CHAPTER 1

THE STRESS SYNDROME: A CONCEPTUAL OVERTURE

- Introduction
- Definitions
- Job Stress in Corporate Banking sector
- Impact of Workplace Stress
- Consequences
CHAPTER 1

THE STRESS SYNDROME: A CONCEPTUAL OVERTURE

> INTRODUCTION

Hans Selye first introduced the concept of stress into the life science in 1936. He defined stress as "The force, pressure, or strain exerted upon a material object or person which resist these forces and attempt to maintain its original state." Stress is ubiquitous in our society. It has become an integral part of everyday living. Researchers on stress make it clear that, to enter into the complex area of stress, especially in the area of occupational stress, is very difficult. Stress is an unavoidable consequence of modern living. With the growth of industries, pressure in the urban areas, quantitative growth in population and various problems in day to day life are some of the reasons for increase in stress. Stress is a condition of strain that has a direct bearing on emotions, thought process and physical

1.1
conditions of a person. Steers (1981) indicate that, "Occupational stress has become an important topic for study of organisational behaviour for several reasons." 1. Stress has harmful psychological and physiological effects on employees, 2. Stress is a major cause of employee turn over and absenteeism, 3. Stress experienced by one employee can affect the safety of other employees, 4. By controlling dysfunctional stress, individual and organisation can be managed more effectively.

The stress faced by professional workers is substantial. For many professionals, it is intrinsic to the job itself, where competing demands and pressures cannot be escaped. The sheer volume of work can also be overwhelming at times, whether one is a social worker, teacher, doctor or manager. Anyone in this kind of job knows, either from his or her own direct experience or from observing colleagues, that stress can have very serious consequences. It can develop into a living nightmare of running faster and faster to stay in the same place, feeling undervalued, feeling unable to say 'no' to any demand but not working productively on anything. The signs of stress can include sleeplessness, aches and pains and sometimes physical symptoms of anxiety about going to work. What is more, people who are chronically stressed are no fun to work with. They may be irritable, miserable, lacking in energy and commitment, self-absorbed. They may find it hard to concentrate on any one task and cannot be relied on to do their share.
And yet, some people seem to have the ability to stay in control of their workload and to handle job frustrations without becoming worn out, irritable or depressed. These people are able to handle stress, having ways of taking the rough with the smooth, keeping a sense of humour and renewing their energy and resources so that working life continues to bring pleasure and reward.

It isn't easy to find a generally acceptable definition of 'stress.' Doctors, engineers, psychologists, management consultants, linguists and lay-person all use the work in their own distinctive ways with their own definition. A useful definition for this handout is that stress is a demand made upon the adaptive capacities of the mind and body. If these capacities can handle the demand and enjoy the stimulation involved, then stress is welcome and helpful. If they can't and find the demand debilitating, then stress is unwelcome and unhelpful. This definition is useful in three ways; (1) stress can be both good and bad, (2) it isn't so many events that determine whether we're stressed or not, it is our reactions to them, and (3) the definition tells us that stress is a demand made upon the body's capacities. If our capacities are good enough, we respond well. If they aren't, we give way.
DEFINITIONS

Stress is found in all aspects of life. Hans Selye, a pioneer in stress research, has defined stress as "the nonspecific response of the body to any demands made upon it" (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1992, p. 597). It is considered to be an internal state or reaction to anything we consciously or unconsciously perceive as a threat, either real or imagined (Clarke, 1988). Stress can evoke feelings of frustration, fear, conflict, pressure, hurt, anger, sadness, inadequacy, guilt, loneliness, or confusion (Cavanagh, 1988). Individuals feel stressed when they are fired or lose a loved one (negative stress) as well as when they are promoted or go on a vacation (positive stress). While many individuals believe they must avoid stress to live longer, Freese (1976) argues that it is the salt and spice of life and that to have no stress we would have to be dead.

Stress is "A dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important."

Stress is defined as "An adaptive response to an external situation that results in physical, psychological and or behavioral deviations for organization participants."
Beehr and Newman (1978) define occupational stress as "A condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterised by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning."

Cox (1985) defines stress as "Stress is a part of complex dynamic system of transaction between the person and his environment."

Lazarus (1993) says "Stress is a subset of emotions."

Thompson, Murphy and Stradling (1994) define stress as "A process of coping with life’s pressures and problems and negative feelings this can generate."

Rosch (1996) says "Stress is a useless term for pragmatic researchers because it represents different things to different people. Reality is different for each of us and most importantly often cannot be measured with any significant degree of accuracy."

Brian Seaward defines stress as. "The inability to cope with a perceived, real, or imagined threat to one’s mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing which results in a series of physiological responses and adaptations."

Richard Lazarus defines stress as "A state of anxiety produced when events and responsibilities exceed one’s coping abilities."
Andrew Glossed says stress is “A condition or state of imbalance between the stressful situation and our ability or capacity to cope with that situation.”.

Ronald Reenter defines stress as “Stress is the physiological and emotional reaction to psychological events. Stress is often experienced as a consistent, exaggerated, and overwhelming sense of urgency, often couple with frustration. Achievement stress, triggered by school tasks, is a learned, inappropriate distress habit which impairs school performance.”

Stress is an experience. When demands of a physical, psychological or sociological nature make us react to it we are under a stress. Those, which demand a reaction and force us to mobilize our resources are called ‘Stressors’. Stressors make us experience stress. Increased temperature of the room, demands of people around us and societal norms are examples of stressors. When we mobilize our resources to meet these demands, psychologists say we are under stress.
Sir Charles Darwin’s Principle of Survival of the Fittest has been changed to Survival of the Fastest and now to Survival of the most competitive, because today corporate managers are living in environment of “Either Excel or Exit.” According to A.S. Selye there are four categories of workers viz.; Unskilled, Semiskilled, Skilled and highly skilled. Workers behaviour is highly complexed and keeps on changing in real life business situations. Stress in the workplace is a growing problem with expensive costs to individuals, organizations, and the society. In today’s changing and competitive corporate environment, stress is increasing both at the top, middle and lowers level, as per the management organisation Table.
ORGANISATION TABLE

Chairman & Managing Director

↑
Executive Directors

↓
Directors

↑
General Manager

↑
Deputy General Manager

↑
Assistant General Manager

↑
Regional Manager

↑
Senior Branch Manager

↑
Branch Manager / Manager

↑
Officers

↑
Special Assistant

↑
Clerks

↑
Sub-staff

Table 1.1
As a result of this more and more managers are showing signs of chronic fatigue and burnout. Eight out of ten managers believe that workplace is more stressful than it was five years ago and the managers say they estimate that around 70% of their colleagues are suffering from stress and becoming “MISFIT” whereas they were “BESTFIT” when selected for the job. It is a matter of enquiry? Because we cannot allow the managers to languish like a terminal patient as a result of “BURNOUT STAGE”

The most common manifestations of stress around the office include bad temper, irritability, absenteeism, lack of communication and aggression. The most significant contributor to stress is heavy workload followed by long work hours, meeting deadlines, and lack of job security. Work is not just confined to office; 60% take work home at night and on weekends.

The problem of stress is more apparent in the middle management than the senior management. Senior managers have more control over their work situation but those further down the ladder can often find themselves having to deal with pressure from above and below thus affecting their performance more or less a stage of NO RETURN, unless immediately rehabilitated and restored to their normal health through physical and mental therapies and counseling methods, which is a must.

1.9
JOB STRESS IN BANKING SECTOR

During the past decade, the banking sector had undergone rapid and striking changes like policy changes due to globalisation and liberalisation, increased competition due to the entrance of more private (corporate) sector banks, downsizing, introduction of new technologies, etc. Due to these changes, the employees in the banking sector are experiencing a high level of stress. The advent of technological revolution in all walks of life coupled with globalisation, privatisation policies has drastically changed conventional patterns in all sectors. The banking sector is of no exemption. The 1990s saw radical policy changes with regarding to fiscal deficit and structural changes in India so as to prepare her to cope with the new economic world order. Globalisation and privatisation led policies compelled the banking sector to reform and adjust to have a competitive edge to cope with multinationals led environment. The advent of technological changes, especially extensive use of computers in the sector has changed the work patterns of the bank employees and has made it inevitable to downsize the work force in the sector. The implications of the above said transformations have affected the social, economical and psychological domains of the bank employees and their relations. Evidence from existing literature states that more than 60% of the bank employees have one or other problem directly or indirectly related to these drastic changes.
Along with other sectors the banking sector also leaning towards the policy of appointing contract lab ours while various compulsive as well as rewarding options such as VRS, etc. All the factors discussed above are prospective attributes to cause occupational stress and related disorders among the employees. Although a lot of studies have been conducted on the psychosocial side of the new policy regime in many sectors, there are only few studies, as far as the banking sector is concerned, while the same sector has been drastically influenced by the new policies.

At this juncture, the present study is undertaken to address specific problems of bank employees related to occupational stress. This throw light in to the pathogenesis of various problems related to occupational stress among bank employees. The study will be helpful to drawn up further policy on the related fields on long term basis and act as a secondary data for further research.

➢ **IMPACT OF WORKPLACE STRESS**

Under normal circumstances, people should be able to find new balances and responses in their reactions to new situations. Stress is not necessarily a negative phenomenon and it would therefore be a mistake to concentrate only on its pathological effects. A moderate level of stress can be an important motivational factor and can be instrumental in achieving a dynamic adaptation to new situations.

1.11
It may lead to constructive conflict, leading to competition among employees and managerial cadre.

If health is considered as a dynamic equilibrium, stress is part of it. There is no health without interaction with other people and with the environment. Only excesses of stress are pathological.

Some stress is therefore normal and necessary, at work and outside it. But if stress is intense, continuous or repeated, if a person is unable to cope, or if support is lacking, stress then becomes a negative phenomenon, which can lead to physical illness and psychological disorders. In a work context, it often results in inadequate adaptation to situations and people and failure to perform at an optimal level, rather, it starts contributing negatively to the organization.
CONSEQUENCES

As already pointed out in the introducing comments on stress, stress is not automatically bad for individual employees or their organizational performance. It is the dysfunctional aspects of the high level of stress that should be and are of a major concern for contemporary society in general and for effective human resource management in particular. Distress experienced by individuals has negative consequences for them, their families and for the organizations they serve. The consequences of stress can be studied under three general categories:

CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE FAMILY

CONSEQUENCES TO ORGANISATIONS

PHYSIOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

BEHAVIOURAL SYMPTOMS

Table 1.2

1.13
(A) Consequences for the Individual

Stress shows itself in a number of ways. An individual who is experiencing stress may develop the following symptoms:

1) Physiological Symptoms. In the initial stages, the major concern of stress is directed at physiological symptoms. High degrees of stress are typically accompanied by severe anxiety, frustration and depression. Some of the physiological symptoms of success are as follows:

- **Stress.** Irritability, insomnia, alcohol and food abuse. Physical changes including rapid breathing, and heart beat, tensed muscles. Prolonged stress can cause muscular twitches, skin problems, baldness and sexual problems such as impotence.

- **Anxiety.** Excessive Worry, irritability, anger, nervousness as well as inability to concentrate or sleep. Physical changes include palpitations, chest pain and dizziness.
• **Depression.** Feeling of sadness, hopelessness, guilt and worthlessness, loss of interest in activities, change in appetite or weight, difficulty in concentrating and suicidal thoughts.

2) **Psychological Symptoms.** While considerable attention has been given to the relationship between stress and physiological symptoms, especially within the medical community not as much importance has been given to the impact of stress on mental health. But psychological problems resulting from stress are very important in day to day job performance. The psychological impacts of stress may be:

- Stress can cause dissatisfaction Job related stress can cause job-related dissatisfaction. Job dissatisfaction "is the simplest and most psychological aspect of stress."

- High levels of stress may be accompanied by anger, anxiety, depression, nervousness, irritability, tension and boredom. One study found that stress had the strongest impact on aggressive actions such as sabotage, interpersonal aggression, hostility and complaints.

1.15
The psychological problems from stress may lead to poor job performance, lowered self esteem, resentment of supervision, inability to concentrate, take decisions and job dissatisfaction.

Research studies indicates that when people are placed in jobs that make multiple and conflicting demands or in which there is a lack of clarity as to the individual's duties, authority and responsibilities, both stress and dissatisfaction are increased. The less control people have over the pace of their work, the greater the stress and dissatisfaction.

Some evidence suggests that jobs that provide a low level of variety, significance, autonomy, feedback and identity, create stress and reduce satisfaction and involvement in the job.

3) Behavioral Symptoms. Any behaviour which indicates that you are not acting your usual self may be a sign of adverse reaction to stress. Direct behaviour that may accompany high levels of stress include:

i. Under eating or overeating
ii. Sleeplessness
iii. Increased smoking and drinking
iv. Drug abuse.
v. Dosing off during meetings or social gatherings
vi. Losing Your sense of humour
vii. Moving in a tense and jerky way
viii. Reacting nervously or irritably
ix. Absenteeism and turnover
x. Reduction in productivity

Consistently acting and feeling out of character is a serious warning that we are losing our ability to cope with tension. Inability to feel or express any emotions or a sense of well-being indicates loss of contact with our surroundings and us. The above indicators can help us in overcoming the tensions in our day to day life.

Like the psychological problems resulting from stress, the behavioural problems are often not attributed to stress by co-workers or supervisors and generate little sympathy from subordinates.

B. Consequences for the Family
Distress, which is handled by individuals in dysfunctional ways such as resorting to drinking or withdrawal behaviours, will have an adverse effect on their family life. The effects of this will even lead to misbehaviour with the spouse, child abuse, alienation from family members and eventually to divorce. The stressors which generally affect the family life are:

1.17
i. In the dual career families where both the spouses are pursuing jobs, a lot of personal commitments, varied in nature, are demanded from them both to their jobs and families. The stress experienced by the couple stem from job overload, as both partners have to manage their careers as well as help the family.

ii. More stress are experienced while handling the personal, social and cultural dilemmas of balancing work and family, discharging parenting responsibilities, handling competition at the work place and within the family as well as being involved member of the extended family.

C. Consequences to Organisations

The effects of employees stress on organisations are many and varied. These include:

i. Low performance and productivity.

ii. High rate of absenteeism and turnover.

iii. Loss of customers due to poor attitudes of workers.

iv. Increased alienation of the worker from the job.

v. Destructive and aggressive behaviours resulting in strikes and sabotage.
The stress experienced by employees who take on critical roles and are responsible for public safety can sometimes be detrimental to the well-being of the constituents served; For example, the stress experienced by airline pilot, train driver, railway guard or air traffic controller can result in the loss of so many lives. Therefore, the costs of employees stress leads to organisation in terms of lost profits, declining assets, negative image projection, poor reputation and, loss of future business are enormous, as well as to the employees who face a chain reaction from stress and strain which leads to distress to Burnout, leading to depressive tendencies and the employee reaches a stage of NO RETURN, if not immediately rehabilitated to normal health through physical and mental therapies.
REFERENCES

1. Moorhead Gregory and Griffin Ricky W.: Organizational Behavior. p- 224-230


3. www.personnelmanagement.com


6. www.inflibnet.ac.in


1.20


