Occupational stress is a serious and growing problem in the workplace that results in substantial cost to individual employees and organizations around the globe. Work now more than ever consumes large portions of employee’s lives. The importance of work in people lives can be a tremendous source of stress. Increase in work stress may result from people having longer work hours, threat of job loss due to organizational downsizing, or a host of other factors, such as ever-changing technology, and day to day strain in the work environment. Stress is an unpleasant state of emotional arousal that people experience in situations that they perceive as dangerous or threatening. It is accompanied by physiological, behavioral and cognitive changes. Individuals respond in different ways when subjected to certain stressors. The present study was conducted to identify the level and source of occupational stress among bank employees in Kerala. The study also explored the physical and psychological effects of job stress and major coping strategies adopted by them to tackle the crisis. The cause and effects relationship job stress and influence of coping strategies over effects of stress are also covered in this study.

The study is based on data collected from 462 sample respondents selected using multi stage stratified random sampling with proportional allocation. For this purpose Kerala state was divided into three zones namely South, Central and North. In the next stage one district each from these zones was selected. For inter-sector comparison, bank branches are again classified as public sector, Old private sector and new generation banks. The collected data analysed to identify the level of stress, sources of stress, physical and psychological effects of job stress and coping measures adopted to manage job stress. Cause and effects relationships, influence of coping strategies on effects of stress, influence of socio-economic variables
of the respondents over level, causes and effects of job stress and coping strategies were also included in the analysis. The tools used for data analysis include Chi-square test, Exploratory factor analysis, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Post-Hoc Tests multiple comparison, Canonical correlation analysis, Discriminant analysis, Multiple regression.

The study reveals that medium stress level is prevalent among majority of the respondents. Officers and Managers are high stressed groups among the respondents compared to clerks. The exploratory factor analysis identified 13 stressors experienced by the bank employees, 3 psychological effects related to job stress and 6 coping strategies adopted by them to manage the impact of job stress. Again the study depicted that socio-economic background of the respondents exerts significant influence on their level of stress, sources of stress, psychological effects of stress and selection of a particular coping strategy. The important physical strain experienced by the respondents due to job stress is eye strain, Back/Neck/Shoulder pain, Tiredness and Headache. The discriminant function analysis helped to locate the most important sources of stress in each sector taking two sectors at a time. Canonical correlation analysis facilitated to measure the strength of the overall relationships between sources of job stress and effects of job stress.

The consideration of stress factors identified in this study along with its effects are highly useful both to the management and workforces in the banking sector, in understanding the gravity of occupational stress, its impact and the necessity of management intervention to tackle it.

**Key Words:** Occupational Stress, Eustress, Work overload, Psychological effects, Coping