

# Occupational Stress and its impact on Physical and Psychological Health of Employees in Private Educational Organizations : Management Strategies

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## Abstract

*The aim of this paper is to establish a theoretical approach of employees stress issue due to privatization of educational organizations and its impact on our social life. This article provides an overview of the literature regarding the definition of stress, the sources of employees stress. This paper explains some theoretical models that analyze stress in terms of resources conservation and recovery of the individual. There are plenty of general problems that people at work worry about – increasing job competition, globalization, terrorism, annual appraisals, financial crisis, even new technology. All these can result in different levels of stress. Stress management is set to become a primary strategic and operational concern for all organizations because of the direct relationship between decency and humanity, good employment practice, and successful organization. The nature of the research study is kept descriptive and exploratory, to help in identifying causes for potential stress and how it creates a significant effect on workforce performance. Finally conclusions are drawn from the discussion and strategies are recommended based on organizational needs*

## Key words

*Stress, Stress Management, Educational Organisations and Strategies*

## I. Introduction

Privatization is the hottest issues currently being debated in the education sector. Privatization implies induction of private ownership, management and control of organizations. Privatization is management by private sector with total absence of government intervention. Such institutions generate their own funds through higher fees, user charges and full use of resources. They survive on the philosophy that they do not have to pay for those who can pay.

Factors Responsible for Privatization of Higher Education are as need for competitive efficiency, Growth in population, Financial burden on government, Education is an Economic good, Quest for Quality, Rapid growth of school education, Fulfilling the need for skilled manpower, Curtailment of corruption, Desire for more autonomy, Desire for more autonomy, Greater responsibility with the recipients of education etc.

Stress is a general and global phenomenon encompassing man's psychological, physical, familial, and social dimensions. Researchers have made great efforts studying the effects of this stress on mental and physical health of employees to better understand its nature and thus, to improve the mental health and the consequent increase in job efficiency. Today, in view of the complexity and ever-increasing changes of the society as well as the improvement of technology, stress has become a serious threat to human so that it has severely affected the physical and mental health of employees. Some authors believe that employees' stress rises because their positions and technical skills may be changed. When employees cannot make the necessary technical adjustments, a sense of uncertainty arises about the future, which in turn, creates stress. This uncertainty can affect both the employees job commitment and job satisfaction.

Since stress and its effects on human are differently treated in different cultures and considering the current trend in privatization of governmental sectors in Punjab, we conducted this study to determine the level of job stress and mental health status among employees of private educational organizations.

An organization is a social arrangement for the controlled

performance of collective goals was studied by Buchanan Huczynski [5]. It operates through division of labor and allocation of functions, and well defined hierarchy of authority and responsibility. However, each organization is faced with internal and external pressures which may cause psychological stress. Stress "an adoptive response, mediated by individual characteristic and psychological processes, that is consequence of any external action, situation or event that places special physical, psychological demands upon a person" (J M Ivancevich and M T Matteson [7]). may result into high labor turnover and absenteeism rate, low productivity, reduced performance, ineffectiveness, and inefficiency levels will also affect the psychological, social and physical health of the employees. On the contrary, stress may generate positive outcome as a consequence. Receiving a Ph. D degree at the end of successful public defense, or completing a difficult work assignment will result into "Eustress" (Selye [13], [14]). In this regard Selye described stress as the spice of life and said that the absence of stress may lead to dullness, decay and death. He differentiated between positive stress, which he called "Eustress" and negative, harmful stress which he called "distress" (in most cases, a wedding would be Eustress and a funeral distress). Stress is a part of life, it is inevitable but when someone continuously lives in a stressful environment, such stresses convert in distresses and distresses convert into disease and disorder. Furthermore, Stress is a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint, or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important.

## II. Theoretical Approach To Stress And Its Impact

Stress is a major theme in the literature used in social sciences, behavioral studies, and those who focus on the study of life. According to Cohen, S, Karmack, T & Mermelstein, R. [3], stress is defined as a process in which demands that comes from the environment or threaten the adaptive abilities of the individual organism, derive psychological and biological changes, which may cause the individual to be infected with various diseases.

Stress is defined as a special relationship between the person and the environment being evaluated by the individual due to lack or excess of his/her inputs, which endangers his/her welfare (Lazarus & Folkman [11]). Hans Selye [13], [14] and the coping model (Lazarus & Folkman [11]), focus on the interaction between people and their external environment and defined stress as an imbalance between requirements, external sources, and the individual. However, stress is present when the pressure exceeds the perceived ability to confront it.

The notion of "stress" has entered the current language along with the studies of the famous biochemist Hans Selye. The idea of "stress" has bothered Hans Selye in his entire life. However, this famous scientist dedicated his life to study "stress" which brought about a revolutionary concept in the field of medicine and humanities. Selye's work ([14]) on general adaptation syndrome (GAS) is considered nowadays as a highly important research made on stress description.

Research study has indicated that stress is caused by many factors. Environmental factors which may cause stress can be categorized into:

- Organization level
- Individual level

The potential stressors in the individual context are job demand, work over load, role conflict, role ambiguity, work/family conflict (T. A. Judge and J. A. Colquitt [8]) and fear of losing job. Job loss can turn into a very stressful event causing decreased psychological and physical well being.

Job pay differentials, inequities, ambiguous procedure, unrealistic job description, too much of centralization, high degree of specialization, line staff conflict, overcrowding, safety hazards, poor communication system, unfair control system, inadequate information, inappropriate system of promotion of their employees, poor intra-and-interpersonal relation of the employees, lack of coordination and cooperation among the employees, favoritism, nepotism, lack of accountability, absence of justice, authority used for personal benefit and vested interest and violation of merit. In such environments majority of the people become sycophant, no reward and incentive system for good work and no accountability on corruption and avoidance of work and untrained man power in the offices. Absence of proper arrangement of training of the employees also leads to stress.

If the above cited malevolencies and prejudices are prevalent in the man power of any organization, surely they will fall prey to tensions, frustrations and pressures, which are the major causes of stress. Common signs of stress include increased heart rate, high blood pressure, muscle tension, mental depression and an inability to concentrate. Typical reaction includes social withdrawals, increased use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs and feelings of helplessness and depression about the situation. This study aims at the organizational stress: consequences, prevention and management strategies.

The problem of occupational stress has been of great concern to many industrial/ organizational psychologists because researches indicate that if undue stress is imposed on employees, it will affect the job performance and their psychosomatic that is, physical and mental, health as well. Researchers like Karasek [9], Kahn, Wolfe Quinn, Snoek Rosenthal [10], Scott Landlow [15], Caplan, Cobb, French, Pinneau and Van Harrison [2], Corper and Marshall [4], Bhagat Mc Quaid, Lindholm, and Sergovis [1], Margolis, Kroes and Quinn [12], Hurrell & Murphy [6] explain how work load

affects the physical and psychological health of the employees. The industrial /organizational psychologists focused their attention on the causes and effects of stress in the work place for two reasons. First, there is a general awareness that stress related diseases are wide-spread, and that more people are disabled today as a result of stress than at any other time in history. Secondly, stress on the job is costly and is reflected in a form of lower productivity and poor performance in the organization. We found that after privatization, the job stress of employees increased significantly. This increase was associated with a decrease in mental health. Our findings are consistent with many researches. It is observed in various studies that the organizational change has a significant association with more psychological stress which in turn, resulted in poor job performance.

### III. Research Design

The study is mainly of explanatory in nature. The study is based on a survey conducted in 30 educational organizations from Malwa region of Punjab with sample size 200. Out of total sample, 130 (65%) were men and rest women. Data was collected through self structured questionnaire. Books, internet web sites, journals etc were used as a source of secondary data. MS-Excel was used to list and store the data. Percentage Analysis method was used to analyze and interpret results and to achieve research objectives. The respondents were professionals at private schools, colleges and universities under various age group. The following table shows sample description on the basis of respondent's age group.

Table 3.1: Sample description

Age Group	Sample Size
25- 29	22
30-34	55
35-40	78
➤ 40	45

Total sample size: 200

The main emphasis of this study is concentrated on to determine the sources of occupational stress of employees in private organizations and its impact on their physical and psychological and behavioural changes. Emphasis is also given in finding the stress management policies taken into consideration by organizational and individual point of view. Next stress is given to study the causes of stress of employees in various private educational organizations in our sample area of different age group. The impact of stress on the employees physical and mental health is also taken into consideration. Moreover the adoption of stress relief remedies taken by various organization and individual level is also studied on the basis of our sample. Finally an overall conclusion is drawn on the basis of our sample.

### IV. Source of Stress and Its Impact on Employees

A number of factors (organizational and individual) moderated by individual differences cause an employee to feel stress. The more frequently these factors occur and the more intensely they are experienced by the employee, the greater the stress that employee experiences. Job related tension tends to decrease job satisfaction and performance listed as follows.

- Excess of Work loads
- Organizational changes

- Lack of employee control
- Organization culture
- Operating style
- Emphasis on competition
- Fear of job loss
- Increasing technology
- Push for multi tasking

Stress is a normal, adaptive response to stressors in our environment. Our bodies are designed with a set of automatic responses to deal with stress. The problem is that, physiologically, our bodies have the same reaction to all types of stressors. Experiencing stress for long periods of time, such as lower level but constant stressors at work, activates this system. For many people, every day stressors keep this response activated, so that it does not have a chance to “turn off.”

This reaction is called the “Generalized Stress Response” and

consists of the following physiological responses:

- increased blood pressure
- increased metabolism (e.g., faster heartbeat, faster respiration)
- decrease in protein synthesis, intestinal movement (digestion), immune and allergic response systems
- increased cholesterol and fatty acids in blood for energy production systems
- localized inflammation (redness, swelling, heat and pain)
- faster blood clotting
- increased production of blood sugar for energy
- increased stomach acids

When this set of reactions is continuously activated, individuals begin to display signs and symptoms that indicate they are having difficulty coping with the stressors in their lives. These symptoms can be physical, psychosocial, and behavioural in nature as illustrated in the following table.

Table 4.1: Physical, psychosocial, and behavioural symptoms of employees due to stress

Physical	Psychosocial	Behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headaches</li> <li>• Grinding teeth</li> <li>• Clenched jaws</li> <li>• Chest pain</li> <li>• Shortness of breath</li> <li>• Pounding heart</li> <li>• High blood pressure</li> <li>• Muscle aches</li> <li>• Indigestion</li> <li>• Constipation or diarrhea</li> <li>• Increased perspiration</li> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Insomnia</li> <li>• Frequent illness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Irritability</li> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Defensiveness</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Mood swings</li> <li>• Hypersensitivity</li> <li>• Apathy</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Slowed thinking or racing thoughts</li> <li>• Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, or of being trapped</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overeating or loss of appetite</li> <li>• Impatience</li> <li>• Quickness to argue</li> <li>• Procrastination</li> <li>• Increased use of alcohol / drugs</li> <li>• Increased smoking</li> <li>• Withdrawal or isolation from others</li> <li>• Neglect of responsibility</li> <li>• Poor job performance</li> <li>• Poor personal hygiene</li> <li>• Change in religious practices</li> <li>• Changes in close family relationships</li> </ul>

## V. Stress Management And Strategies

Stress within an organization is managed at two levels at organizational level by organizational arrangement, and at personal’s level by individual’s arrangement. Organizational arrangements examines the structure of the relationships between stressors and strains, without taking consideration on individual differences. This means that job design and control or decision interact to influence health. Personal arrangement focuses on the cognitive processes and emotional reactions based on individuals interactions with their environment, so that items cannot be conceptualized as stressors independently of a person’s reaction to them, because what is stressful for one person may not be stressful for another. Once a problem has been identified, specialists start identification and development of solutions, by training for employers and employees, managers, provision of information, timeframe for review, in order to develop awareness of stress and its management, and to educate employers about how they can limit organizational stress.

### Organizational stress management at organizational level :

Organizational arrangement strategy for prevention, reduce, and relieve of stress at workplace represents properly rearrangement of working conditions within an organization through job design, and creation of healthy workplace. Positive effects of this sort of

intervention should be in long-run. Employers and organization will reach within the organization regarding to job design, and healthy workplace environment standards by acknowledging and understanding time management, goal and work-roles, responsibility and authority, arrangements and ability, ambiguity and errors, meaning, stimulation and reward, beneficial support, and team building. They will also get know about environmental, socio-cultural, and lifestyle factors which influence and create organizational stress. Environmental factors refer to evaluation regarding ergonomic norms and standards, and application of these norms and standards. Socio-cultural factors refer to work-family balance, satisfaction with work, communication, emotional and social support, and moral at workplace. Life-style factors refer to breaks within working time, and health education. All of these should be done in order to prevent, relieve, and reduce stress.

### The Organizational Strategies for Coping with Stress are evaluated as follows

- **Flex time** allows workers to start or end the workday earlier or later can reduce work/life stress, especially for working parents. Flex time can also reduce the stress of commuting in rush hour traffic.
- **Job sharing** allows at least two people trained to perform each job, enabling each employee to have time off without losing productivity.

- **Working from home** results in higher morale and job satisfaction and lower employee stress and turnover, The prime reason is that working at home provides employees more control over how they do their work, Working at home also helps workers better manage work/family demands.
- **Extending the lunch hour** may help discourage snacking and fast food. Adequate time may also encourage time for calming or other stress-reduction activities such as walking.
- Offering an **expert opinion** which can help to resolve personal healthcare issues, such as medical bills and interacting with insurance policies and providers, which can help employees to reduce worry and stay focused on their job.
- **EAPs (Employee Assistance Programs)** are typically offered by the HR department as part of the employer's health insurance plan to assess and address personal issues that affect employee performance and productivity. Issues can range from substance abuse to family problems, and EAPs often include counseling benefits. EAPs for substance abuse can reduce workers' compensation claims, employer healthcare costs, and absenteeism.
- Conducting **stress management programs at organizational level**, with the objective of creating awareness about stress and making employees to learn stress management techniques.
- **Physical activities planned by organization** in job design can release stress, better through physical exertion, as physicians were suggesting, indulging any kind of physical activity is recommended while job design.

#### Organizational stress management at individual level:

At this level, in order to prevent, reduce and relieve stress, we have to take separately every person, according to its personality, historical events experienced, and to found stressors and solutions for stress for any person apart. These arrangements consist of two possible types of interventions ranged from interventions aimed in Stress Prevention Program as primary intervention, and interventions aimed in Stress Reducing Program being secondary intervention.

In order to prevent stress between employees, they should be trained and informed about professional contentment including time and achievement management, communication and personality, and work and workplace organization. Employees should also be informed about health, about their free time, self-care skills, to which will be added trainings on hobby, nutrition, fitness, wellness, and massage. Beside these, anti-stress program should be promoted through education on identification of possible causes (sources, levels, and effects), as well as education on stress management and support. A preventive medical examination and medical examination is necessary. This will define level of stress affection on health. Each person that has established severe medical illness should be directed to further medical care. A person is analyzed as a whole, analyzing all of his potentials with problems. This would help to choose the most effective combination as the best possible form, containing following: autogenic training, mindfulness meditation, yoga or walking meditation, progressive muscular relaxation, transcendental meditation, biofeedback, music therapy, self-control meditation, paced respiration, deep breathing, Jacuzzi, swimming pool, hydro-massage, and occupational therapy.

#### Individual Oriented Strategies for Coping with Stress

- **Solo-Activities** like reading, writing, photography, art, Playing a musical instrument, collection of different

things, running, hobbies, vacations.

- **Group- Activities** like Sports, Games, Eating out, Vacations.
- **Solo-Passive/Group-Passive activities** like Television, Movies, Shows & Theatre, Listening to music, Concepts, opera, Sporting events, Vacations.
- **Yoga & Meditation** also helpful in overcoming the stress.

#### VI. Result and Discussion

Number of respondents who felt high level stress mentioned in section 4 which provides sources of stress are tabulated as follows.

Table 6.1 : Various sources of stresses in private educational organizations.

Age Group	25-29	30-34	35-40	>40
Work loads	14	40	67	40
Organizational changes	9	42	56	39
Lack of employee control	11	46	58	37
Organization culture	15	42	61	39
Operating style	21	49	65	41
Emphasis on competition	20	53	68	41
Fear of job loss	5	48	69	42
Increasing technology	7	45	69	41
Push for multi tasking	17	49	71	38

The following graph describes a more clear picture of the above table.

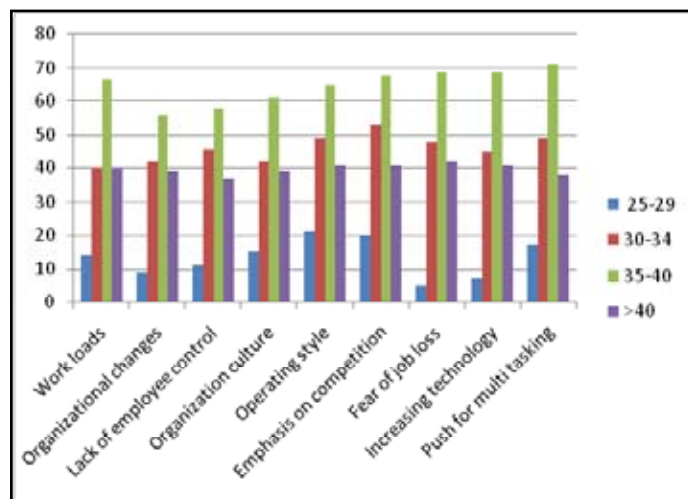


Fig. 6.1: Causes of stress at various age group of employees

From the above table 6.1 and figure 6.1 it is evident that the employees felt more pressure from workload highly that is 91% in the above 40 years of age followed by 86% in the age group 30-34. Whereas employees in the group 25-29 felt stress due to workload which is recorded only upto 64%. The reason behind it may be due to the young age which helps them to cope up with such workload.

In organizational changes also above 40 years of employees were taking as a dominant stressor followed by 35-40 age group and 30-34 age group.

Lack of employee control has become a major stressor for the employees who are above 40 years and under 35-40 years of age which is calculated as 87% and 72%.

Organisation culture impacts is also more on above 40 years employees (87%) followed by employees of 35-40 and 30-34 age group. (78% and 76%).

Operating style influences over all on all the employees of different age group which varies from 91% - 83%.

Competition has become a major stressor in all private organization and employees under 25-29 age group and 30-34 age groups felt higher stress (as 91% and 96%) as compare to the age group 35-40 and above 40. But over all it is very high for all the age group due to survival strategy of employees in private organization.

Another most important stressor is fear of job loss. It creates more stressor among employees specially above 40 group (93%) followed by 35-40 and 30-34 age group (88% and 87%). It is also observed that fearlessness of job effects very less to the age group under 25-29.

Increasing technology and push for multi tasking become major stressors among employees in private educational organization. The most effected ages are above 40 years (91%) and followed by lower age group. Whereas the stress due to push for multi tasking highly effects the employees under age group 35-40 and 30-34. But it is noticed that this factor is very important in occupational stress as it influences all the age group highly.

Based on this survey results it appears that workplace stress is a growing problem among Malwa region of Punjab.

Table 6.3: shows that, the stress among employees at Physical, emotional and behavioral levels.

Age Group	25-29	30-34	35-40	>40
Physical	14	45	65	41
Emotional	20	48	66	37
Behavioural	19	45	61	21

**The impact of stress at physical level:** 91% of respondents from above 40 age group felt high level of physical stress followed by 83% from 35-40 age group, 82% from 30-34 age group and 63% from 25-29 age group. As discussed earlier the stress impact on body lead to headaches, fatigue, hypertension, coronary artery diseases etc.

**Psychological level:** 90% from 25-29 age group felt high level stress impact on emotional level followed by 87% from the age group 30-34, 85% from 35-40 and 82% from above 40 years. Psychological impact of stress on individual leads to alienation, apprehension etc. which causes absenteeism, employees turn over and which leads to low productivity etc.

**Behavioural level:** 86% from age 25-29 age group felt high level stress impact on behaviour followed by 81% from age group 30-34, 78% from age group 35-40 and very minimum 46% on above 40 age group. Stress impact on behavior leads to unsafe behavior pattern, speech disturbance and even suicidal tendencies etc.

Most of the employees fear with the fact that lack quality in their work puts stress on them. It is found that maximum number of employees in Schools / Colleges remains in stress. Over all 84% employees feel that they are overloaded with work. 28% employees feel stress due to their family related problems. Only 46% employees feel that strategies used to manage stress of employees are effective. Majority of the employees try to find solution of their own to relieve them from stress. 6% employees use yoga or other ways to relieve them from stress, reason being full occupancy of time in work place. In spite of stress, majority of the employees balance in their social life.

## VII. Conclusion

The importance of the study of stress at various levels, among employee is growing. At organizational level, well designed coping strategies have become the attention of various private organizations. Stress can make an individual productive and constructive when it is identified and well managed. In times of great stress or adversity, it is always best to keep busy, to plow anger and energy into something positive. Positive attitude and meditation will be helpful for coping the stress. Having broader perspective of life will definitely change the perception of stress. Let us hope that we will be successful in making distress into eu-stress for our healthy lifestyle as well as organizational well being.

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