

**Stress Management – An Integral Part Of Training And Development
(A Case Study In Public Sector Banks)**

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Abstract

The long journey of mankind has seen a lot of progress. Science has enabled us to improve our understanding of the physical reality around us. Technology continues to offer conveniences in increasingly newer ways. We want jet-speed in all our activities. The convergence of communication technology, new horizons explored by science & technology and fabulous computing power at our command – mixing of the three as ‘triveni’ in different ways and applied to manufacture equipments, machinery and multipurpose vehicles – while on the one hand have generated interest to unravel the marvels of nature and uncover the secrets and mysteries of universe - on the other hand, these developments have put great pressure upon the time, capacity and energy of man that very little time is available to create and sustain relationships and enjoy all the choicest things in the world. There is mad-race for creating wealth and run crazy after all kinds of self-aggrandizement.

Life in general has become full of challenges. There is a new concept of integrating the domestic economies of the world under the prying eyes of World Trade Organisation (WTO). There is effort being made by the member-states under the leadership and directions of WTO to usher in free trade regime and no role for the sovereigns to indulge in regulating markets. The players in the market economy would play within the free play of the market forces. Privatisation is the buzz word and globalisation is the aim. So much so good! But the fall-out of these fast and strong initiatives is the stress that is entering in increasing measure in the life of every body – more so in the working class that includes all types and levels of employees. The employers have to introduce new approaches to involve workers in decision-making, transcending such elements of management as openness, collaboration, trust-building, autonomy, pro-activeness, authenticity, healthy confrontation – all geared to strengthen bonding with the organisation through participation and democratic leadership.

The present study is an effort to bring to light, though in a limited way, the causes of stress among the employees with specific reference to the situation obtaining in the Public Sector Banks, and furnish suggestions to work towards maintaining work-family balance for establishing healthy and happy society.

Key words: Stress; self-aggrandizement; globalisation; eustress; globalisation; behaviour.

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Introduction

It is increasingly observed by the management practitioners that workplace stress is becoming a major issue in all types of organisations; it is now a matter of concern for both the employees and the organization. Work-place stress has, in fact, become a part of life for the employees; it is a carry-over to home and affects all relationships. Life to-day has become very complex even at home. It crosses home boundaries and like a shadow follows the employees outside home. It is impossible to avoid stress; it has to be managed. *Stephen Robbins (1999)* defines stress as “a dynamic activity wherein an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand”.

Stress, in general, is an unavoidable consequence of modern living which has been, and is being continuously, affected by advancements in science and technology. We live practically in knowledge society, full of new generation challenges, opportunities and vicissitudes. All concerned know it well that past decades have witnessed tremendous changes at work-places owing to changes in organizational structure, policies and practices, peer pressures and consumer behaviour. Consumer behaviour has been affected by changed production pattern necessitated by the race to provide new products with additional features. This has further promoted changed consumption pattern, being influenced by mobility of human race, more so under the World Trade Organisation’s newly produced approach to bring about transformation of the world into global village. There are other reasons too for stress generation like growth of industries, not only in the urban areas but also in the rural areas causing heavy pressure in the urban areas on the facilities and other infrastructure; quantitative growth in population and various problems in day-to-day life are also other reasons for increasing stress. Stress is a condition of strain that has a direct bearing on emotions, thought process and physical conditions of a person (*Jayashree, 1992, P34*). Seventy five percent of body diseases are said to be stress related (*R. Ganpathi, 2010, P48*).

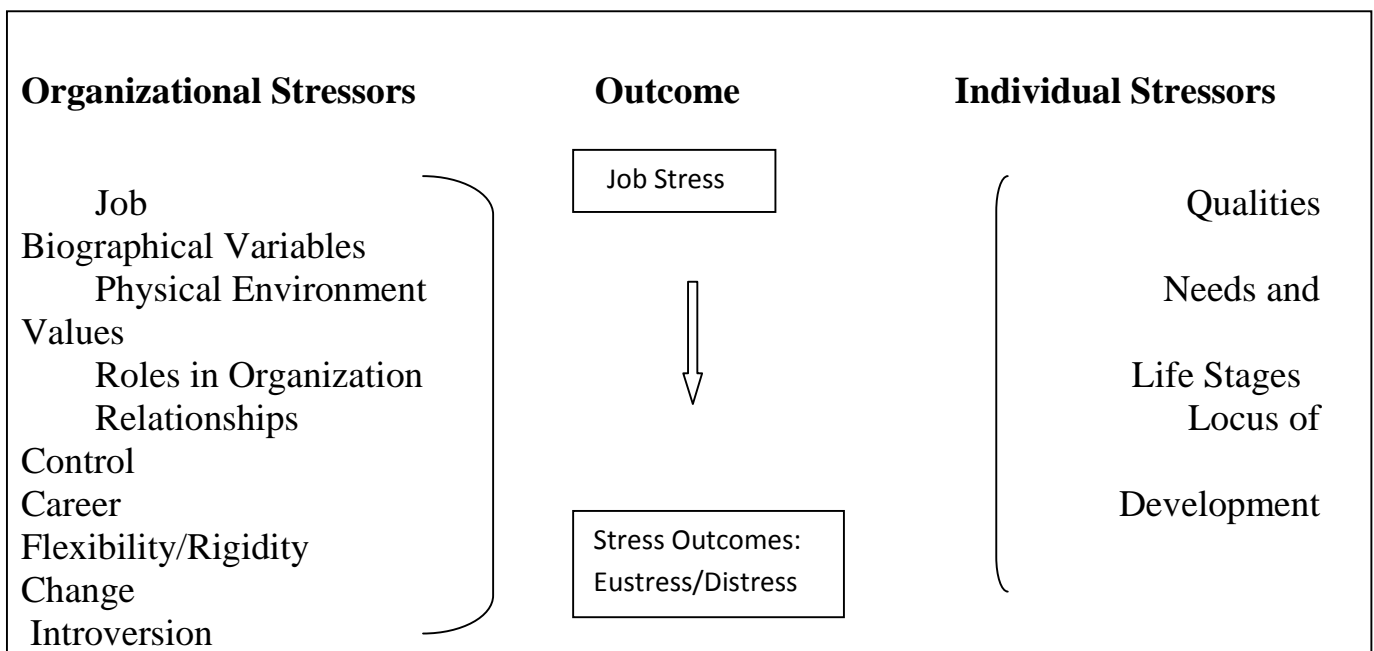
Steers (1981) indicates that, “occupational stress has become an important topic for study of the organizational behaviour for several reasons”.

- Stress has harmful psychological and physiological effects on employees.
- Stress is a major cause of increased employee-turnover and higher rate of absenteeism.
- Stress experienced by one employee can affect the morale and safety of other employees.

Stress is understood to be the measure of the extent of adaptation of our body and mind to change. In other words, stress represents an unbalanced state between environmental requirements and individual abilities for adaptation (*Elkahlout & Algaed, 2009, P77*). Change process occurring in an organization directly affects employee-prosperity as it has direct relationship with increased insecurity. This, in turn, results in enhanced feelings of stress; decreases job satisfaction and have negative implications on physical and psychological health among employees of an organization (*Cunha and Cooper, 2002*). There is accordingly dire need to attain and sustain the most healthy work environment because of the pervasiveness of stress in all aspects of work.

Stress is defined generally as the non-specific response of the body to any demand, whether it is caused by, or results in, pleasant or unpleasant conditions (*Selye, 1936*). A recent global economic indicator survey conducted by the *Regus Group* revealed significant increase of work-related stress over the last two years in most of the countries. The highest increase was recorded in China where about 86% employees reported a rise in stress. India too ranked quite high, as 57% of its workers said they experienced a higher level of stress (*WHO, 2006*). Job related stress is triggered by two groups of sources - organizational and individual. The figure below depicts a model of managerial job stress. It contains depiction of main sources/causes of stress.

Model of Managerial Job Stress



Source: C.B Gupta, 2010

It is reiterated that Stress has become a major cause of concern for both employers and employees. Symptoms of stress are manifested both physiologically and psychologically. Persistent stress can result in cardiovascular disease, sexual health problems, a weaker immune system and frequent headache, stiff muscles, or backache, etc. *Table 1 below indicates that out of top ten causes of death in India, maximum deaths are stress related.*

Table 1

TOP TEN CAUSES OF DEATH IN INDIA				
(Ages 25 to 69)				
(In percentage)				
RANK	CAUSE OF DEATH	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1	Cardiovascular diseases	26.3	22.5	24.8
2	Respiratory diseases	10.1	10.4	10.2
3	Tuberculosis	11.4	8.3	10.1
4	Malignant & other tumors	7.8	11.8	9.4
5	Ill-defined conditions	4.8	6.0	5.3
6	Digestive diseases	6.1	3.5	5.1
7	Diarrhoeal diseases	4.0	6.6	5.0
8	Unintentional injuries	5.0	4.1	4.6
9	Intentional self harm	3.3	2.6	3.0
10	Malaria	2.4	3.4	2.8

Source: India Today, April 2010

ASSOCHAM (Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry in India) and PWC (Price Waterhouse Coopers) have conducted another study which revealed that 65 million people were affected by hypertension in 2008 and the number was likely to increase to 200 million by 2015. It is estimated that India is losing its potentially productive years due to increasing heart diseases and strokes in the age group of 35-60 years, falling in the group of countries that comprise the ones with the highest incidence in the world (*K. Aswathhapa, 2009*).

It is necessary to understand the types of physical and psychological stress factors in the internal and external work environment and the level of their interaction with individual's characteristics so that interventions may be made for the reduction of their impact, if not elimination thereof altogether, from the work place, thus ensuring greater efficiency and optimum productivity and also enhanced well being of employees within their families and with the outside world.

Banking Sector

Since 1991, the banking sector has undergone rapid policy changes due to various factors like privatisation, liberalization and globalization of the Indian economy leading to increased competition by permitting entry of domestic private sector banks and foreign banks, introduction of new technologies in operations (like Core Banking Solutions) and many others – Internet Banking, installation of Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), Real Time Gross Settlement System (RTGSS). When we consider the amount of time employees spend in workplace, it is natural that occupational stress would pose serious threat to employee well-being.

Status of financial security, opportunities for career advancement, demands and expectations to perform, relationships, events, and physical environment at workplace, continuously affect an individual's ability to cope in the work environment (*Khattak & Khan, 2009, p.810*). The invasion of technological revolution in all walks of life coupled with globalisation, and privatisation policies has drastically changed conventional patterns in all sectors and sub-sectors of the economy; the change is discernible in social and cultural domains too.

The banking sector is no exemption to this. Globalization and privatization led policies compelled the banking sector to reform and adjust to have a competitive edge vis-a-vis private entities. These significant changes have both directly and indirectly affected the social, economic and psychological spheres of the bank employees (*Khattak & Khan, 2009, p.11*). It has been found that more than 60% of the bank employees have one or other problem directly or indirectly related to these drastic changes. The



shattering consequences of stress can affect an individual as also an organization in different ways. The following table explains it:

Effect of Stress on Individual		
Physical Effects	Psychological Effects	Behavioral Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Backache • Restlessness • Respiratory Disorders • Nausea • Skin Problems • Hair Problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tension • Anxiety • Fear • Depression • Forgetfulness • Negative Thinking • Frustration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arguing • Crying • Conflicting Attitude • Physical act of Violence • Absenteeism • Underperformance • Using abusive language
Effect of Stress on Organization		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased Absenteeism • Decreased Commitment to work • Increased staff turnover • Impaired performance and productivity • Increased complaints from clients and customers • Adverse effects on staff recruitment 		

Source: WHO, 2003

The factors discussed above are prospective attributes to cause occupational stress and related disorders among the employees. We have to be quite clear on the point that, health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity but a positive state of complete physical, social and mental well being (*M. Dhanalakshmi, 2011, P41*).

In this context, the researcher has undertaken this study to identify the major causes of stress.

Objectives, Scope and Methodology

The objectives for the present study have been formulated as follows:



1. To study the relationship between stress level and selected demographic characteristics (age, gender and monthly income).
2. To identify and analyze the organizational and individual factors leading to stress.
3. To suggest suitable measures for reducing the stress level among respondents.

The primary data for analysis has been collected from the employees of three public sector banks (Panjab National Bank, Canara Bank and State Bank of India) in Panchkula. To collect the primary data, 100 employees were selected with the help of convenience sampling. The data for analysis was collected using the tool of questionnaire. A few interviews were conducted using a Schedule. The questionnaire contained questions relating to organizational factors (unpleasant working conditions, time pressure, technological advancements, work overload, commands of boss, impatient and demanding customers and low salary). Individual factors (feeling of inequality, lack of peer support, health issues and family problems) leading to stress among employees as well as initiatives for managing stress.

The primary data collected has been analysed with respect to three age categories of the sample-units that is, category A_1 (below 25 years), A_2 (25-35 years) & A_3 (above 35 years) and three income categories viz; I_1 (below Rs 20,000), I_2 (Rs 20,000-30,000) and I_3 (above Rs 30,000). Gender is another variable for the analysis of collected data. The observations during the collection of data have also been taken into consideration. Statistical tools used for analysis are simple frequencies, percentages and rating techniques. Chi-square test was applied to study the relationship between the stress level and selected demographic variables. Garrett's ranking technique was also used to rank the factors which caused stress among the employees and the initiatives for managing stress.

Research Hypothesis

- There is no relationship between the stress level of the respondents and selected demographic variables (age, gender and monthly income).

Analysis

The results from the analysis of the collected data are presented under different heads.

Table 2

Relationship between Stress Level and Age of the Respondents.

S. No.	Age		A ₁	A ₂	A ₃	Total
	Group	Stress level				
1.	Stressed		6	37	15	58
2.	Not stressed		4	30	8	42
3.	Total		10	67	23	100

Chi-square value=1.386, (d.f.) =2, insignificant at 5 per cent level of significance It was inferred from the above table that the majority of respondents (63.79%) who felt stressed belonged to age category A₂. But, the results of chi-square test showed that no significant differences, at 5 per cent level of significance, existed among the respondents belonging to different age-band categories with respect to stress level

Table: 3

Relationship between the Income of the Respondents and their Stress Level

Sl. No.	Income			Total	
	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃		
1.	Stressed	28	35	4	67
2.	Not stressed	10	15	8	33
3.	Total	38	50	12	100

Chi-square value=3.11, (d.f.) =2, significant at 5 per cent level of significance

The chi-square value at 5 percent level of significance indicates that significant differences exist among the respondents belonging to different income categories in relation to stress level. It indicates that less income is one of the factors causing stress

as maximum number of stressed employees belongs to low income categories viz; I_1 and I_2 .

Table: 4

Relationship between the Stress Level and Gender of the Respondents.

S. No.	Gender Stress level	Male	Female	Total
1.	Stressed	45	25	70
2.	Not stressed	20	10	30
3.	Total	65	35	100

Chi-square value=.45, (df) =1, insignificant at 5 per cent level of significance

Table 4 shows that out of stressed employees which account for 70%, maximum out of them are male employees (64.28) but chi square value reveals no association between the two attributes namely gender of the employees and their stress level, as the calculated chi square value is less than the table value. It means that employees experience stress irrespective of their gender.

Organizational Factors Causing Stress: The employees experience stress due to various organizational factors like poor working conditions, excessive work, time pressure to name a few. These can result in irritability, jumpiness, insecurity, exhaustion, and difficulty in concentrating. From the organizational point of view, stress also affects the overall productivity of the organization (*Shamim Akhtar, 2011, P27*). Table 5 indicates the organizational factors causing stress among employees. To ascertain the major causes of stress, employees were asked to express their views on 5 point Likert scale and their responses are shown below.

Table: 5
Organizational Factors Causing Stress

Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Unpleasant Working conditions	10	15	48	19	8
Work overload	19	37	31	11	2
Time Pressure	5	20	50	17	8
Technological Advancement	7	21	40	31	1
Orders & commands of boss	18	49	23	6	4
Impatient Customer	22	20	40	11	7
Low Salary	29	30	18	11	12

Table 5 above exhibits that majority of the respondents considered orders and commands of boss (67%), low salary (59%) and work overload (56%) as main causes of stress. Majority of the respondents are either indifferent or neutral with respect to time pressure (50%), unpleasant working conditions (48%) and impatient customers (40%). Despite this position, many employees have shown their disagreement with technological advancements (32%) as one of the major organizational factors which causes stress.

Individual Factors Causing Stress: The stress condition is caused not only by organizational factors but also by the personal (individual's) factors which are also responsible for causing stress among employees. Contrary to organizational factors which are generalized in nature, individual factors are personal to employees and more specific thus sharply identifiable. During interviews, it became clear if the employees felt that their efforts were not being recognized as against others where this was done,

and they were not getting fair treatment that is positive stroke, reinforcement of behaviour did not take place and the efforts put in were kept at level to avoid punishment or criticism of any sort. A feeling of low self-confidence arises thereby which jeopardizes their efficiency, causing stress.

Table: 6

Individual Factors Causing Stress

Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Feeling of inequality	20	40	30	8	2
Lack of peer support	10	20	45	10	15
Health Issues	22	20	40	11	7
Family Problems	28	25	20	10	17

A look at table 6 above shows amply clearly that various individual factors affect employee’s performance and thereby cause stress. It shows that maximum respondents attribute feeling of inequality (60%) and family problems (53%) to their stress related issues. A large number of employees are neutral with respect to individual factors like lack of peer support (45%) and health issues (40%).

Major Causes of Stress: Turning to table 7 below, we observe that it indicates the root causes of stress. The pointer is that stress is a reality of our everyday life. There are both eustresses and distresses that come from our work and non-work lives. The work and non-work domains of one’s life are closely interrelated (*Sekaran, 1986*). If one experiences much distress at work, that stress will be carried over to the home, which will increase the sense of awareness of even small distresses experienced in a family sphere. Likewise, stress experienced at home or with friends or from other non-work situations is carried over to the work place which generally heightens and multiplies the stresses experienced at work. Thus, in order to rank the most influencing reason for the job stress of the sample respondents, Garret's Ranking Technique was used. Eleven selected factors are listed in the following table (table No.7) to identity which factor is the root cause of stress. A detailed discussion emerged on 11 specific



factors analyzed with the help of Garrett's Ranking Technique. The order of merit thus given by the respondents for the 11 specific problems was converted into ranks by using the formula. The ranks thus obtained were converted into scores by referring to the table given by Garrett. Then for each problem, the scores of individual respondents were added and divided by the total number of respondents whose scores were summated. The mean scores for all the problems were arranged in ascending order and ranks were shown in order of importance in table 7.

Table: 7

Causes of Stress

Causes of Stress	Mean Score	Rank
Work overload	59.59	1
Time Pressure	58.34	2
Orders and commands of boss	51.90	3
Low Salary	51.79	4
Technological Advancement	51.41	5
Feeling of inequality	48.81	6
Health Issues	46.82	7
Family Problems	45.28	8

Garrett's ranking technique was used to rank the most influencing reason for causing stress among respondents.. Table 7 depicts the mean scores of various factors. Further, the table reveals that out of 11 factors listed above, work overload has been considered as the main cause of stress (59.59%) followed by time pressure (58.34%), unpleasant working conditions (58.23%), orders and commands of boss (52.33%) and so on. On the basis of Garrett's ranking analysis, impatient customers (42.13%) and Lack of peer support (39.32%) causes minimum stress.

Initiatives for Managing the Stress Level: The responsibility to maintain a healthy work-life balance rests on both, the organization and employees. The organization needs to support its employees by creating an environment that enables them to maintain a healthy balance. The employees, on the other hand, need an attitudinal shift

and a mental discipline to ensure that priorities are set right and adhered to (*P Dwarkanath, director, group human capital, Max India Ltd*).

Taking close look by looking at stress from organizational point of view, management may not be concerned about the low to moderate levels of stress experienced by the employees. For this kind of indifference, the laudable reason is that some functional level of stress is necessary to improve employee performance. Such stress leads to crisis and then all faculties and generic skills come to assist the employee to look for workable alternatives thus promoting entrepreneurial innovation and creativity. But high levels of stress and sustained low levels of stress are a cause of concern for the management. It is at this stage that management rises to combat this stress for happy environment.

A happy and satisfied employee improves his working and that performance is reflected in productivity and fewer faults in products. In a situation when stress overpowers the employees, the organizations should focus on diagnosing the causes of what actually manifests as symptoms causing stressful condition affecting health and application to work/task in the organization, and then try to rectify the problems from its origin. Unrealistic targets, poor communication and negative motivation are some of the root causes which should be avoided (*Shamim Akhtar, 2011*).

Table: 8

Initiatives for Managing Stress

Initiatives for Managing Stress	Mean Score	Rank
Recognition and Rewards	66.40	1
Transparency in System	59.58	2
Developmental Programs	44.63	3
Effective Communication	44.29	4
Empathetic Attitude	42.35	5
Work Life Balance	41.77	6

A critical look at table 8 would show that recognition and rewards got first rank with mean score of 66.40 followed by transparency in system and developmental programs



with mean scores of 59.58 and 44.63, respectively. Stress is also caused when employees find it tough to balance their professional and personal life. Therefore, the organisation (Bank in this study) can also take initiatives for managing both work and life and thereby manage stress.

Findings and Suggestions

As its objective, the study proceeded in systematic and scientific manner and analyzed the major causes of stress (organizational and individual) and also the initiatives that banks could undertake to reduce the stress level of employees. The results reveal that the potential sources of stress are heavy workload, dead-lines for various operational transactions (time pressure) and routine, boring and unpleasant working conditions. It is also inferred that there is a need on the part of the banks to look into these stress factors which may cause serious repercussions for the banking sector in the long run. The job of bankers demands continuous interaction with customers and figures. The staggering (prolonged) working hours also keep them off all the day long from their families and social life. These aspects lead to emotional exhaustion of banking sector employees and make them completely stressed out. It is important to note that there is significant relationship between income of employees and their stress levels but either age or gender has no significant association with employees being stressed or not.

The study suggests that the banks should conduct stress audit at all levels in the organization to identify stress areas and thus help to reduce stress. The system should be transparent and banks should encourage open channel of communication with employees. The study revealed that the employees should be duly recognized and rewarded for their good work which further improves their efficiency at work. The stress created by long hours can be reduced, if the banking transactions (operational work) are carried out in shifts. Lack of ample time for family and job worries at home leads to problems in work-family interface. Thus the study also recommends that the banks should introduce work life balance initiatives which will further motivate the employees and increase their productivity and quality at work

Conclusion

It is a fact that stress is the result more of the convergence of three developments – phenomenal computing power, developments in science & technology and communication revolution – stress has been raising its ugly head and it has to be managed. The truth is that the rising workplace stress is a large albatross hanging around the neck of both employees as well as employers. The US Department of Labour and the American Psychological Association have conducted studies in the recent past and found out that there was a 20.3 per cent increase in job absences

caused by anxiety stress and neurotic disorders. There is no surprise in the outcome that stress affects morale, productivity as well as safety. A workable strategy would be aimed at creating and sustaining a healthy workplace environment that can pay off in reversing this trend. Inviting employees to have a say about their work environment in an honest and open fashion (as corporate policy initiative) can change the workplace culture and help reduce stress to a great extent. Managing stress in the developing economies like India's has become quite a challenge as there is a gaping gap between the existing health infrastructure and the pace at which organizations are expanding, thus putting increasing pressure on the facilities and amenities that are available currently.

Therefore, it's high time we created awareness and adopted corrective measures at least to minimize the menace. The productivity of the work force is most decisive factor as far as the success of an organization is concerned. Productivity in turn is dependent on the psychological well being of the employees. We are working in an age of highly dynamic and competitive world in which man is exposed to all kinds of stress factors that affect him on all realms of life. Therefore, there is feeling of growing importance of interventional strategies (organisational development interventions) at organizational level to root out the rot that has been unconsciously caused and to set in motion all the possible remedial measures..

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