A STUDY ON STRESS MANAGEMENT OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN PRIVATE SECTOR

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Introduction

Stress may be referred to as an unpleasant state of emotional and physiological arousal that people experience in situations that they perceive as dangerous or threatening to their well-being. The word "stress" means different things to different people. Some people define stress as events or situations that cause them to feel tension, pressure, or negative emotions such as anxiety and anger. Others view stress as the response to these situations. This response includes physiological changes such as increased heart rate and muscle tension as well as emotional and behavioral changes. However, most psychologists regard stress as a process involving a person's interpretation and response to a threatening event. Stress at work is a relatively new phenomenon of modern lifestyles. Job stress is a chronic disease caused by conditions in the workplace that negatively affect an individual's performance and/or overall well-being of her body and mind. Women may suffer from mental and physical harassment at work places, apart from the common job stress. The word "Stress" is defined by the oxford dictionary as "A State of Affair Involving Demand on Physical or Mental Energy".

With everyday pressures of modern womanhood, the pressures of work life are becoming an ever increasing issue. 70% of women of working age are now in employment and half of these have children under the age of 5. There are an increasing number of households where the woman is the key breadwinner. This means that in addition to the challenges of running a home they are now facing stress in the workplace. Stress refers to the strain from the conflict between our external environment and us, leading to emotional and physical pressure. In our fast paced world, it is impossible to live without stress, whether you are a student or a working adult. There is both positive and negative stress, depending on each individual's unique perception of the tension between the two forces. Stress is the body's non-specific reaction to any demand made on it. For various reasons, programs dealing with stress and its related problems are becoming increasingly popular. Long-term productivity depends largely on the dedication and commitment of the company's employees. Employees are increasingly holding their employers liable for emotional problems they claim as work related. And, stress-related mental disorders have become the fastest-growing occupational disease. There is increasing evidence indicating that severe, prolonged stress is related to the diseases that are leading causes of death—coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension, cancer, emphysema, diabetes, and cirrhosis; stress may even lead to suicide. Some signs that may indicate problems include impaired judgment and effectiveness, rigid behaviour, medical problems, increased irritability, excessive absences, emerging addictive behaviours, lowered self-esteem, and apathetic behaviour. Stress is a feeling that is created when we react to particular events. It's the body's way of rising to a challenge and preparing to meet a tough situation with focus, strength, stamina, and heightened alertness. The events that provoke stress are called stressors, and they cover a whole range of situations—everything from outright physical danger to making a class presentation or taking a semester's worth of your toughest subject.

Significance of the Study

The work culture is in a complex nature in organizations, consisting of different attitudes, perceptions, values and beliefs, and plays a significant role in moderating the relationship between work stress and job attitudes. Maintaining a good balance between a successful homemaker and a potential performer in the workplace poses a major problem to the working women. Since it was intended to study in depth, the study has been undertaken from the point of view of the stress management of the Private women employees residing in Thoothukudi district only. Hence the Present study deals with "A study on Stress Management of Private women employees in Thoothukudi District".

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Review of literature

Chakraborty Krishna, (1978) says that there is an unconscious fear among all, including the women themselves, that to alter the traditional arrangement, might change or even destroy the family and femininity. This is because, the process of social change is ambiguous and offers women, conflicting signals. Consequently, the decision women make to seek an occupation, is dependent upon their ability to cope with dual responsibilities, domestic and occupational and to negotiate with their husbands and kin an arrangement that satisfies the latter.

Kapur's (1970) study was one of the first attempts to focus exclusively on the marital and family lives of employed women. Her research examined the influence of the wife's employment on the couples' marital adjustment she argues that married women's work in itself does not affect her marital adjustment negatively.

Larwood and Wood (1979) described internal blocks that women experience which derive from early sex stereotyping and socialization. First, many women are caught in a "low expectation trap" particularly when performing a job usually done by men. Women can feel that their performance is unequal to the task. Secondly, some theorists feel that women fear success and many avoid success in order to "behave in a socially approved manner" (Homre, 1970). Third, most women are not socialized to be assertive or aggressive or to seek power and control. Fourthly, many women have been expected and encouraged to be dependent upon men, a fact that some researchers believe makes women less-reliable and more amenable to influence.

Piechowski (1992) reviews the literature on the mental health of women playing multiple roles. Negative outcomes have been linked to family role demands such as disproportionate responsibility for housework and childrearing tasks and troubled marriages. Likewise, work-role stress and dissatisfaction have shown themselves to be significant predictors of depression and other psychological symptoms. In contrast, a high degree of decision latitude and control has been related to more positive outcomes. Desai and Ananthram (1985) in a study of middle class working women show, the reality is that due to the dead weight of traditional norms they are tossed between the worlds of work and family demands. It is also true that in a patriarchal family the demands of the husband, children and kin relations receive priority. It is a truism that research on dual-earner families has been sparse and uneven in India mainly because of the preoccupation with the larger issue of the status of women (Ramu, 1989).

Objectives

1. To trace the origin and growth of stress management.
2. To find out the problems faced by the women employees.
3. To find out the relationship between the socio & demographic variables of the respondents and their attitude towards stress management.
4. To trace out the relationship between the employer and employees.
5. Employee's opinion towards working conditions.
6. To examine the effect of organizational and life events stress on job attitude (Job Satisfaction).
7. To predict the job attitude (Job Satisfaction) with the help of stress measures.
8. To examine the moderating effect of work culture in the relationship between perceived stress, Job Attitude and work culture stress (organizational and life events) and job dissatisfaction, among managerial personnel.
9. To offer suitable suggestions on the basis of the findings of the study.

Methodology

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data has been collected through questionnaire. The secondary data have been collected from books, journals, periodicals, and websites. Sample size: Convenient sampling technique was adopted and 50 respondents were selected within the study area.

Tools for Analysis: The opinion of the respondents about the dimensions of occupational stress of private sector women employees were analysed with the help of ranking method.
Stress is caused by various factors - not all of which are work-related of course, (which incidentally doesn't reduce the employer's obligation to protect against the causes of stress at work). Causes of stress - known as stressors - are in two categories: external stressors and internal stressors.

1. External stressors - physical conditions such as heat or cold, stressful psychological environments such as working conditions and abusive relationships, eg., bullying.
2. Internal stressors - physical ailments such as infection or inflammation, or psychological problems such as worrying about something.

Stressors are also described as either short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic)

Short-term 'acute' stress is the reaction to immediate threat, also known as the fight or flight response. This is when the primitive part of the brain and certain chemicals within the brain cause a reaction to potentially harmful stressors or warnings (just as if preparing the body to run away or defend itself), such as noise, over-crowding, danger, bullying or harassment, or even an imagined or recalled threatening experience. When the threat subsides, the body returns to normal, which is called the 'relaxation response'. Long-term 'chronic' stressors are those pressures which are ongoing and continuous, when the urge to fight or flight has been suppressed. Examples of chronic stressors include: ongoing pressurized work, ongoing relationship problems, isolation, and persistent financial worries.

- General causes:
  a) Threat: A perceived threat will lead a person to feel stressed. This can include physical threats, social threats, financial threat, and so on. In particular it will be worse when the person feels they have no response that can reduce the threat, as this affects the need for a sense of control.
  b) Fear: Threat can lead to fear, which again leads to stress. Fear leads to imagined outcomes, which are the real source of stress.
  c) Uncertainty: When we are not certain, we are unable to predict, and hence feel we are not in control, and hence may feel fear or feel threatened by that which is causing the uncertainty.

- Life causes:
  o Death: of life partner, family, friend
  o Health: injury, illness, pregnancy
  o Family change: separation, divorce, new baby, marriage
  o Physical changes: lack of sleep, new work hours
  o Responsibility increase: new dependent, new job.
- Causes of stress at work:
  o Feeling powerless and uninvolved in determining one's own responsibilities
  o Continuous unreasonable performance demands
  o Lack of effective communication and conflict resolution
  o Lack of job security
  o Long working hours
  o Excessive time away from home and family
  o Office politics and conflict among staff
- Other stress indicators at work include:
  o Sickness absence, High staff turnover, Poor communication between teams, Bullying, Lack of feedback on performance, Value and contribution, Technological change, Lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities, Dissatisfaction with non-monetary benefits, Working long hours.
  o Boring and mundane work, One-off incidents, Uncomfortable workplace, Lack of training.

Different Dimensions of Occupational Stress

The human relations tradition of organizational research has emphasized that supportive behaviour by work supervisors can improve both the morale and productivity of workers and reduce many forms of organizational stress. Studies focusing directly on occupational stress indicate that social support reduces work stress as well as psychological strains. Two categories of strain responses, (1) job dissatisfaction and (2) psychological and physiological symptoms of strain, were used as dependent variables. The first category was chosen because studies generally have found that perceived job stressors are positively related to job dissatisfaction. The second category was chosen because previous studies
relate job stress to either psychological symptoms or physiological complaints.

Result and Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of Scale</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The infrastructure is totally poor, and it creates a sense of uneasiness</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to use my skills and abilities while doing my job</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The scope &amp; responsibilities of the new occupation are not clear</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management does not give reward to honest, hard-working and efficient staff members</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy workloads without break, causes a lot of trouble</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The occupation does not give enough time to spare with family members</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>VIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of encouragement</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload varies among staff causes undue stress</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of co-operation</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have chance to participate in making important decisions</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table reveals that the poor infrastructure has got the First rank and unclarity about the Scope & responsibilities of the new occupation has got Second rank and lack of consideration and reward from the management has got third rank and variation in the Workload among staff has got Fourth rank and Heavy workloads without break, has got Fifth rank and Inability to use their skills and abilities while doing their job has got sixth rank and Lack of encouragement has got seventh rank and lack of time to spare with family members has got eighth rank and Lack of co-operation among the staff has got ninth rank and Lack of chance to participate in important decisions has got tenth rank.

The findings of the above study suggest that the infrastructure is totally poor, in the work place and it creates a sense of uneasiness to the women employees. Management should provide proper infrastructure facility, so that the women employees can attain the organizational goal easily without any hazard. Sometimes it influences their physical and mental health and also their personal life. They do not pay attention to their families. The women employees are under much pressure which affects their performance. Gender classification show that females are more stressed due to their occupation as compared to the males. Stress and anxiety are part and parcel of the lives of most career women, who struggle to maintain among others their personal lives, their family responsibility and in discharging the duties in line with what is expected of them in their job description.

Now-a-days a working woman has a world of difference from being a home maker. This perception acts as a justification for the high stress levels among working women. However, there is no necessity to be feeling the stress and to be reeling from pressure, if what you want is a career that balances among your multiple priorities.

Six stages of Managing the job stress

The following points are to be considered for managing the job stress. It is very useful to tackle the unwanted stress while doing their work. It must be recognized that the combinations of stages within and outside the work situation interact and contribute to disease.

a) Recognize warning signs of excessive stress at work.

b) Reduce job stress by taking care of yourself.

c) Reduce job stress by prioritizing and organizing.

d) Reduce job stress by improving emotional intelligence.

e) Reduce job stress by breaking bad habits.

f) Learn how managers or employers can reduce job stress.

Suggestions

• Design jobs to provide concept, stimulation, and opportunities for workers to use their skills.

• Clearly define workers’ roles and responsibilities.

• Improve communications.

• Provide proper infrastructure facility.

• Minimize too much of work load.

• The training of stress management must be provided to the women employees.

• To provide time to the women employees during the working hours for relaxation.
Workshops/seminars and conferences must be organized to develop the positive attitude of the women employees towards job and to update their knowledge.

Conclusion

Women have to play a dual role both in the family and in the work environment. Balancing family and work effectively involves stress among women. Thus, it can be concluded that the private organization should take necessary measures to reduce the stress of women employees which will increase productivity and also create healthy environment at work place. Management should provide proper infrastructure facility for the women employees. Moreover stress management training for women in the workplace is necessary to improve women employee morale, productivity, and overall organizational health. The study has shown both causes of varying types of stress and ways to counteract them. Corporate sectors have to develop techniques for better stress management in the workplace for women employees.

Women vary greatly in their capacity to endure stressful situations, and there is, undoubtedly, self-selection in the kinds of jobs and stressors that women individual choose. Because sources of stress may vary from women to women. Providing a solution for one women worker may create stress for another women worker. For example, if the organization provides more opportunity for influence over the work process, the change in control may be experienced positively by some but negatively by others. A partial solution to this problem may involve intervening with groups of women workers that are formed based on women individual-environment relationships, and which contribute to the generation or reduction of stress in women employee.

Organizational role stress has deteriorating effects on Satisfaction with job related condition and existing managerial practices. Stress due to positive life events increases the manager’s Satisfaction with existing managerial practices like rewards, opportunities of promotions, etc. Organization should take a step to reduce work stress. It is well known that stress is a cause of many psychological and physiological diseases. So employers should have to make an effort to reduce the stress which is felt by the employees of the organization. In this regard, stress management workshop like relaxation, Yoga and music therapy may be conducted. Employer should also make effort to reduce role ambiguity and role conflict by clearly defining ones role and responsibilities. The employers may employ full time employee as a counselor to receive his/her service who will help the employee to solve their personal problems related to family or personal life. It the employers improve the working conditions and work culture of the organization, it would be beneficial for the effective functioning of the organization. Stress, or to be more accurate pressure, is an unavoidable part of everyday life, meaning different things to each of us. We are often told of the harmful effects of stress on our health and well-being, but we are not powerless in the face of stress, stress management training is a powerful tool. It is impossible to remove all the pressures from life but we can learn strategies to stop excessive pressure developing into stress.