CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Among all resources, human resource is considered as an important resource in the changing scenario of business environment. In organizations, results and productivity are directly proportional to the quantity and the quality of its human resources. They have the greatest potential to develop and grow if the right climate is provided to them. Employees tend to be satisfied if their needs, wants, requirements, job recognition and encouragement from the top management are fulfilled so that their work is free from stress-related aspects. Occupational stress is a worldwide issue with implications for employees, organizations, and economies\(^1\). In this age of globalization and liberalization, competition among organization has increased and every employee spends most of his/her time on work-related issues. Employees not only have to deal with work pressures but also deal with personal relationships, personal finance, information technology, personal fears and changes. All these aspects of modern-day living can be incredibly stressful, which impose high physical demands on bodies and emotional costs on the lives\(^2\).

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (1999) defines stress as: “The harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, needs of the worker”. This makes a distinction between ‘pressure’, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and ‘stress’ which can be detrimental to health. It is important for the employees to maintain a healthy balance between work and their private lives so that both employees and the company benefit in the long term. Work-life balance is literally balancing the demands, the amount of time and effort given to work and the workplace and that given to the individual’s domestic, personal, family, and social life. If employees’ work life and personal life are out of balance, then stress may be running high. A vital factor in achieving an appropriate work-life balance is by ensuring that work element does not dominate and not causing damage to the individual through the effects of negative stress\(^3\).
Stressful working conditions result in low productivity, increased absenteeism, staff turnover and an assortment of employee problems including alcoholism, hypertension and cardiovascular problems. Du Brin (1996) opined that there is no job without potential stressors for some people. Stress management is required when an individual is unable to cope with the demanding environment. Costs associated with occupational stress in terms of workdays lost, absenteeism, and health costs have significant implications for organizations. As a result, ‘Stress management’ has become a popular training and developmental programme. To improve the employees’ efficiency and organizational effectiveness, the study about stress is necessary.

The sugar industry is one of the important agro-based industries which contribute significantly to the growth of the global economy by providing large scale direct and indirect employment to farmers and agricultural workers in the rural areas who are involved in cultivation of cane, harvesting, transport and other services. About 20 percent of the world’s supply of sugar is derived from sugar beet, the vast majority of which is produced in industrialized countries, while the remaining 80 percent is derived from sugarcane, mainly produced in developing countries. Today the leading sugarcane growing nations include Brazil, India, Cuba, China, Mexico, Australia, Thailand, United States and Philippines.

The discovery of sugar from sugarcane had originated in New Guinea about 6000 BC and spread routes to Southeast Asia and India. The sugar industry is the second largest agro-based industry in India after cotton textile industry and India is the second largest sugar producer in the world. Sugarcane is the key raw material for the production of sugar in India. It provides the raw material mainly for the production of white sugar, jaggery (gur) and khandsari. It is also used for chewing and extraction of juice for beverage purpose. Even in the prevailing water scare agriculture scenario, sugarcane crop is the major hope for the agriculturist to sustain their income and also to improve their standard of living. Today Indian sugar technologists, consultants, professionals and sugar machinery manufacturers have large presence in most of the Afro-Asian countries. The products, technologies, processes and services rendered by the Indian sugar companies are considered to be the most cost effective and efficient in the world.
The Indian sugar industry comprises about 20 percent of sugar mills and 15 percent of sugar production of the world. The industry has remained a focal point for socio-economic development in the rural areas by mobilizing rural resources, generating employment and income and creating transport and communication facilities. It generates its own replenishable biomass and uses it as fuel without much depending on fossil fuel. However, the industry faces a number of problems, such as, obsolete technologies, low capacity utilization, poor financial condition, and erratic supply of sugarcane. It also suffers from the government control and regulation policies. The control by the government is right from the procurement of sugarcane to the marketing of sugar and its by-products\textsuperscript{10}.

More than 500 sugar mills are functioning all over India. The Indian sugar industry has been marked by a co-existence of different ownerships and management structures since the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The sector is composed of three distinct categories such as public mills, private mills that procure sugarcane from nearby cane growers and cooperative mills owned and managed jointly by farmers\textsuperscript{11}. For a predominantly agricultural country like India, development of industries is a must. Industrial development alone can provide a secure basis for a rapid growth of income. India has a very high growth rate in consumption that makes it a very high potential zone for export of sugar\textsuperscript{12}. Within the sugar-cane growing areas, the plantation and other farms are supplied with roads, rural electrification, housing, health facilities and education centres. The construction of such facilities goes a long way to improve the infrastructure of the rural areas. Sugarcane growing is thus viewed as a justification for undertaking such projects and programs.

In India, sugar industry was initially concentrated in the subtropical place of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, since the second plan it has dispersed to the Deccan area and Southern states. Uttar Pradesh contributes almost 60 per cent of India’s total sugar production, while the balance comes mainly from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Two-thirds of the sugar produced in the country is consumed by soft drinks manufacturers, mithai makers and confectioners. The prices of the end products of these bulk sugar consumers are not subject to any regulation\textsuperscript{13}.
Sugar industry in Tamil Nadu is an important agro-based industry next to textile industry. Sugar mills play a vital role in the economic development of the state particularly in rural areas. Tamil Nadu is one of the leading producers of sugar in the country and its contribution is about 10 percent of the country’s total sugar production. Most of the mills in the state commenced their operation every year in October to December and completing in April to June. Keeping in mind the importance of human resource in organization, an attempt is made to study the employees’ stress management in sugar mills in Tamil Nadu.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Stress is an unavoidable part of today’s fast life and modern organizations are facing the problems of executive stress and burnout. Stress affects the individual directly and through them, their families and organizations are also affected. The stress that an employee encounters at the workplace adversely affects the productivity of an organization and decreases the job performance and health of individuals. This study examines the level of workplace stress among sugar mill employees in Tamil Nadu. Sugar mills have various departments like Engineering, Manufacturing, Accounts, Human Resource, Sales and Cane Department.

The staff members in Cane department of the sugar mills assess the sugarcane development in fields and organize the continuous flow of sugarcane to the factories. While establishing every sugar mill, certain areas are specified and the sugarcane produced in the fields is brought to their respective sugar mill. The major work force in sugar industry is outside the sugar mill that is the workers who are involved in sugarcane cutting from the fields and transporting it to the sugar factories. The workers work in groups and the sugarcane is transported from the fields to the mill with the help of bullock carts, tractors and trucks. The workers concerned in this activity involve large number of female workers and presently the work is done on contract basis by the contractors who appoint gangs consisting of 5 to 15 workers each to transport cane to the sugar mills.\(^\text{14}\)

In Cane department, Cane Inspectors are responsible for achievement of planting sugarcane, procurement of laborers required for harvesting, field management, supplying seed materials, fertilizers, pesticides and weedicides and
timely harvest and supply to the factory. They have to forecast the supply of expected cane from their area of operation. They provide technical guidance to the cane growers (farmers) and act as a liaison between the farmers and the factory. They have to coordinate with their cane officers for necessary work. Arrangement of cane cutting/harvest workers to cut sugarcane in the field is the major task for cane inspectors. Since these workers are scattered, Cane Inspectors should find them and make arrangement to cut sugarcane at appropriate time. These workers are organized into groups for cane cutting in the field.

Shortage of cane cutting/harvest workers is the main problem faced by Cane Inspectors. This problem is mainly aggravated due to the workers changing attitude. Nowadays laborers are not interested to work in the field. Many of the labors have moved to work in textile mills, construction, and other industries. Without the cane harvest laborers, cane harvesting cannot be done and if sugarcane is not brought to sugar mills in time, then sugar production will be affected. So the Cane Officers give pressure to Cane Inspectors to employ cane harvest laborers judiciously. These workers are paid on piece rate basis, which is on the basis of the sugarcane cut coupled with the distance that is required to be travelled for transporting it to the sugar mills. Field workers always demand for revision of cutting rates but the farmers are not ready to give the amount they demand. This creates keen problem to Cane Inspectors to manage both of them. Sometimes due to rain and poor road facilities, lorries that are carrying sugarcane from field to sugar mill meet with accident. In such unusual times the Cane Inspectors inspect the accident spot. Moreover, Cane Inspectors must record all information about farmers, area of sugarcane plantations, draw field maps and issue trip sheets to lorry drivers. In order to complete their work, they work for long hours in a day.

Cane Officers have to ensure regular supply of cane to the sugar mill. They are responsible for making important decisions and managing critical problems at divisional level. They supervise and extract work from Cane Inspectors. Within the specified period of time, they have to reach the target area for cane cultivation fixed to them by the sugar mill. They provide technical guidance to the Cane Inspectors. Each sugar mill has several divisional offices and there will be one Cane Officer for each division. When there is a problem, divisional heads are
responsible for the whole division allocated to them and their superior officers will force them to bring result. Sometimes they are unable to supply specified tonnes of sugarcane to sugar mill due to shortage of labor during festival times. The labor force and farmers will create problems at times and tight workload creates tension often for the Cane Officers. Both Cane Inspectors and Cane Officers have to cope with higher officials, farmers, laborers and lorry drivers, and responsible for the achievement of target sugar supply to the sugar mills.

These problems make them susceptible to stress which leads to serious health-related issues. Stress and health issues contribute to make changes in employees’ behavior and motivate them to take personal and work life in a serious manner. This directs them to have decreasing job satisfaction and job performance. Since employees are directly affected by stress issues, sugar mills need to give more attention on employees’ problems. In fact, every industry has its own unique set of problems and sources of stress, and stress should be necessarily reduced. The present study about stress management in sugar mills will help to increase the employee’s efficiency and organizational effectiveness by knowing what major factors are causing stress in their job and suggesting them to cope by adopting suitable stress management techniques. Previous studies of stress management focus employees in banks, educational institutions and entrepreneurs, which reveal stress factors in their corresponding areas. There are not many studies undertaken in sugar mills regarding stress management in Erode, Namakkal and Karur districts of Tamil Nadu. Hence the study was undertaken.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives. It aims

1. To study the socio-economic profile of the employees, symptoms and factors influencing the work-related stress.

2. To analyze the impact of occupational stress on health, behavior and performance of employees in the sugar mills.

3. To ascertain the stress management facilities offered by the sugar mills and employees’ coping strategies for managing stress.
4. To identify the social support factors to reduce stress and expectation of employees in this regard.

5. To offer suggestions for managing employees’ stress in the sugar mills.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The present study is conducted from employees’ point of view in all the five sugar mills in three districts of Tamil Nadu. The study makes an attempt to know the work-related stress among Cane Inspectors and Cane Officers in sugar mills. This study helps in identifying the stress condition of the employees in their job during the time period of 2011 to 2012.

1.5 Operational Definition of Key concepts

1.5.1 Stress

Stress is an adaptive response, mediated by individual characteristics and/or psychological processes that are a consequence of any external action, situation or event that places special physical or psychological demands upon a person.

1.5.2 Acute Stress

Acute stress is usually for short time and is common in people who take too many responsibilities and are overloaded or overworked, disorganized, always in a hurry and never in time.

1.5.3 Chronic Stress

Chronic stress is a prolonged stress that exists for weeks, months, or even years. People suffering from this type of stress may not even realize that they are under chronic stress.

1.5.4 Eustress

Eustress denotes the presence of optimum level of stress in an individual which contributes positively to his/her performance.
1.5.5 Distress

Distress denotes the presence of high level of stress in an individual which affects job performance adversely and creates many types of physical, psychological and behavioral problems.

1.5.6 Burnout

Burnout is a state of emotional and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.

1.5.7 Accelerated Speech

While talking, some people tend to speak faster than they normally do because of the pressures of the stress they undergo (or experience).

1.5.8 Feeling Negative about Everything

People with panic disorder and stress tend to be negative thinkers with self-defeating beliefs.

1.5.9 Stressors

The factors that cause stress are called as the stressors or stress factors. Stressors are experienced as a perceived threat to one’s wellbeing or position in life, and a series of physiological changes take place to allow the person to fight or run.

1.5.10 Time Pressures and Deadlines

Time pressure often seems to result from external causes like having too much work assigned by a supervisor or the relentless objective flow of time itself. Pressure and anxiety are associated with deadlines.

1.5.11 Lack of Career Development

An organization that provides employees with opportunities for personal/professional development and growth helps to prepare them to accept responsibilities at higher levels.
1.5.12 Unable to satisfy all Stakeholders

A stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of a corporation’s purpose. Employees need to work to fulfil the objectives and expectations of stakeholders.

1.5.13 Group Behavior

Group behavior under stress indicates that with increasing stress, group solidarity at first increases but later decreases.

1.5.14 Insufficient Co-workers

Employees feel happy and satisfied to work when there are sufficient co-workers in the workplace. This reduces burden in carrying extra workload for the employees.

1.5.15 More Administration and Paper Work

When the employees are dealing with more administration and paper work apart from their regular work, they feel that they are overloaded.

1.5.16 Continuous and Chaotic Job Demands

The socio-psychological demands of the work environment are stressful as task demands at work.

1.5.17 Shortage of Help at Work

Lack of co-operation and help from co-workers and superiors affect the work and causes stress to the employees.

1.5.18 Fatigue

Fatigue is a condition characterized by a lessened capacity for work and reduced efficiency of accomplishment, usually accompanied by a feeling of weariness and tiredness.

1.5.19 Poor Concentration

Lack of concentration leads to lack of attention at work which leads to under productivity.
1.5.20 Behavioral Changes

Stress symptoms and health problems induce behavioral changes such as changes in eating habits, increased smoking, sleep disorders, rapid speech and consumption of alcohol.

1.5.21 Work Effectiveness

Work effectiveness is the achievement of organizational goals by performing the tasks assigned to the employee in his/her job conditions.

1.5.22 Low Morale

Low morale brings about an attitude of defensiveness and or apathy.

1.5.23 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a general attitude toward an individual’s job. People get satisfied with their work only if their requirements like pay, promotion, supervision, working environment, benefits and relationships are met.

1.5.24 Job Redesign

The redesign of jobs refers to activities that involve the alteration of specific jobs to increase organizational productivity and/or to improve the quality of the work experiences of the employees.

1.5.25 Recreation Centre

A recreation centre is a place where people relax after a hard day’s work. Recreation centres sometimes serve as a social hub for people.

1.5.26 Stress Management Workshops

Stress management workshops help employees to know about the impact of stress and provide them with practical techniques and training to manage the stress. Workshops also provide advice on health and nutrition to build new stress reduced life.

1.5.27 Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are the psychological and social means by which people deal with stress to avoid it becoming a strain.
1.5.28 Physical Exercise

Physical exercise not only improves the health of the employees but also relaxes tense muscles, helps to sleep and cope with stress.

1.5.29 Away from Stressful Environments

Many stressors contribute to ill health and the employees want to move away from those stressful work environments.

1.5.30 Positive Thinking

Development of positive thoughts helps employees to strongly face more problems.

1.5.31 Tour

Employees can relieve their stress in a better manner by going for a tour with their family, friends, relatives and neighbours.

1.5.32 Social Support

Social support systems consist of the circle of people who care about the individual. A person’s resistance to stress can be strengthened by his/her social support system that includes spouse, relatives and friends.

1.6 Chapters Scheme

The study report has been presented in eight chapters.

The first chapter initiates with introduction, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, scope of the study and operational definition of key concepts.

The second chapter deals with research methodology.

The third chapter reviews the concept and the literature of the previous studies relevant to the present research.
The fourth chapter focuses on the theoretical framework of stress management.

The fifth chapter presents the profile of sugar industry in India and Tamil Nadu.

The sixth chapter gives profile of the respondents, impact of stress and coping strategies of the respondents.

The seventh chapter deals with the social support factors of the respondents to relieve stress.

The eighth chapter recapitulates the summary of findings, suggestions and conclusion.
FOOTNOTES


6. FAOSTAT (The FAO Statistical Database)


