce. Lifestyle in the young IT professionals to lead lead to health hazards due to occupational stress. There is a strong need to address the various issues concerning stress and job satisfaction of employees of IT sector which contributes significantly to India's GDP. Hence, this study throws light on the pathogenesis of various problems related to occupational stress and its impact on job satisfaction. This study will be helpful to draw up a further policy on related fields and act as a secondary data for further research.

METHODOLOGY

The study explores the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction of professionals in the IT industry. The study uses a descriptive research design. The researcher used the descriptive research design in order to obtain a proper definition of the problem with the help of literature surveys. Descriptive research design is best suited for formulating of a problem for precise investigation.

Both primary and secondary data have been collected for the study. The primary data were collected from the IT professionals with the help of a questionnaire. A structured and validated questionnaire has been used for collection of primary data.

The secondary data have been collected from the sources like books related to stress management, previous research studies, national and international journals and online journals.

SAMPLING FRAMEWORK

The study was conducted in Chennai, India. The information technology industries in Chennai have extended their business in all areas, namely, software testing, development, programming, import and export, and maintenance of projects. In the diversified economic foundation, information technology industries have gained a major ground in the Chennai's economy. The late 1990s, witnessed the birth of business process outsourcing and software development and within a few years there was a prominent squirt of outgrowth in the number and magnitude of the information technology industries in the city. This in turn created a great impact on the city's economy. Chennai is now one of the important software centres in India. Cheap IT labour is one of the main facts that has attracted a multitude of multi-billion-rupee foreign software companies such as Microsoft to establish their business in the city as well as in other software centers of India like Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Delhi making the country a booming software exporter worldwide. At present Chennai is the second largest exporter of IT and IT enabled Services in India next to the Silicon Valley. The city is a hub of a number of technological parks and promises the employment of nearly 3,00,000 people.

Accordingly, Chennai is the most suitable place to conduct this research in India. Therefore, Chennai city is selected for the study. There are top 20 IT companies in India. Among them, top ten companies functioning in Chennai have been selected to analyze the occupational stress and job satisfaction of IT professionals. The selected IT companies are; (1) Tata Consultancy Services Ltd., (2) Infosys Limited, (3) Wipro Technologies Ltd., (4) Cognizant Technology Solutions India Pvt. Ltd., (5) HCL Technologies Ltd., (6) L&T Infotech (7) Mahindra Satyam (8) Tech Mahindra Ltd., (9) Aegis Limited and (10) CSC, India. There are 153422 employees working in the selected companies.

PARTICIPANTS

As the profession of IT industry professionals is acknowledged as stressful occupation, the sample of the present study involved professionals working in the IT industries in Chennai City.

SAMPLE SIZE

For the purpose of the analysis, the IT professionals are classified as higher level, middle level and lower level professionals. As per the sample size determination formula the required total sample size is 384, which constitutes 0.25 per cent of the total population. Therefore, 0.25 per cent from of category is drawn on the basis of stratified random sampling method.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A well developed and widely used Occupational Stress Index (OSI) in the Indian context (Srivastava and Singh, 1981) was chosen to assess the occupational stress of the sample. The occupational stress index consists of 46 statements. To estimate the levels of occupational stress add up the scores on all the statements. If the score is below 115, employees have low occupational stress, if the score is between 116 and 161, employee occupational stress is of moderate level, and if the score is above 161, employees are highly stressed. The overall occupational stress experienced by the respondents is presented in table 1.

TABLE 1
OVERALL OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Category	Mean score	Mean score (%)
Higher level Professionals	162.54	70.67
Middle level Professionals	177.04	76.97
Lower level Professionals	159.10	69.17
Average (N=384)	167.13	72.67

Source: Primary data

Table 1 shows the overall occupational stress experienced by the sample respondents. The respondents have secured the mean score of 72.67 per cent for overall occupational stress. The middle level professionals have obtained the maximum score of 76.97 per cent, followed by higher level professionals who have secured 70.67 per cent. The lower level professionals have obtained the minimum mean score of 69.17 per cent. It is observed from the table that the middle level and high level professionals have been exposed to high level of occupational stress, whereas lower level professionals have experienced a moderate level of occupational stress.

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS LEVEL

The occupational stress level of the respondents is shown in table 2.

TABLE 2
OCCUPATIONAL STRESS LEVEL

Occupational stress level	No. of Respondents			
	Higher level Professionals	Middle level Professionals	Lower level Professionals	Total
Low	16 (13.33)	25 (15.24)	30 (30.00)	71 (18.49)
Moderate	41 (34.17)	37 (22.56)	59 (59.00)	137 (35.68)
High	63 (52.50)	102 (62.19)	11 (11.00)	176 (45.83)
Total	120 (100.00)	164 (100.00)	100 (100.00)	384 (100.00)

Source: Primary data, Figure in the bracket is percentage to the total

Table 2 indicates the level of occupational stress experienced by the respondents. Out of 384 respondents about 46 per cent of the respondents have revealed high rating, 36 per cent of the respondents have obtained the moderate rating and nearly 18 per cent of the respondents have expressed low rating in respect of over all occupational stress. Out of 120 higher level professionals, the majority of them have experienced high level of stress, about 34 per cent of the respondents have moderate stress and 13 per cent have revealed low level of stress. Among the middle level professionals, the majority of them have experienced high level of stress, 23 per cent have exposed moderate level of stress and 15 per cent have revealed low stress. Out of 100 lower level professionals, 59 per cent of the respondents have been affected by moderate level of stress. The table reveals that the highest level professionals and middle level professionals have experienced high level of stress, whereas lower level professionals have been affected by moderate stress.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS-OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

In order to find whether there is any significant relationship between the categories of respondents and occupational stress experienced by them, a null hypothesis is framed and tested with the help of 't' test. 't' test values were calculated for different combination of categories of respondents. The t – values calculated were compared with the Table 't' values (at 5% level and at 1% level) to test the significance of variation in respect of occupational stress experienced by the different categories of the respondents.

The results were tabulated and interpreted in respect of overall occupational stress in table 4.20.

Null hypothesis

Irrespective of categories, all the respondents experience the same level of occupational stress.

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS-OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Category	Count	Mean	S.D	t-value	Result
Higher level and Middle level Professionals	120	40	23.52	0.53	Not significant
	164	54.67	41.43		
Higher level and Lower level Professionals	120	40	23.52	0.34	Not significant
	100	33.33	24.17		
Middle level and Lower level Professionals	164	54.67	41.43	0.77	Not significant
	100	33.33	24.17		

It is inferred from the table 3 that there is no significant difference between the level of occupational stress and the different categories of respondents. It means higher level, middle level and lower level professionals experience the same level of occupational stress.

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

To find out whether there is any significant difference between individual demographic variables such as, sex, age, experience, income, and educational qualifications of the respondents and the occupational stress experienced by the respondents, a null hypothesis is framed and tested with help of the chi-square test.

Null hypothesis

There is no significant difference between individual demographic variables and the occupational stress experienced by the respondents.

The result is given in Table 4.

TABLE 4
CHI-SQUARE TEST RESULT

Demographic variable	Chi-Square Test – Value	Table value 5% level	Table value 1% level	H_o Accepted / Rejected	Significance
Sex	17.2	5.991	9.210	Rejected	**Significant
Age	09.06	9.488	13.277	Accepted	Not significant
Experience	1.06	9.488	13.277	Accepted	Not significant
Income	30.07	9.488	13.277	Rejected	**Significant
Educational Qualifications	59.4	5.991	9.210	Rejected	**Significant

*Significant at 5% level; ** Significant both at 5% level and 1% level.

It is clear from the table 4 that there is a significant association between sex, income, educational qualifications and occupational stress experienced by the respondents. However, there is no significant association between age, experience and occupational stress experienced by the

respondents.

JOB SATISFACTION

Job satisfaction scale developed by Rabindra N.Kanungos (1982), widely used questionnaire was used to assess the job satisfaction of the respondents. This scale was modified to suit the professionals in the IT industry. This scale consists of 47 items, covering the job satisfaction factors such as work (20 items), supervision (11 items), pay (6 items), promotion (5 items) and co-workers (5 items). Each item consists of 5 alternatives.

They are scored as 1 to 5. Negative statements are scored inversely. The responses are Disagree, More Disagree, Average, Agree and More Agree. The respondents were asked to encircle any one of the alternatives. If the score is below 118, employees have low job satisfaction, if the score is between 119 and 165, employee's job satisfaction is of moderate level, and if the score is above 166, employees' job satisfaction is high. The mean score obtained by the respondents in respect of the job satisfaction is analyzed and presented in table 5.

TABLE 5
MEAN SCORE - JOB SATISFACTION FACTORS

Job satisfaction factors	High level professionals		Middle level professionals		Low level professionals		Total	
	Mean Score	Mean Score (%)	Mean Score	Mean Score (%)	Mean Score	Mean Score (%)	Mean Score	Mean Score (%) N=384
Work	42.38	42.38	28.39	28.39	63.80	63.80	41.98	41.98
Supervision	22.75	41.37	16.32	29.67	19.17	34.86	19.07	34.68
Pay	08.09	26.97	05.69	18.97	18.10	60.33	09.67	32.23
Promotions	13.42	53.67	10.73	42.91	05.24	20.97	10.14	40.56
Co-workers	19.17	76.67	14.59	58.34	19.90	79.60	17.40	69.62

Source: Primary data

Table 5 shows the mean score obtained by the respondents in respect of job satisfaction factors. Out of five variables selected to assess the level of job satisfaction, all the respondents have secured a low mean score except co-workers attitude.

High level professionals have obtained the mean score of nearly 42.38 per cent for work environment, 41 per cent for supervision, 27 per cent for pay and 54 per cent for promotion and 77 per cent for co-workers attitude.

The middle level professionals have secured the mean score of about 28 per cent for work environment, 30 per cent for supervision, 19 per cent for pay and 43 per cent for promotions and 58 per cent for co-workers attitude. The lower level professionals have got the mean score of 53.8 per cent for work environment, 35 per cent for supervision, 54 per cent for pay, 21 per cent for promotions and 64 per cent for co-workers attitude.

The mean score obtained by the different categories of the respondents indicates that the higher level and middle level professionals have low job satisfaction in respect of work, supervision and pay. The higher level professionals have moderate job satisfaction with regard to promotion and higher

job satisfaction for co-workers attitude.

The middle level professionals have low job satisfaction in respect of promotion and moderate job satisfaction in respect of co-workers attitude. The lower level professionals have moderate job satisfaction in respect of work, pay and co-workers attitude, whereas they have low satisfaction with regard to supervision and promotion. The common factors which affect the job satisfaction of employees is supervision, for which all the respondents got the mean score of below fifty per cent. It indicates their strong job dissatisfaction in respect way of supervision of the superior officers in the IT industry.

OVER ALL JOB SATISFACTION

The overall job satisfaction of the respondents is shown in the table 6.

TABLE 6
OVER ALL JOB SATISFACTION

Category	Mean score	Mean score (%)
Higher level professionals	105.81	45.03
Middle level professionals	75.72	32.22
Lower level professionals	126.21	53.71
Average (N=384)	98.27	41.82

Source: Primary data

It is understood from the table 6 that all the respondents have secured an average mean score of 41.82 per cent in respect of overall job satisfaction. Among them the highest level professionals have secured the mean score of nearly 45 percent, middle level professionals have secured lowest minimum score of 32.22 per cent and lower level professionals have obtained the moderate mean score of 53.21 per cent. It is inferred from the table that the higher and middle level professionals have low job satisfaction, whereas lower level professionals have moderate job satisfaction.

LEVEL OF JOB SATISFACTION

The level of job satisfaction of the respondents is shown in table 7.

TABLE 7
LEVEL OF JOB SATISFACTION

Level of job satisfaction	High level professionals	Middle level professionals	Low level professionals	Total
Low	61 (50.83)	114 (69.51)	29 (29.00)	204 (53.13)
Moderate	43 (35.83)	32 (19.51)	57 (57.00)	132 (34.38)
High	16 (13.33)	18 (10.98)	14 (14.00)	48 (12.50)
Total	120 (100.00)	164 (100.00)	100 (100.00)	384 (100.00)

Source: Primary data, figure in the bracket is percentage of total

It is understood from the table 7 that out of 384 respondents, the majority of the respondents have secured low job satisfaction, about 34 per cent of the respondents have expressed moderate satisfaction and 13 per cent have obtained high satisfaction. Among the high level professionals, nearly 51 per cent of the respondents have low satisfaction, 36 per cent have moderate satisfaction and only 13 per cent have experienced high job satisfaction. Out of 164 middle level professionals almost 70 per cent have exposed low job satisfaction; nearly 20 per cent have moderate satisfaction and a meager portion of the respondents have enjoyed a high level of job satisfaction. Among the low level professionals, the majority of them have moderate job satisfaction, 29 per cent has expressed low satisfaction and 14 per cent have exposed high level of job satisfaction.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS – JOB SATISFACTION

In order to find whether there is any significant relationship between the categories of respondents and their level of job satisfaction, a null hypothesis is framed and tested with the help of 't' test.

Null hypothesis

There is no significant difference between categories of the respondents and their level of job satisfaction.

TABLE 8
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS-JOB SATISFACTION

Category	Count	Mean	S.D	t-vale	Result
Higher level professionals	120	40	22.65	0.44	Not significant
Middle level professionals	164	54.67	51.86		
Higher level professionals	120	40	22.65	0.38	Not significant
Lower level professionals	100	33.33	21.83		
Middle level professionals	164	54.67	51.86	0.67	Not significant
Lower level professionals	100	33.33	21.83		

It is inferred from the table 8 that irrespective of categories, the level of job satisfaction of all the respondents not significantly differs. It means higher level, middle level and lower level professional experiences same level of job satisfaction in the IT industry.

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND LEVEL OF JOB SATISFACTION

To find out whether there is any significant difference between individual demographic variables (sex, age, experience, educational qualifications, income) and the level of job satisfaction of the respondents, a null hypothesis is framed and tested with the help of the chi-square test.

Null hypothesis

There is no significant difference between individual demographic variables and the level of job satisfaction of the respondents.

The result is given in table 9.

TABLE 9
CHI-SQUARE TEST

Demographic Variable	χ^2	Table value 5% level	Table value 1% level	H_o Accepted / Rejected	Significance
Sex	2.28	5.991	9.210	Accepted	Not significant
Age	44.1	9.488	13.277	Rejected	**Significant
Experience	57.2	9.488	13.277	Rejected	**Significant
Income	15.6	9.488	13.277	Rejected	**Significant
Educational Qualifications	43.6	5.991	9.210	Rejected	**Significant

** Significant both at 5% level and 1% level.

Table 9 shows that there is a significant relationship between age, experience income, experience, educational qualifications and the level of job satisfaction of the respondents. However, there is no significant association between sex and level of job satisfaction of the respondents.

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND JOB SATISFACTION

To find out whether there is any relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction, a null hypothesis is framed and tested in table 10.

Null: Hypothesis

The level of occupational stress influences the job satisfaction of the IT professionals.

TABLE 10
OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND JOB SATISFACTION

Variable	r	t-value	Result
Occupational Stress and Job Satisfaction	0.98	88.50	**Significant

**Significant at 5% and 1% level

Table 10 shows the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction. The calculated F value is less than table at 5% and 1% level of significance. Hence, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction. It implies that high level of occupational stress leads to low job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, middle level and high level professionals have been exposed high level of overall occupational stress, whereas lower level professionals have experienced a moderate level of overall occupational stress. Similarly, the study reveals that the higher and middle level professionals have low job satisfaction, whereas lower level professionals have moderate job satisfaction.

In general, stress adds flavor, challenge and opportunity to life. Without stress, life would be dull and unexciting. However, too much stress can seriously affect one's physical and mental well-being. Recurrent physical and psychological stress can diminish self-esteem, decrease interpersonal and academic effectiveness and create a cycle of self blame and self-doubt. It is important for that one should find the optimal level of stress must learn to manage effectively, that will lead to secure one's health. Therefore, if the IT industry adopts the effective stress management strategies to decrease level of stress and improve job satisfaction of the employees.

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