

Job Stress among Workers: Implications and the Way Out

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Abstract

In recent times, job stress has attracted significant attention within various working places. In most cases job stress is attributable to negative situation, nonetheless, to function effectively and normally, we all need a certain degree of strength. This paper is basically theoretical, it discusses the causes of stress and its effects, before the question of job stress among workers in Nigeria could fully understood and tackled factors underlying such are properly identified and assessed issues relating to stress are also examined, different ways of reducing stress are also suggested.

Introduction

In Nigeria, eight hours are devoted to official work while the remaining hours are for other busy-like work. Hardly does an average Nigerian sleep well and relax at home; people always vigorously pursue work to the extent that they have nothing else to think about.

Some people derive satisfaction from their labour, others measure the value of work by income or prestige, others see work as nothing but mere share waste of time. Some people are not satisfied because they feel that what they go through at work is not commensurate with their pay, they regard themselves as workaholic. There are people who work to live and those who live to work; others die at work or because of their work. Thousands of people die everyday across the world due to dust related accidents or diseases and so on.

A diligent worker may be trapped in a job or on career path and may eventually suffer from distress, despondency or depression. Many workers die prematurely because of on-the-job exposure to dangerous substances or as a result of stress at work or injuries sustained in their working places.

Since work related stress or death and serious injuries occur in almost all sectors of industries and commerce, it is therefore relevant to ascertain why work has become so stressful and even dangerous something must be done to make different jobless hazardous. Situations that may threaten some one's health and life should be minimized.

As companies go through the process of restructuring and downsizing to remain financially profitable, greater pressure to produce is placed on employees. Downsizing has a negative effect on the health of employees, especially in this time of global economic growth.

Overwork

Employees that overtook and are overstressed are a risk to themselves and others. Many office workers spend much of their working days in a state of irritation with colleagues once stressed at work. Such conflicts often trigger violent reactions that can lead to death; many employees assault or kill their colleagues at work.

Meaning of Stress

There seems not to be any precise scientific definition of stress in the literature (Baron, 1986; Willis, 1991; Narayanan et al., 1999). Luthans (1989) described stress as the most imprecise word in the scientific dictionary. Consequently different authors have provided varied definitions, of stress which reveal their different biases and experiences” (Anyaduba, 2001). Cole (1997) referred to stress as the bodily changes that can take place when the external pressures on an individual reach an intolerable pitch causing weakened job performance and ill health. He also asserted that the adverse psychological and physical reactions occurring in an individual are as a result of their being unable to cope with the demands on them in their different places of work.

Stress is triggered not only by external problems of individuals, but by the way they cope or fail to cope with the identified problems. Many people cope with a number of pressures in their lives, but as soon as individuals fail to deal adequately with pressure, then sings of stress set in.

Luthans (1989) equally perceived stress as an adaptive response to an external situation that results in physical psychological and/or behavioural deviations for organizational participants. Beehr and Newman (1978) in their view, defined job stress as a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that forge them to deviate from their normal functioning. Arising from definition, Anyaduba (2001) defined stress as the adaptive response to external pressure or tension or other situation by an individual that results in physical psychological and/or behavioural disorders or deviation.

The symptoms of stress can be both short-term and long-term; symptoms of stress in short-terms according to Cole (1997) can be irritability, indigestion, nausea, headaches, back pain, loss of appetite and loss of sleep. Symptoms in the long-term may include coronary heart disease, stomach ulcers, depression and other serious conditions.

If stress symptom is triggered by work problems, domestic or social problems, it will eventually lead to reduction in employee's performance, lack of motivation perpetual lateness and absenteeism.

In almost all human undertakings, one goes through some elements of stress at one point in time or the other. Nweze (1984) opined that whenever one is subjected to time pressure or gets involved in complex and difficult problem solving processes, noise levels, disaster or danger it is most likely that one will go through moments of stress.

Some researchers are of the opinion that stress is regarded as a personal and subjective reaction to pressure. When people believe that a problem could be properly managed and are confident of their ability to handle the problem, then signs of stress are not likely to manifest no matter the amount of pressure exerted. On the other hand, if people perceive any problem as being difficult to manage, with lacking of self-confidence, then stress will creep in.

Causes of Stress

Four stressors that are causes of stress:

- (i) Extra organizational stressors
- (ii) Organizational stressors

- (iii) Group stressors
- (iv) Individual stressors.

Each of the stressors is hereby explained as follows:

Extra Organizational Stressors:

These are regarded as factors, operating outside an organization that causes stress. The factors are:

- *Societal Changes*: These are outcome of traditions, customs, norms and societal values. They vary from one society to the other.
- *Technological Changes*: These are in relation to telecommunication, computer application and information system. These have proved to be significant in Nigeria, because some workers are made redundant through the introduction of these technological systems.
- *The Family Unit*: This is held in very high esteem in Africa, especially Nigeria and it has a very great influence on couples personality. More importantly when families relocate due to transfer of either of the couples, it could create a lot of problems as one will have to secure a new residence and get school placements for the children.
- *Economic and Financial Situation*: Individual or families can equally be a stressor, especially at this hard time in Nigeria when there is a downturn in the economy of the nation. Nweze (1984) and Akinnusi (1995) observed that with the harsh economic climate in Nigeria, as a result of the dwindling economy, people are taking up all types of odd jobs. The few with gainful employment are being forced to take up additional part time jobs to make all ends meet.
- *Discrimination in the Work Place*: This may also on the basis of race, gender or class lead to withdrawal syndrome or aggressive tendencies.
- *Substandard Residential and Community Conditions*: Are also significant stressors. Chen and Specters (1992) observed that workers residing in substandard or crime infected areas are more prone to drug abuse, theft and other crime related activities. These could be carried out to their places of work and begin to have negative impact on them.

Effects of Job Stress

Stress may not be completely bad for individual employee in his or her place of work. It may even serve as a means of enhancing their job performance. Weiss and Sharbough (1982), observed that some people work under time pressure and they actually require a little bit of stress to put them back on the track to meet up with their tight schedules. However, most employees are usually adversely affected by varying degrees of stress, which eventually affect their performance.

It is a general belief that when an employee of an organization suffers from stress, the results may be:

- Sickneses, absenteeism and in some cases psychological or emotional absence.

- Low productivity level and internal rancours within and individual.

Performance of an individual may drop if there is high rise in stress. This kind of high rise in stress can manifest in an individual physiologically, psychologically and other areas. The physiological effects may include high blood pressure, faster heart beats/rates and respiration, severe headache, heart attack or cardiac arrest, all types of ulcer and a host of others.

The behavioural aspect of stress include sleeplessness, drug abuse, loss of appetite, absenteeism, sudden noticeable loss of gain in weight and other related and notable ones.

Methods or Strategies of Dealing with Stress

The following are the methods or strategies to reduce or avoid stress:

- An individual should be involved in the use of skills and take decisions using your own discretion.
- One should be a responsible worker, allow boss or job holder to be involved in decision-making.
- Others should be involved in managing the place of work. In other words, one should delegate responsibility, if he or she is in the position to do so an individual should be given the opportunity to air his or her view on a matter.
- Allow for participatory spirit.
- Encourage smooth interaction among co-workers; one should not be an authoritarian.
- As an employer, one should have positive attitude towards employees or those one is expected to lead.

Some coping strategies are advocated by experts like Luthans (1989), Nweze (1984) and Narayanan et al. (1999), which are as follows:

- a) Individual coping techniques and
- b) Organizational coping techniques.

Individual Coping Techniques

(i) *Sports and Relaxation*: Regular physical fitness and relaxation will help an individual cope with stress and all its symptoms. Examples of these exercises are jogging, swimming, playing tennis, cycling and brisk walk. Such exercises, according to Willis (1991), will assist an individual to burn off excess adrenaline in the system, and eventually, stimulate the production of natural morphine-line chemicals that induce a feeling of well-being and relieve tension.

Individuals should be advised to take appropriate break when need be and rest when it is necessary, not waiting to rest when health is negatively affected. In the course of this rest, minds should be off from official work, light novel or magazine can be read in the process. One can also be involved in meditation which can help to reduce stress.

There should be maintenance of self-control on the part of an individual. He/she should restrain from handling explosive situations or sensitive matters that could put him under undue/unnecessary stress.

- *Cognitive Therapy:* Cognitive therapy is regarded as a treatment programme which can be used in handling stress related problems. Here the positive aspect of an individual is emphasized. There is need for employees in their working places to put up positive attitude towards one another in order to create conducive working environment.
- *Socialization:* This relates to employees in a workplace interacting freely with one another, exchanging ideas and pleasantries. Such an act will help to reduce stress among colleagues.

Enforcing Proper Time Management

Individuals are expected to have a list of what they intend to do in a period of time so as to avoid time mismanagement. Managers should ensure this so as to ensure planned progress. According to Anyaduba (2001), they should prioritize their tasks and delegate assignment to subordinates. There is also the need for them to set aside a particular time of the day when distractions of any kind will not be entertained.

- *Music:* Can also be used to reduce stress because good rhythms keep the mind from anxiety, worries and tension.
- *Religion:* One needs to maintain constant communion with God and true fellowship, which will make one to have focus and eventually reduce stress.

Steps that Can be Taken to Reduce Stress

The following steps can also be employed to reduce stress:

- a) Be emotionally stable
- b) Remove every aggressive behaviour in workplace
- c) Avoid harassment among employees
- d) Dress decently to avoid embarrassment and harassment
- e) Be committed to work and loyal to employees since loyalty transcends efficiency

f) Interact reasonably with colleagues

g) React positively to irritating and hostile behaviour of co-workers.

Conclusion

Various aspects of job stress have been considered and steps to be taken to minimize such have also been suggested. The onus now rests on individuals to consider the state of their health. Steps should be taken by employers to provide necessary incentives for employees without necessarily stretching them to chronic stress.

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