

The Nature and Sources of Organizational Stress: Some coping Strategies

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Abstract

The paper investigated nature and sources of stress in the organizational life and in teachers. The data were taken from both primary and secondary sources. Three categories of stress: physiologically, psychologically, and behaviorally are discussed in this paper. The effects and aftereffects of stress of these three categories are also given. It revealed that the level of stress could be decreased with the help of coping strategies. It is less possible to become stress free. **The only stress free place according to the Holy Qur'an in this great universe is 'Heaven'.**

Key words: Stress, Nature of stress, Sources of stress, teacher, coping strategies, Quran.

Introduction

Having stress is a fact of life which everyone deals with it on daily basis. Understanding the nature of stress is complicated. Stress is not simply anxiety, nervous breakdown, or something damaging, bad, or to be avoided (Luthans, 2010). It is an arousal state of mind and body in response to demands made up on them. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2003) explained that stress is the physiological and psychological response of an individual to demands (the loss of something desired), constraints (forces that prevent individuals from doing what they desire), or opportunities involving uncertainty and important outcomes. It is a dynamic condition in which any individual confronts with an opportunity, constraint or demand related to what the person desires, and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important (Clegg, 2000; Lohithakshan, 2000; Newman, 1998; Landy,

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1994). Kyriacou (1989: 27) stated that stress to teachers refers to the experience of unpleasant emotion by teachers such as: anger, tension, frustration, depression, and nervousness, resulting from their work.

Stress is usually known as a negative term caused by something bad. There are two kinds of stress: (a) di stress (b) eu stress (a Greek term). Di Stress is used for negative term in situations like: being on probation, formal reprimand for poor performance, serious ill. Eu stress is used for positive value, when any opportunity offers a potential gain. Some examples of such opportunities are trying to be on Dean's list, working for top position in an examination, job promotion and transfer to another location of less priority of the employee. It is a mild form of stress which can act as a motivator and energizer; therefore, people employees should seek out rather than avoid (Clegg, 2000; Luthans, 2010, p. 297). Robbins (2003 & 2010) also explained in this regard: stress is not necessarily bad in its nature. There can be a positive value when any opportunity offers a potential gain (p 563).

Pressure, stress and strain are used in literature either synonymously or related to each other. When any opportunity offers a positive gain is considered as pressure, which is also known as eu stress. It can also be called mild form of stress and acts as motivator and energizer (Owen, 2000). High level of pressure or stress is an emotional response to conditions that are traumatic, threatening, or exciting. It produces chemical changes that prepare the body for action, and those changes are accompanied by various observable behaviors: rapid pulse, high blood pressure, trembling. It can result social and medical problems and affect the performance negatively (Luthans, 2010). Strain is deviation from the normal state or functioning resulting from stress.

Giving data of medical side Luthans (2003) reported that 90 % patients visiting medical doctors for prescription complain having symptoms related to stress. He (2003) also mentioned that as a result of stress in the organizational life they have to spend \$68 billion due to several factors like: absenteeism and poor performance. Many employees in Germany and Britain suffered serious ill effects due to stress, costing their organizations more than DM 100 billion and \$ 65 billion and \$ 11.4 billion USD, respectively. Robbins (2003) also reported stress as an increasing problem in the lives of employees in various organizations. According to Bacon and Allen (1983) 75% diseases are said to be stress related. Therefore, it is important for administrators and employees to know about stressors as they induce job-related stress which may influence work attitude, behavior, and performance. The research has very clearly revealed that satisfied worker performs better and stress is enemy of satisfaction (Akhtar, 2010; Owen, 2000; Luthans, 2010).

Some symptoms of stress:

Stressors are the environmental conditions that have the potential to cause stress (Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990). Three categories of stress: physiologically, psychologically, and behaviorally are discussed in this paper. Early research focused on health related or physiological concerns. It reflected that high stress level resulted in: changes in metabolism, increased heart and breathing rate, increased blood pressure, headaches and increased risk of heart attacks (Luthans, 2010).

Potential sources of stress:

Thousands of studies to identify sources of stress are conducted. In a study conducted at the inner city of Lahore, Pakistan to know the factors creating stress in school heads concluded that overload, long working hours, non cooperative attitude of teachers, and concern about the education and wedding of their daughters created stress (Malik & Din, 2000-2001). According to the research conducted by Style and Cavanaugh (1996): expectations, self-fulfillments, student teacher relation, self relations, conflicting values, professional constraints, personal in/competence, ego needs were revealed as the sources of stress. In the postal workers job related tension was a serious cause of stress in the United States. Greater workload due to downsizing in various companies created stress by longer workload and working hours. Reported by Dean (1995) in teachers stress can be caused by working conditions, role conflict, role ambiguity, poor management and children behavior and head teachers experienced stress as a result of greater responsibilities and their position with what they have to interact with the public and work with higher authorities. Surveys have revealed that employees complain about stress created due to trying a balance in work and family life (p 563). In Japan Fukoku Life Insurance Company conducted several studies regarding working hours. Employees working more hours were badly stressed was revealed in several studies conducted by Fukoku Life Insurance Company. Over 2300 workers died in 1996 having karoshi (means death from overworking) listed as their cause of death (DeCenzo& Robbins 1999, p 439). Robbins (2010) has discussed sources of stress under four major areas: Organizational factors, Extra/ Non organizational factors, Group factors, and Individual/ personal factors.

Organizational factors:

Organizational factors are the most influential in the organizational life and have great potential to induce job-related stress. There are many factors within organizations that can create stress. Some of the macro level stressors related to job stress by Luthans (2003) are discussed in this paper in four categories: (a)

Administrative policies and strategies (b) Organizational structure and design (c) Organizational processes and (d) Working conditions

- a) Administrative policies and strategies: Some of the factors related to administrative policies and strategies created stress in organizational life are: “Downsizing, Competitive pressure, Merit pay plan, Bureaucratic plan, and advanced technology” (p 301).
- b) Organizational structure and design: The factors related to organizational structure and design created threat resulting stress are: “Centralization and formalization, Line staff conflicts, Specialization, Role ambiguity and conflict, No opportunity for promotion, Restrictive & untrusting culture” (p 301).
- c) Organizational processes: The factors creating stress related to organizational processes are: “Tight control, only downward communication, little performance feedback, Centralized decision making, Lack of participation in decisions, and Punitive appraisal systems” (p 301).
- d) Working conditions: As revealed from the literature the factors related to working conditions creating stress are: “Crowded work area, noise, heat, or cold, polluted air, strong odor, unsafe & dangerous conditions, poor lighting, physical or mental strain, Toxic chemicals or radiations” (p 301).

2. Extra/ Non Organizational Factors

Organizations are greatly affected by the external environment. Environmental conditions have a potential threat to cause stress. Following extra/ non organizational factors create threat in the organizational life:

- Social/ technological change: It has a great effect on life style. The pace of modern living has increased stress and decreased wellness. It has both eu stress and di stress impact and carries over into their jobs.
- Family: It has a big impact on personality development. Relocation, illness of member, residence, dual career, stress to spouse, divorce & trauma three month effect, spouse or children death can act as stressors.
- Economic/ financial conditions: Any change in the business cycle, when the economy is contracting, or any change in income of individuals creates stress. Many employees are forced to go in the evening for a second job or spouse work to fulfill the financial needs, which creates stress.

- Race and class: It is reflected that minorities suffer at job place. Women suffer stress due to discrimination, stereotype working, and social isolation
- Residential/ community conditions: It has revealed through research that condition of housing, convenience of services and shopping, neighborhood, and degree of noise and air pollution create stress (Lunenburg and Ornstein 2003; p 537; Luthans, (2010).

3. Group Stressors: Three Major Areas

The groups have a tremendous influence on behavior. Three major areas related to group behavior which create stress are given as under:

1. Lack of group cohesiveness: It creates cynic, untrustworthy attitude in the organizations and makes life stressful.
2. Lack of social support: 'Man is a social animal' therefore, social support provides cohesiveness and opportunity to share problems with each other. Lack of this support creates stress.
3. Intra-individual, interpersonal and inter-group conflicts: Conflict is normally associated with incompatible or hostile attitude and becomes a source of stress.

4. Individual/ Personal Stressors

There are several personal factors as a source of stress for administrators at work place like: individual characteristics as need for achievement, aptitudes and skills, task understanding and personality traits (authoritarianism, introversion/ extroversion and self-esteem were found creating stress). Some other sources of stress individually are families' issues, economic problems, economic problems, personality, poor health, out of physical shape, not enough leisure time, poor diet, over/ under weight, no direction in life, inherent family characters, role conflict, role incompatibility, role ambiguity and role over load or under load.

Family issues: Some of these are marital difficulties, the breaking off of a relationship, and discipline troubles with children that create stress and there is impact on the working of employees.

- Economic problems: Regardless of income level many of the workers face difficulties in handling finances. This led the researchers to conclude that stress symptoms expressed on the job may actually originate in the person's personality. A famous saying of the last Prophet Muhammad SAW "if a man

is given a valley of gold, s/he wishes to have one more” helps to understand this phenomenon.

- Role conflict: If a person is required to carry out two or more roles at the same time, or a situation in which an individual is confronted by divergent role expectations creates stress (Robbins, 2003, pp. 228-9).
- Role incompatibility: Stress results when the role is incompatible.
- Role ambiguity: Uncertainty, whether in the focal person or in members of the role set, about what the focal person’s role is in any given time, creates stress.
- Role overload or role under load: when the number of roles that one person can handle becomes too much or to do little can be stress provoking.

There are several personality traits which create stress in individuals at work. In this regard Friedman and Rosen man’s (1974) extensive studies found the type ‘A’ profile correlated highly with experienced stress. Type ‘A’ and type ‘B’ personality is a classical example to be quoted here. Research reflected that type ‘A’ characteristics are more dangerous than Type ‘B’. More details can be seen in Friedman and Rose man’s studies.

Type ‘A’ characteristics are: “Being impatient, more of the time walking, talking, and eating rapidly, always moving, doing two things at once, cannot cope with leisure time, mostly is observed: with numbers, aggressive and competitive, measures success with quantity and constantly feels under time pressure”. Whereas Type ‘B’ characteristics are: “not concerned, about time, is patient, plays for fun not to win, has no pressing deadlines relaxes without guilt, mild mannered, and never in a hurry.

Several studies were conducted in the field of education and teacher education. Kyriacou (1989) in this regard reported the following factors, which created stress particularly in teachers at work place: attempting to motivate students, planning appropriate activities for wide student ability ranges, coping with excessive amounts of paperwork, dealing with large numbers of indifferent parents, too little clerical help, lack/ less of salary/ compensation for teaching, poor faculty relationships in the school, poor administration/ teacher relationship, class size too large, frequent class disruptions.

The effects of stressors

As mentioned above, this paper investigates the effects of only these three categories: (i) Physiological (ii) Psychological (iii) Behavioral.

1. Effects of physiological stressors

The effects of physiological stressors are related to feelings. Some of them are: produce a chemical reaction (s) in the body, increased heart and breathing rates, increased blood pressure, changes in metabolism, increased perspiration, increased skin temperature, high blood glucose level, blood clotting, and migraine headache.

After effects of physiological stressors

If these stressors mentioned above continue for a longer period of time, there are several aftereffects on the personality. Some of these after effects of physiological stressors are: heart diseases, hypertension, increased blood cholesterol level, ulcer, allergies, gastrointestinal problems, arthritis, cancer, and skin diseases.

2. Effects of psychological stressors

Psychological stressors are also related to feelings. Some of these stressors are: anxiety, tension, boredom, depression and mental fatigue

After effects of psychological stressors:

If these stressors continue for a longer period of time, there are several after effects on the personality of the employee: Some of these aftereffects of psychological stressors are: poor intellectual functioning, lower self esteem, irritability, inability to concentrate, inability to decision making, forgetfulness, negativism and apathy (lack of emotions and feelings).

1. Effects of behavioral stressors:

Behavioral stressors are related to doing. Some of the effects related to doing are: impulsive behavior, higher tardiness, absenteeism, decreased performance, extreme in appetite, drug abuse, and speech difficulties,

Coping Strategies

Various researchers and writers have reported/ suggested coping strategies in the light of several researches conducted throughout the world. For the work point of view a limited amount of stress (low to moderate) may benefit the organization. Such level of stress may be functional and lead to higher performance. High level of stress or even low level sustained over long periods of time can lead to reduce employees' performance. It requires an appropriate action by the management. (Clegg, 2000; DeCenzo, 1999; Robbins, 2003; Luthans, 2003).

Efforts individuals can do to reduce the level of stress:

An employee can reduce the level of stress by personal responsibility. Some of the strategies proven effective are given as under:

1. Implementing time management techniques

Time management is greatly helpful in reducing stress. Luthans (2003) in this regard has given an application example for time pressure which is a major cause of stress for managers. Because no matter how fast some managers work and how much time they put in; they are still unable to get all their work done. Time management techniques are helpful with these problems. Today many organizations, for this purpose, are training their managers how to get more done in less time. Some of the most helpful guidelines for effective time management are given below as an exercise.

- i. "Make out a "to do" list that identifies everything that must be done during the day. This helps keep track of work progress.
- ii. Subordinates should be delegated minor work/ authority.
- iii. Determine when you do the best work –morning or afternoon – and the most difficult assignments should be schedule for this time period.
- iv. At least set one hour time aside, preferably, during the day when visitors or other interruptions are not permitted.
- v. Let the secretary screen and respond all incoming calls in order to turn away minor or those do not require your personal attention.
- vi. To catch up on paperwork, have lunch in the office one or two days a week in order to save time and give yourself the opportunity.
- vii. Discourage drop-in visitors by turning your desk so that you do not have eye contact with the door or hallway.
- viii. Read standing up. The average person reads faster and more accurately when in a slightly uncomfortable position.
- ix. Make telephone calls between 4:30 and 5:00 P.M. People tend to keep these conversations brief so that they can go home.
- x. Put all remaining works on top priority on the tomorrows "to do list" and do not feel guilty about those things that have not been accomplished today. (Luthans, 2003)".

An exercise above is given in this paper as a sample. Readers and all those interested in working in this area can develop such exercises in all other areas.

1. **Increasing physical exercise:** It produces chemical responses within the body that reduce many of symptoms of stress for heart rate, breathing rate, and blood pressure. Some of the exercises for people of all ages are: walking, jogging, swimming, riding bicycle, playing softball, tennis or racquetball to cope with stress (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 2003).
2. **Meditation:** This affects basic body function in a manner equivalent to deep rest, which is helpful in reducing the symptoms of stress. (Luthans, 2003)
3. **Life style changes:** Life style according to Islam which is simple is greatly helpful in reducing symptoms of stress. Some other factors like a proper diet, getting adequate sleep, doing daily exercises regularly, avoiding smoking and all illegal drugs is likely to minimize the harmful effects of stress (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 2003).
4. **Relaxation training:** It is good to eliminate immediately stressful situation or manage a prolonged stressful situation (Luthans, 2003).
5. **Expanding social support network:** It clearly revealed from social psychology research that social support is beneficial to employees. It involves building sympathetic and close associations with others coworkers and colleagues. It helps in confidence building and ultimately reduces symptoms of stress. (Ibid)
6. **Visualization:** It is concentrating on a soothing color or focusing on a peaceful scene to imagine you performing the steps needed to achieve a goal.
7. **Visiting mental health professionals:** Among them are: psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and mental health counselors. Having special training they are helpful in reducing the level of stress (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 2003).

Organizational programs to cope with stress

In literature one can benefit from theories developed on coping with stress (Edwards, 1992, April, pp 238-274). Overall policies and strategies, structure and design processes, functions and working conditions need to be carefully seen. Most of these organizational factors creating stresses will be focus of attention in developing strategies to cope with stress. Most of these can be controlled by the management. Some coping strategies are given as under:

1. As for as the matter of policies is concerned, attention should be given to making performance reviews and based on it pay plans equitable and fair.

2. In the area of structures, steps should be taken to back away from higher degree formalization and specialization.
3. For physical conditions security measures be given importance, lighting, noise and temperature would be improved.
4. In processes/ functions improvement in ways of communication and providing information will help in reducing stress.
5. Jobs should be carefully designed, which are appropriate to the interests, education and qualifications of the employees.
6. Stress can be reduced by clarifying organizational roles. Each employee should have clear expectations and the necessary information and support so that employee is not left with conflicting demands or an ambiguous understanding of what s/he is to do.
7. Porter (1975) and Lawler (1990) work known as 'equity theory' which is "perceived equitable rewards are a major input into employee's satisfaction" provides guidance which is helpful in reducing stress.
8. Supportive organizational culture: Making the structure of organizations more decentralized and organic, with participatory decision making and upward communication flows helps in reducing stress.
9. Goal settings and management by objectives: It channels employee's persistent effort toward organizationally relevant outcomes. Goals are powerful motivator if employees are committed. It is helpful in reducing stress.
10. Further education and informational program related to employees' assignments creates job compatibility and is helpful in doing assigned jobs. Consequence is lessening stress at job place.
11. Appropriate leadership styles: Democratic leadership creates sense of belonging in employees. Having participation in decision making motivates employees and helps in creating stress less environment. Mostly employees are satisfied and are focused on work. For this purpose training of participatory decision making skills for managers, and increasing employee involvement in decision making is needed for this purpose.
12. Making excellent and excessive use of communication skills in organizations lessen stress. Open organizational climate with top-down-top, diagonally and horizontal communication techniques are helpful to reduce stress. It is helpful in providing clarity in functions, lessening role ambiguity and role conflict. It

is also helpful in shaping employee perception. (DeCenzo, 1999, Robbins, 2003)

13. Resolving conflicts by being just in all affairs of the organization life, and directing attention of employees on the goals and objectives of the organization helps in reducing conflicts which ultimately leads in reducing stress. (Luthans, 2003)
14. Management of change. There are several factors like: government intervention in affairs, changing societal values, changing technology and knowledge explosion, administrative processes and employees' needs for change, create stress to certain levels to certain employees. Participation, of employees in decision making, use of effective communication methods, providing supportive culture with rewards, better planning and coercion are helpful to use to reduce resistance to change. Some of the major approaches to manage change can be classified as individual and group. Individual approaches to change are: job enrichment, laboratory training, behavior modification, and transactional analysis. Whereas some of the group approaches to management of change are: role analysis techniques, inter-group problems solving, process consultation, survey feedback, and strategic planning. (Lunenburg & Ornstein 2003)
15. Creating continuously awareness of Stressors to employees and managers helps in reducing stress.
16. Improvement of Environment Hygiene provides working comfort and lessens stress.
17. Collegial and functional supervision helps eliminating doubts and helps in creating trust in the organizational environment which is helpful in reducing stress.
18. Creating career development opportunities: Managers / head teachers and higher authorities should created opportunities for improving education, getting training for being effective and doing jobs comfortably. All it is to help meet the needs of employees influence organizational effectiveness.

Strategies for reducing stress in teachers:

According to Kyriacou (1989) the following strategies are particularly helpful in reducing the stress in teachers: (a) the authorities should carefully listen to teachers. (b) the teachers plan all activities and assignments ahead of time. (c) stay off the intercom (don't interrupt during class session). (d) teachers are assign as mentors

(teachers as experts) (e) progress of teachers is highlighted and they are also informed. (f) look for the good and (g) communicate with parent (through newsletter, parent teacher day etc.).

It reveals that one can decrease the level of stress with the help of coping strategies but it is less possible to become stress free. **The only stress free place according to the Holy Qur'an in this great universe is 'Heaven'**. It is said in the Holy Qur'an: enter paradise no fear shall be on you, nor shall you grieve (*Al A'araf* 7: 49). The following several other verses of the Holy Qur'an also support it: "Verily, those who have attained to faith (in this divine writ), as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians- all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds- shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve (Di stress)" (*Al Baqarah* 2: 62); and at another place it is stated "yea, indeed everyone who surrenders his whole being unto God, and is a doer of good withal, shall have his reward with his Sustainer; and all such need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve" (*Al Baqarah* 2:, 112). Also "they who spend their possessions for the sake of God and do not thereafter mar their spending by stressing their own benevolence and hurting (the feelings of the needy) shall have their reward with their Sustainer, and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve" (*Al Baqarah* 2:262). "those who spend their possessions (for the sake of God) by night and by day, secretly and openly, shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve" (*Al Baqarah* 2:274) "Verily, those who have attained to faith and do good works, and are constant in prayer, and dispense charity- they shall have their reward with their Sustainer, and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve." (*Al Baqarah* 2: 277). Like many other verses it is once again mentioned about stress free living in the Heaven "Exulting in that (martyrdom) which God has bestowed upon them out of His Bounty. And they rejoice in the glad tiding given to those (of the brethren) who have been left behind and have not yet joined them, that no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve" (*Aal e Imran* 3: 170).

Few references quoted above clearly revealed the very important point that the only stress free place in this universe is Heaven. Some more references are given below for researchers/ scholars for further research work: *Al Maedah* 5: 69; *Younis* 10: 62; *AlHajar* 15: 48; *Yaseen* 36: 55; *Al Zukhrof* 43: 48;; *AlMutuffafeen* 83: 22-24; *AlGhashia* 88: 8-11. (All translations)

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