3

STRESS

- Introduction
- Causes of work related stress
- Types of stress
- Theories of stress
- Theories of psychological stress at work
3. STRESS

Modern living has brought with it, not only innumerable means of comfort, but also a plethora of demands that tax human body and mind. Now-a-days everyone talks about stress.

It is cutting across all socio economic groups of population and becoming the great leveller. Not only just high pressure executives are its key victims but it also includes labourers, slum dwellers, working women, businessmen, professionals and even children. Stress is an inevitable and unavoidable component of life due to increasing complexities and competitiveness in living standards. The speed at which change is taking place in the world today is certainly overwhelming and breath taking. In the fast changing world of today, no individual is free from stress and no profession is stress free. Everyone experiences stress, whether it is within the family, business, organization, study, work, or any other social or economical activity. Thus in modern time, stress in general and job stress in particular has become a part of the life and has received considerable attention in recent years. Stress has become the core concern in the life of everyone, but everybody wants stress-free life. Stress is a subject which is hard to avoid. Stress is a part of day-today living. Every individual is subjected to stress either knowingly or unknowingly. Stress, long
considered alien to Indian lifestyle, is now a major health problem / hazard.

Stress is difficult to define precisely.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of stress was first introduced in the life sciences by Selye Hans in 1936. It was derived from the Latin word ‘stringere’; it meant the experience of physical hardship, starvation, torture and pain. Selye Hans, 1936 defined stress as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it”.¹ Further, stress was defined as “any external event or internal drive which threatens to upset the organism equilibrium” (Selye Hans, 1956).² Lazarus (1966) referred stress a state of imbalance with in an organism that is elicited by an actual/perceived disparity between environmental demands and the organism’s capacity to cope with these demands; and is manifested through variety of physiological, emotional and behavioural responses.³

McGrath (1970) defined stress as a perceived imbalance between demand and response capacity under conditions where failure to meet demand has important consequences.⁴
Another definition given by Stephen Robbins, 1999, stress has been stated as “a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand related to what he/she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important.”

Stress affects not only our physical health but our mental well being, too. To successfully manage stress in everyday lives, individual can learn to relax and enjoy life. The best way to manage stress is to prevent it. This may not be always possible. So, the next best things are to reduce stress and make life easier.

Stress refers to any environmental, organizational and individual or internal demands, which require the individual to readjust the usual behaviour pattern. Degree of stress results from events or situations that have potential to cause change. Stimuli or situations that can result in the experience of stress are called stressors. There are three major sources of stress- environmental, individual and organizational.

Environmental stress is not only caused by the factors intrinsic to job, but also influenced by the environmental or extra organizational factors. Stress results because of the individual’s interaction with environmental
stimuli or factors such as societal or technological changes, political and economical uncertainties, financial condition, community conditions etc.

The stress which an individual experiences in an environment is carried with him in another environment also, thus increasing the stress and causing stress to others also.

There are many factors at the level of individual which may be generated in the context of organizational life or his personal life like life and career change, personality types, role characteristics. Any change in career life of an individual puts him in disequilibrium state of affairs and he is required to bring equilibrium. In this process individual experiences stress.

Personality type / characteristic such as authoritarianism, rigidity, masculinity, femininity, extroversion, spontaneity, locus of control are particularly relevant to individual stress. When people become members of several system like family, voluntary organization, work organization etc., they are expected to fulfil certain obligations to each system and to fit into defined places in the system. These various roles may have
conflicting demands and people experiences role stress as they are not able to fulfil the conflicting demands or requirements.

Stress has been considered as one of the major factors in work organization (Agrawal et al., 1979). Sources of stressors in the employment organization identified by Pestonjee (1992) are work, role, personal development, interpersonal relations and organization climate.

Work which requires a lot of manual dexterity have a greater chance of inducing stress in the worker who work there. Work in the organization can induce stressors when the activities to be performed are either too difficult and complex or repetitive and monotonous.

Uncomfortable working conditions extract extra energies from the worker. Stress is inevitable / unavoidable, when large amount of work is expected beyond the capacities of the worker and work has to be performed keeping in view the set deadlines. The five aspects related to stressors intrinsic to work like, boredom, physical working conditions, time pressure and deadlines, work demands, job design and technical problems.
Role can be a source of stress when there is ambiguity about job responsibility and limits of authority, role set members have conflicting expectations on the way in which a role should be performed. Thus, role in terms of its normative, interpersonal and self congruence aspect can give rise to stress.

Major clusters of potential stressors identified to measure personal development stressors in the employment organization were over promotion, under promotion, role stagnation, job security, ambitions, success and gender discrimination.

The kind of relationship the role incumbent has with members in the organization determines the level of interpersonal relations stressor he or she experiences. Relationship with boss, peers and subordinates were the three aspects included under this stressor component.

The climate that persists in the organization can be potential source of stressors. The freedom given to plan the work, weightage given to the views and opinions, participation in decision making, sense of belonging, free and fair communication and sympathetic approach towards personal
problems were considered to measure the stressors in organizational climate.

It is interesting to note that, stress has two faces. It is a good servant, but a bad master. In other words, it can be one’s best friend or worst enemy. A certain amount of stress is necessary to achieve success, but undue stress causes distress. Although we tend to think of stress as caused by external events, events in themselves are not stressful. Rather it is the way in which an individual interpret and react to events that makes them stressful. Stress is received by different people differently. If two people experience the same amount stress or pressure, one may take it as positive or healthy types or the other may accept it as negative.

Stress is often referred to as having negative connotation. The calamitous consequences of stress can affect an individual in three ways i.e. physiological, psychological and behavioural.

Mental stress may be accompanied by anger, anxiety, depression, nervousness, irritability, tension and boredom. Physical stress is accompanied by high blood pressure, digestive problem, ulcers and indigestion, palpitation, chest pain, skin disorder muscle tension, head
ache, loss of appetite, restlessness, ulcers, shut down of menstrual cycle, impairment of fertility among male and depletion of vitamin C, B and D in the body. Behavioural

Stress may be symphonized in the behaviour such a overeating or under eating, loneliness, Sleeplessness, absent seem, alcohol consumption, increased smoking and drug abuse.

Further the stress can affect either positively or negatively to employee performance. Positive qualities are those in which the individual may feel more excited and agitated and perceive the situation positively as a form of challenge (Selye, 1956). Stress is also described as posing threat to the quality of work life as well as physical and psychological well-being (Cox, 1978). A high level of occupational stress, not only detrimentally influence the quality, productivity and creativity of the employees but also employee’s health, well being and morale (Cohen and Williamson, 1991). Job related stress tends to decrease general job satisfaction. Stress can be either temporary or long term, mild or severe, depending mostly on how long it continues, how powerful they are and how strong the employee’s recovery powers are. But major stress problems are sustained for long period. If one does not react to the stress, it may create
some other Trauma. It is another severe form of stress. The nature of loss may have an effect on the individual’s perception of the stressful events as well as the avoidance, intrusion and hyper arousal symptoms of post traumatic stress.

3.2 CAUSES OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

Working is usually positive because it gives your life structure and can often provide satisfaction. A certain amount of pressure at work is usually a good thing. It can help to perform better and prepares for challenges and actions. Sometimes, though, if pressure and demands become too much, they can lead to work-related stress.

Work-related stress can be caused by a number of things. One might feel under pressure at work because of an excessive workload or unrealistic deadlines. Or may have a difficult working environment due to issues with your colleagues. It may also be due to a combination of factors in work and personal life.
3.2.1 Work-related stressors

a. Overload

This is the extent to which individuals feel that the demands of their workload and the associated time pressures are a source of pressure, for example:

- unrealistic deadlines and expectations, often as a result of super achievement by the most talented
- technology overload
- unmanageable workloads
- under recruitment of staff for work already timetabled

b. Control

The experience of pressure is strongly linked to perceptions of control. Lack of influence and consultation in the way in which work is organized and performed can be a potential source of pressure, for example:

- lack of control over aspects of the job
- lack of involvement in decision making
- account not taken of staff ideas/suggestions about the job
- lack of influence over performance targets
- lack of time
c. Work relationships

Many jobs demand regular contact with other people at work. Poor or unsupportive relationships with colleagues and/or supervisors can be a potential source of pressure. In addition, pressure can occur if individuals feel isolated or unfairly treated.

Poor work relationships can be a result of:

- aggressive management style
- lack of support from others
- isolation at work
- aversive behaviour, e.g. bullying and harassment
- lack of understanding and leadership
- manager forever finding fault
- others not pulling their weight
- others take credit for personal achievements
- poor relationships with colleagues

d. Job security

This is the extent to which lack of job security and job changes are a source of pressure, for example:
• job insecurity

• lack of job permanence, e.g. temporary/fixed term contracts

• future job change

• fear of skill redundancy

e. Work-life balance

The demands of work have the potential to spill over and affect personal and home life and so put a strain on relationships outside work, for example:

• long hours: being expected to or having to work additional hours at home to the detriment of personal, partner and family relationships

• over-demanding and inflexible work schedules

• unsocial hours

• excessive travel time

• work interfering with home/personal life

f. Resources and communication

To perform a job effectively, individuals need to feel that they have appropriate training, equipment and resources. They also need to feel that
they are adequately informed and that they are valued. Stress may result from lack of:

- information about what is going on in the organisation
- feedback on performance
- adequate training to do the job
- equipment/resources to do the job

g. Pays and benefits

The financial rewards associated with a job are important in terms of lifestyle. They are also often perceived to be an indication of an individual's worth and value to the organisation. Although financial reward may not be a prime motivator, it could become a factor if there are other negative aspects of the job.

h. Aspects of the job

These are potential sources of stress that relate to the fundamental nature of the job itself. Factors such as the physical working conditions, type of tasks and the amount of satisfaction derived from the job.

- job is unlikely to change in the next 5–10 years
- poor physical working conditions
· fear of physical violence

· work performance closely monitored

· organisation changes for change's sake

· dull and repetitive work

· dealing with difficult customers/clients

· lack of enjoyment of job

3.3 TYPES OF STRESS

Stress management can be complicated and confusing because there are different types of Stress—acute stress, episodic acute stress, and chronic stress; each with its own characteristics, symptoms, duration and treatment approaches.

3.3.1 Acute Stress

Acute stress is the most common form of stress. It comes from demands and pressures of the recent past and anticipated demands and pressures of the near future. Acute stress is thrilling and exciting in small doses, but too much is exhausting. A fast run down a challenging ski slope, for example, is exhilarating early in the day. That same ski run late in the day is taxing and wearing. Skiing beyond your limits can lead to falls and
broken bones. By the same token, overdoing on short-term stress can lead to psychological distress, tension headaches, upset stomach and other symptoms.

Fortunately, acute stress symptoms are recognized by most people. It’s a laundry list of what has gone awry in their lives: the auto accident that crumpled the car fender, the loss of an important contract, a deadline they’re rushing to meet, and their child’s occasional problems at school and so on.

Because it is short term, acute stress doesn't have enough time to do the extensive damage associated with long-term stress. The most common symptoms are:

- Emotional distress — some combination of anger or irritability, anxiety and depression, the three stress emotions.
- Muscular problems including tension headache, back pain, jaw pain and the muscular tensions that lead to pulled muscles and tendon and ligament problems.
- Stomach, gut and bowel problems such as heartburn, acid stomach, flatulence, diarrheal, constipation.
• Transient over arousal leads to elevation in blood pressure, rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, heart palpitations, dizziness, migraine headaches, cold hands or feet, shortness of breath and chest pain. Acute stress can crop up in anyone's life, and it is highly treatable and manageable.

3.3.2 Episodic acute stress

There are those, however, who suffer acute stress frequently, whose lives are so disordered that they are studies in chaos and crisis. They're always in a rush, but always late. If something can go wrong, it does. They take on too much, have too many irons in the fire, and can't organize the slew of self-inflicted demands and pressures clamouring for their attention. They seem perpetually in the clutches of acute stress.

It is common for people with acute stress reactions to be over aroused, short-tempered, irritable, anxious and tense. Often, they describe themselves as having "a lot of nervous energy." Always in a hurry, they tend to be abrupt, and sometimes their irritability comes across as hostility. Interpersonal relationships deteriorate rapidly when others respond with real hostility. The workplace becomes a very stressful place for them.
The cardiac prone, "Type A" personality described by cardiologists, Meter Friedman and Ray Rosenman, is similar to an extreme case of episodic acute stress. Type A's have an "excessive competitive drive, aggressiveness, impatience, and a harrying sense of time urgency." In addition there is a "free-floating, but well-rationalized form of hostility, and almost always a deep-seated insecurity." Such personality characteristics would seem to create frequent episodes of acute stress for the Type A individual. Friedman and Rosenman found Type A's to be much more likely to develop coronary heart disease than Type B's, who show an opposite pattern of behaviour.¹¹

Another form of episodic acute stress comes from ceaseless worry. "Worrywarts" see disaster around every corner and pessimistically forecast catastrophe in every situation. The world is a dangerous, unrewarding, punitive place where something awful is always about to happen. These "awfulizers" also tend to be over aroused and tense, but are more anxious and depressed than angry and hostile.

The symptoms of episodic acute stress are the symptoms of extended over arousal: persistent tension headaches, migraines, hypertension, chest pain and heart disease. Treating episodic acute stress requires intervention
on a number of levels, generally requiring professional help, which may take many months.

Often, lifestyle and personality issues are so ingrained and habitual with these individuals that they see nothing wrong with the way they conduct their lives. They blame their woes on other people and external events. Frequently, they see their lifestyle, their patterns of interacting with others, and their ways of perceiving the world as part and parcel of who and what they are.

Sufferers can be fiercely resistant to change. Only the promise of relief from pain and discomfort of their symptoms can keep them in treatment and on track in their recovery program.

3.3.3 Chronic stress

While acute stress can be thrilling and exciting, chronic stress is not. This is the grinding stress that wears people away day after day, year after year. Chronic stress destroys bodies, minds and lives. It wreaks havoc through long-term attrition. It's the stress of poverty, of dysfunctional families, of being trapped in an unhappy marriage or in a despised job or career.
Chronic Stress comes when a person never sees a way out of a miserable situation. It's the stress of unrelenting demands and pressures for seemingly interminable periods of time. With no hope, the individual gives up searching for solutions.

Some chronic stresses stem from traumatic, early childhood experiences that become internalized and remain forever painful and present. Some experiences profoundly affect personality. A view of the world, or a belief system, is created that causes unending stress for the individual. When personality or deep-seated convictions and beliefs must be reformulated, recovery requires active self-examination, often with professional help.

The worst aspect of chronic stress is that people get used to it. They forget it's there. People are immediately aware of acute stress because it is new; they ignore chronic stress because it is old, familiar, and sometimes, almost comfortable.

Chronic stress kills through suicide, violence, heart attack, stroke and, perhaps, even cancer. People wear down to a final, fatal breakdown. Because physical and mental resources are depleted through long-term
attrition, the symptoms of chronic stress are difficult to treat and may require extended medical as well as behavioural treatment and stress management.

3.4 THEORIES OF STRESS

Definitions of stress are, of course, products of their time. They produce a state of knowledge built around a research agenda that expressed the issues of the day. In this way, all definitions give us a sense of time and place, and it is through this sense that we get an understanding of why different definitions emerged, their influence on the development of theory, how we engaged in research and the way our results were interpreted.

3.4.1 Lazarus and the Transactional Model of Stress

The transactional model defines stress as arising from the appraisal that particular environmental demands are about to tax individual resources, thus threatening well-being (Holroyd & Lazarus, 1982). This definition of stress encompasses a number of themes that capture the transactional nature of stress and those processes that best express the nature of that transaction. These themes involve the following:
• Stress is a product of the transaction between the individual and the environment.

• The authority and power of the transaction lies in the process of appraisal that binds the person and the environment and, it is this “relational meaning” (Lazarus, 1999, 2001) that the person constructs from the transaction and that lies at the heart of the stress process.13

• There are two types of appraisal—primary and secondary. It is through these appraisals that the focus is shifted to what people think and do in a stressful encounter, representing a process-oriented approach (Lazarus, 1999, 2001).14 This reflects the “the changing person–environment relationship”

• It is the appraisal process that offers a causal pathway—a bridge to those discrete emotions that best express the nature of the stress experience (Lazarus & Cohen-Charash, 2001).15

There are two types of appraisal. The first describes primary appraisal. This is where the person acknowledges that there is something at stake (Lazarus, 2001).16
It is secondary appraisal where the focus turns to “what can be done about it” (Lazarus, 1999). This is where the person evaluates the availability of coping resources (Lazarus, 2001).

### 3.4.2 Person–Environment Fit

Another theoretical model which has been in existence for a considerable amount of time, and which to a large extent has underpinned other approaches to stress and well-being is the Person–Environment Fit (P–E fit) perspective. This account of the stress process stems from the early work and theorizing of Lewin (1935) and Murray (1938). For example, reacting to prevailing mechanistic views of human behaviour which attributed the causes of behaviour solely to the environment, and psychodynamic approaches which tended to conceive behaviour as emerging from personality characteristics (traits), Lewin conceptualized the interaction between the person and environment \((P \times E)\) as the key to understanding people’s cognitive, affective and behavioural reactions. His early thinking therefore provided the foundation for the modern perspective of P–E fit. In particular, he foreshadowed the notion that optimal fit between the
person and his/her environment is needed for effective human functioning.\textsuperscript{21}

### 3.4.3 Conservation of Resources Theory

Another very popular theoretical model of the stress process is that developed by \textbf{Stevan Hobfoll (1989)}, known as the \textit{Conservation of Resources} (COR) theory. This perspective bears marked similarity with the P–E fit model, specifically in that both approaches examine the interaction of the person and the environment, and the degree of correspondence between demands in the environment and the individual’s resources to deal with those demands.\textsuperscript{22} One key difference (outlined by \textbf{Hobfoll, 2001}) is that the P–E fit model focuses predominantly on people’s perceptions of fit, whereas COR theory incorporates more objective indicators of actual fit.\textsuperscript{23} Nevertheless, there is considerable overlap between these approaches. The fundamental tenet of COR theory is that “individuals strive to obtain, retain, protect and foster those things that they value” (Hobfoll, 2001).\textsuperscript{24} That is, people endeavour to both preserve resources and to accumulate resources in order to better navigate their way through life’s demands and challenges. A “resource” is anything that is important to the person, contributes positively to their well-being and enables them to adjust. In his overview of COR theory
and its applications, Hobfoll indicated that 74 different types of resources have been identified through research.\textsuperscript{25}

Some of these are what he referred to as “personal” resources, whereas others are features of the environment (external resources). Personal resources include attributes such as personal values (e.g., the importance of achievement), personality traits (e.g., internal locus of control, hardiness, dispositional optimism, generalized self-esteem) and other characteristics, including positive affect (\textit{Nelson & Simmons, 2003}).\textsuperscript{26} Environmental resources will vary depending on the kind of environment the person functions in. In a work context, for example, features such having autonomy in one’s job, the amount (and type) of feedback received on one’s job performance, and the level of rewards obtained for successful job performance, are all illustrations of environmental resources (\textit{Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008}).\textsuperscript{27} Social support from work colleagues and organizational support for individuals (accommodating their needs) also represent major environmental resources, which can reduce stress and burnout (\textit{Halbesleben, 2006})\textsuperscript{,28} as well as enhancing positive well-being (\textit{Luszczynska & Cieslak, 2005}).\textsuperscript{29}
As just mentioned, a key feature of COR theory is its simultaneous consideration of both environmental elements and the individual’s cognitions. In this theory, these dimensions are given relatively equal weight in determining whether or not the person will experience conservation of resources.

3.4.4 The Job Demands–Control–Support Model of Work Design

A somewhat different, but nonetheless complementary approach to those outlined above, is a theory of work design proposed initially by Karasek (1979) and later expanded by Karasek and Theorell (1990). The initial proposition put forward by Karasek is referred to as the Job Demands–Control (JDC) Model, although the term “discretion” was also used by Karasek as a synonym for control. He proposed that, although excessive job demands or pressures (both physical and psychosocial) can have an impact on stress levels (especially psychological strain), by themselves these demands are not the most important contributors to strain experiences.

Rather, the amount of strain people experience in their work will be determined by whether or not they have any control over the demands they have to deal with. That is to say, according to Karasek (1979), there
will be interactive effects of Demands × Control (or discretion) on stress levels.  

Put another way, control will buffer (moderate) the impact of demands (pressures) on strain.

### 3.4.5 Different Perspectives, Different Theories

Each of the theories discussed offers a different perspective for understanding the transaction between the individual and the environment. Other theories have taken up the issues of “process.”

For instance, the theory of stress outlined by Shupe and McGrath (2000) describes “a dynamic, adaptive process theory”, which, when focused at the individual level, suggests a complex cycle connected by four processes: the appraisal process (interpreting events); the choice process (the choice of a coping response); the performance process (the coping phase); and the outcome process (the consequences for the individual; Shupe & McGrath, 2000). Shupe and McGrath go on to outline the complexity of these interconnected process and the implications this complexity has for researchers in terms of measurement and interpretation. Similarly, Cummings and Cooper (2000) offer a
“cybernetic theory” of work stress. The emphasis here is on time, information, and feedback.  

3.5 THEORIES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS AT WORK

These constructs are viewed as essential, and they are regarded as underlying the stress process as it moves from “the detection of strain, through the choice of adjustment processes to cope with the threat situation, and on to the subsequent feedback about coping effects”. Cummings and Cooper also go on to outline the complexity of the process, such as the operational and measurement issues involved as the processes moves through its four (detection, choice, adjustment, and affects) phases.

At the heart of this theory is the idea that “individuals are active purposive managers of stress and that knowledge can help them anticipate and manage stress” (Wethington, 2000).

The cybernetic approach is further developed by Edwards (2000) through the idea that the goal of “self regulating systems” is to regulate discrepancies between the individual and the environment. Discrepancies are expressed in terms of a negative feedback loop, and so
stress, coping and well being are crucial elements in this self-regulating process.

The idea of process as expressed through some sort of transaction between the person and the environment lies at the heart of these different theoretical approaches. This is not to say that researchers, whilst still grappling with the issues of process and transaction, have not explored and developed other theoretical approaches. We briefly turn to two of these to illustrate the continuing creative way in which the stress process has been investigated. **Warr, 2007**; explored the way in which work leaves us feeling happy or unhappy.\(^{38}\) While acknowledging the definitional difficulties surrounding terms like happiness and unhappiness, and the preference at times to use the term well-being, **Warr & Clapperton, 2010** suggest that happiness should be considered not just in terms of its energising and tranquil forms, but also in terms of whether it is being used in a contextual (work) sense or even a facet (work component) sense.\(^{39}\)

Another approach is offered by **Nelson and Simmons** (2003, 2004) and **Simmons and Nelson** (2007), who integrate into their holistic stress model the positive qualities of eustress and propose that the appraisal of
any encounter can produce positive or negative meanings. This model “focuses on the positive responses and their effects on performance and health” (Simmons & Nelson, 2007). Interestingly, these authors go on to point to their concept of “savouring the positive” and how this adds a new perspective on how people cope. Similarly, when individual differences are considered in terms of how they trigger positive beliefs, these authors point to how such beliefs aid individuals, create positive P.J. Dewe et al. appraisals, develop resources for managing demanding encounters, and shift the focus towards those aspects of the work environment that help create the context for positive opportunities.

While arguing that it is now time to include the positive as well as the negative into our theories of stress, these authors suggest that studying work stress should be “best thought of as a constellation of theories and models that each addresses a meaningful process or phenomenon” (Simmons & Nelson, 2007).

The different theories reflect a number of perspectives, but all offer a lens through which the person–environment transaction can be explored. Each offers a dynamic view of the stress process, emphasising the importance of the context within which the transaction between the person and the environment takes place.
REFERENCES and NOTES


31. Ibid. P-234.


33. Ibid.


35. Ibid.


41. Ibid.