Prevalence of Work Stress among Private and Public Sector Employees in Delhi: A Differential Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Stress is a term which is entangled with every stage of our lives — whether it is our workplace or our personal life. For the workplace, it may be the pressure to fulfill daily targets, deadline, must do project which arrives without warning, shared assignment or anything else which can generate stress. Lack of promotion, training and support from superiors lead to stress which in turn leads to higher rates of absenteeism, low productivity, low quality of product, customer dissatisfaction etc. Physical and mental health of an individual as well as organization's effectiveness can have the effect of work stress. Hence, the current study aimed to assess the prevalence of one of the mental health issues, i.e., stress, among private and public sector employees in Delhi, India. **Methods:** Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from the private (n=30) and public sector employees (n=30). The level of stress was measured using Occupational Stress Index Scale (OSI Scale) questionnaire and demographic information sheet was used to collect various demographic information which includes age, gender, type of family, marital status, duration of service, salary, type of employment, educational qualification etc. Data was analyzed using SPSS (version 20.0) software. The chi-square test was used to find the relationship between categorical variables, Pearson correlation coefficient was used to find the correlation between continuous variables according to distribution of the data. A p value less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant. **Results:** The mean age of the participants was 38.62 (SD=8.79) years. According to OSI Scale, 13.3% employees (including both sectors) had low level of stress, 75% had moderate level of stress and 11.7% had high level of stress. Further, private sector employees had more work stress than the public sector employees. The results also indicate that Role Overload, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Poor Participation, Powerlessness, Intrinsic Improvement, Low Status and Strenuous Working Condition had a significant relationship with the sector of employment. **Conclusion:** It was found that high level of stress was prevalent among employees in both the sectors — public and private. However, private sector employees were exposed to more professional stressors, which in turn created more occupational stress for them. It would be prudent for employers to initiate some training programmes related to physical and mental well-being, which can help enhance performance of employees and improve overall productivity of the organisation.

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Keywords: *Stress, Occupational Stress, Job Stress, Work Stress, Public Sector, Private Sector*

Stress is a state of mind which reflects certain biochemical reactions in the human body and is projected by a sense of anxiety, tension and depression and is caused by demands of the environmental forces or internal factors that cannot be met by the resources available with the person (Jit, 1995). It is also caused by a stimulus which can be either physical or psychological and an individual respond to the stimulus in some way (Moorhead & Griffin, 2001). In other terms, we can define stress as a state of elevated activation of the autonomic nervous system with coordinated manifestations at the affective, cognitive, and behavioral levels (Siegrist & Rodell, 2006) or 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 (Stephen et al., 2007).

Any discomfort which is felt and perceived at a personal level and triggered by instances, events or situations that are too intense and frequent in nature so as to exceed a person's coping capabilities and resources to handle them adequately is called occupational stress (Malta, 2004). It can also be a series of physiological, psychological and behavioral responses due to the continuing effects of one or more stressors on individuals in an organization (Yan & Xie, 2016). Chen & Silverthorne (2008) labeled job stress as a work-related psychological pressure and a worker's ability to respond and grip the specific situation at work place skillfully.

A healthy job is said to be the one where the amount of pressure on employees is according to their knowledge, abilities, resources, their control over the work and the support they receive from others. As health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity but a positive state of complete physical, mental and social well-being (WHO, 1986), a healthy working environment is one in which there is not only an absence of harmful conditions but an abundance of health-promoting ones. The uncertainty and ambiguity in the environment (Gupta, 2018) and anxiety due to personal or professional reasons lead to stress, which then turns into depression (Alam, 2018). Lack of promotion, training, support from superiors lead to stress which in turn leads to higher rate of absenteeism, low productivity, low quality of product, customer dissatisfaction etc. Work stress is thought to affect individuals physical as well as psychological health as well as organization's effectiveness adversely. Employers face the challenge of fighting mental illness, which has a direct impact on productivity (Bisht, 2018).

As reported by Bhattacharya and Basu (2018), nearly half the employees in India suffer from some kind of stress, according to the latest survey by Optum. The survey was conducted among 800,000 employees in 70 large companies, each with a minimum workforce of 4,500. Another survey, conducted by 1to1help.net, showed that the proportion of workers at high risk of suicide due to unmanaged stress has grown to 8% of all counselling cases in 2018 from 2-4% two years ago.

Further, a qualitative study done on 51 employees in the oil sector conducted by Pandey and Dinyar (2017) has shown that work stress has been an important concern for both employers and employees in any industry. 60% of employees find workplace stress so high that they want to quit their jobs (Roy, 2016).

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Bano, B. and Jha, R. K. (2012) reported that private sector employees face slightly more stress than those who are in the public sector. Also, educational qualification and work experience have a significant impact on employees' stress level.

According to a study done on occupational stress as experienced by private and public sector bank employees by Mokshagundam and Janardhanam (2016) reported that stress was more among employees of Private Sector Banks as compared to the employees of Public Sector Banks.

A study "Occupational Stress, Job Satisfaction & Mental Health among Employees of Government and Non-government sector" conducted by Khundaniya and Kaji (2014) with a sample of 100 employees using OSI Scale showed that there was no significant difference among type of sector and gender with regards to their occupational stress, job satisfaction and mental health.

An empirical study done by Christiana and Mahalakshmi (2013) with 182 private sector managers and 120 public sector managers of Chennai has also reported that there was more or less the same level of stress in both the sectors.

Lehal (2007) conducted a research in Punjab to check Job Satisfaction and Organisational Role Stress in employees and reported that there was a negative correlation between job satisfaction and organizational role stress. Further, the research work of Bashir and Ramay (2010) on 144 samples from graduate, senior employees including managers and customers services officers of well reputed banks in Pakistan concluded that there was a negative correlation between job stress and job performances and shows that job stress significantly reduces the performance of an individual.

A survey done by Times Business Solutions (2016) reported that 35% employees had developed insomnia, 30% felt tired & fatigued all the time, loss of appetite was a major physical impact for 25% employees and 10% said that they had persistent body aches. Further, 40% of employees reported depression as the main consequence of workplace stress. Increased irritability had occurred to 25% employees, another 25% had complaints of increased incidences of anger and 10% had developed anxiety issues. While 60% employees wanted to quit their jobs because of workplace stress, 20% felt venting out helps them. For 10% employees, relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and meditation helped them cope with stress and another 10% took a break and went on vacation to recover from stress. 90% of employees were interested in participating in corporate stress management programs, and 80% of them reported that there were no such programs offered by their organizations.

From various research and survey findings, we can say that work, money and family are the most common and main sources of stress. Other factors may be parenting, pregnancy, caregiving and social isolation. The purpose of this research was to study the prevalence of work stress among private and public sector employees in Delhi, India.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

We drew a purposive sample of 60 employees (30 from private sector and 30 from public sector) in Delhi, India. Questionnaires (in the google form) were sent to 350 private and

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public sector employees on their email addresses and non-respondents were reminded and sent the questionnaire up to two more times. Responses were received from 75 employees and as per the inclusion criteria of our study we selected only 60 responses. The sample is representative of the population from which it was drawn in terms of age, sex and employment sector. The final sample included 30 private and 30 public sector employees (17 Female, 43 Male) aged 25–60 years (mean=38.62, SD=8.79).

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

Sociodemographic characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
<i>Female</i>	17	28.3
<i>Male</i>	43	71.7
Marital status		
<i>Unmarried</i>	18	30
<i>Married</i>	42	70
Family type		
<i>Nuclear family</i>	39	65
<i>Joint family</i>	21	35
Type of employment		
<i>Permanent</i>	34	66.7
<i>Contractual</i>	26	43.3
<i>Note.</i> Participants were on average 38.62 (SD=8.79) years old.		

Tools

In the present study **Occupational Stress Index scale** developed by A.K. Srivastav and A.P. Singh was used. In this scale minimum 46 and maximum 230 score could be obtained based on the 5 options set in the scale. The scoring was done as 5 for ‘Strongly Agree’, 4 for ‘Agree’, 3 for ‘Uncertain’, 2 for ‘Disagree’, 1 for ‘Strongly Disagree’. The interpretation was done as; if the score is below 122, the employee has low stress, if it is between 123 to 155, the stress is moderate and if it is more than 156, the employee is highly stressed. o be rated on the five-point scale. Out of 46 items, 27 were true-keyed and the rest 19 were false-keyed. For a false-keyed answer the score was reversed. The items relate to almost all relevant components of the job life, which cause stress in some way or other, such as role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, group, and political pressures, responsibility for subordinates, poor participation, powerlessness, poor peer relations, intrinsic

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impoverishment, low status, strenuous working conditions, and unprofitability. These items in this scale are related to almost all relevant components of the work life, which cause stress in some way. Occupational stress index covered 12 dimensions- such as *role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, group, and political pressures, responsibility for subordinates, poor participation, powerlessness, poor peer relations, intrinsic impoverishment, low status, strenuous working conditions, and unprofitability*.

Reliability and Validity of OSI Scale: The reliability of OSI Scale was measured through a split half (odd even) method and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the mail scale was 0.935 and 0.90 respectively. The reliability of 12 sub scales are found to be rightly reliable by using reliable by split half method. The validity was measured by computing the correlation coefficient (r-value) between OSI scores and various job attributes and job behavior. And it was found that there is a highly significant positive correlation between them.

Demographic Information Sheet: Demographic information sheet was used to collect various demographic information about the sample including age, gender, type of family, qualification, and marital status. Apart from that, information of other variables like no. of children, family type, monthly family income, sector of employment, employment type, years of experience, duration of employment, any illness, working mode during COVID-19 pandemic and area of living were also collected.

Statistical Analysis

The data was analyzed using statistical software SPSS (version 20.0). Continuous variables were presented in the form of mean ($\pm$ sd) and categorical variables were presented as number (%). To find the association between categorical variables, the Chi-Square test was used. Pearson correlation was used to find the correlation between continuous variables according to distribution of the data. A *p* value less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

RESULTS

The mean age of the participants was 38.62 (SD=8.79) years. 71.7% (n=43) were male and 28.3% (n=17) were female. Further, 70% (n=42) were married and 30% (n=18) were unmarried.

It was observed that among the total employees in both the sectors, 13.3% employees had low stress level, 75% had moderate stress level and 11.7% had high stress level on OSI scale (Table 2).

As per OSI sub-scales, majority of the participants had *low level* of *Role Ambiguity* (63.3%) & *Low Status* (56.7%), *moderate level* of *Role Overload* (71.7%), *Role Conflict* (50%), *Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure* (61.7%), *Responsibility for Subordinates* (73.3%), *Powerlessness* (60%) & *Poor Peer Relations* (58.3%), and *high level* of *Poor Participation* (46.7%), *Intrinsic Improvement* (60%), *Strenuous Working Condition* (46.7%) & *Unprofitability* (70%). (Table 2).

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Table 2: Level of Stress among employees

Scale/ Subscales	Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)
OSI	13.3	75.0	11.7
<i>Role overload</i>	6.7	71.7	21.7
<i>Role Ambiguity</i>	63.3	23.3	13.3
<i>Role Conflict</i>	38.3	50.0	11.7
<i>Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure</i>	8.3	61.7	30
<i>Responsibility for Subordinates</i>	13.3	73.3	13.3
<i>Poor Participation</i>	26.7	26.7	46.7
<i>Powerlessness</i>	25.0	60.0	15.0
<i>Poor Peer Relations</i>	10.0	58.3	31.7
<i>Intrinsic Improvement</i>	15.0	25.0	60.0
<i>Low Status</i>	56.7	28.3	15.0
<i>Strenuous Working Condition</i>	15.0	38.3	46.7
<i>Unprofitability</i>	5.0	25.0	70.0

The result presented in table 3 shows that the mean value (140.36) of Private sector is more than the mean value (136.43) of Public Sector for OSI scale which clearly indicates that the private sector employees had more occupational stress than public sector employees.

Further, the mean scores of private sector employees for the Subscale; Role Overload, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Poor Peer Relations, Low Status, Strenuous Working Conditions and Unprofitability are more than mean scores of public sector employees. But, the mean scores of private sector employees for Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure, Responsibility for Subordinates, Poor Participation, Powerlessness and Intrinsic Improvement are less than the mean scores of public sector employees. These results indicate that private sector employees had more Role Overload, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Poor Peer Relations, Low Status, Strenuous Working Conditions & Unprofitability and less Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure, Responsibility for Subordinates, Poor Participation, Powerlessness and Intrinsic Improvement than public sector employees or vice-versa.

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Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Scales/ Subscales and Sector of Employment.

Scale/ Subscales	Sector of employment			
	Private Sector (N=30)		Public Sector (N=30)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
OSI	140.36	23.62	136.43	6.62
Role overload	20.13	4.18	18.73	1.91
Role Ambiguity	10.96	2.05	7.13	0.56
Role Conflict	14.3	3.46	13.46	1.54
Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure	12.00	3.13	14.33	0.82
Responsibility for Subordinates	9.8	2.42	10.36	1.27
Poor Participation	10.2	4.39	13.76	1.64
Powerlessness	7.83	3.00	8.93	1.09
Poor Peer Relations	12.46	4.21	11.46	1.52
Intrinsic Improvement	11.76	3.92	13.7	1.65
Low Status	9.06	2.96	5.93	0.51
Strenuous Working Condition	13.9	2.71	11.23	2.69
Unprofitability	7.93	1.98	7.36	0.91

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that Role Overload, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Poor Participation, Powerlessness, Intrinsic Improvement, Low Status and Strenuous Working Condition have a significant relationship with the sector of employment.

Table 4: Level of stress among private & public sector employees and p value.

Scale/ Subscales	Level	Sector of employment		
		Private (%)	Public (%)	p value
OSI	Low	23.3	3.3	0.798
	Moderate	53.3	96.7	
	High	23.3	0.0	
Role overload	Low	13.3	0.0	0.024
	Moderate	43.3	100.0	

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Scale/ Subscales	Level	Sector of employment		
		Private (%)	Public (%)	<i>p</i> value
	High	43.3	0.0	
Role Ambiguity	Low	26.7	100.0	0.000
	Moderate	46.7	0.0	
	High	26.7	0.0	
Role Conflict	Low	30.0	46.7	0.019
	Moderate	46.7	53.3	
	High	23.3	0.0	
Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure	Low	16.7	0.0	0.122
	Moderate	56.7	66.7	
	High	26.7	33.3	
Responsibility for Subordinates	Low	20.0	6.7	0.321
	Moderate	53.3	93.3	
	High	26.7	0.0	
Poor Participation	Low	53.3	0.0	0.000
	Moderate	20.0	33.3	
	High	26.7	66.7	
Powerlessness	Low	50.0	0.0	0.040
	Moderate	26.7	93.3	
	High	23.3	6.7	
Poor Peer Relations	Low	20.0	0.0	0.058
	Moderate	23.3	93.3	
	High	56.7	6.7	
Intrinsic Improvement	Low	30.0	0.0	0.003
	Moderate	23.3	26.7	
	High	46.7	73.3	
Low Status	Low	23.3	90.0	0.000
	Moderate	46.7	10.0	

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Scale/ Subscales	Level	Sector of employment		
		Private (%)	Public (%)	p value
	High	30.0	0.0	
Strenuous Working Condition	Low	3.3	26.7	0.000
	Moderate	26.7	50.0	
	High	70.0	23.3	
Unprofitability	Low	10.0	0.0	0.823
	Moderate	16.7	33.3	
	High	73.3	66.7	

DISCUSSION

Higher level of stress among private sector employees have a great impact on employees as well as employers also in terms of reduced productivity and increased staff turnover. For employees it may lead to work life disbalance, it also has a negative impact on family and social interactions. Impact of higher level of OSI Score on health include: cardiovascular disease like obesity, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol even heart attack and stroke immune deficiency disorders, musculo-skeletal disorders and Gastrointestinal disorders.

The present study revealed that more 86.7% of employees had moderate or high level of stress on OSI scale and majority of the participants had *low level of Role Ambiguity* (63.3%) & *Low Status* (56.7%), *moderate level of Role Overload* (71.7%), *Role Conflict* (50%), *Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure* (61.7%), *Responsibility for Subordinates* (73.3%), *Powerlessness* (60%) & *Poor Peer Relations* (58.3%), and *high level of Poor Participation* (46.7%), *Intrinsic Improvement* (60%), *Strenuous Working Condition* (46.7%) & *Unprofitability* (70%). It shows that the job stress among the employees was due to various reasons.

The mean value of Private sector (140.36) and the Public Sector (136.43) for OSI scale indicates that the private sector employees had more occupational stress than public sector employees.

The results further indicate that private sector employees might have high stress due to Role Overload, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Poor Peer Relations, Low Status, Strenuous Working Conditions and Unprofitability. But, the public sector employees might have high stress due to the Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure, Responsibility for Subordinates, Poor Participation, Powerlessness and Intrinsic Improvement. These results also indicate that private sector employees had more Role Overload, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Poor Peer Relations, Low Status, Strenuous Working Conditions & Unprofitability and less Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure, Responsibility for Subordinates, Poor Participation, Powerlessness and Intrinsic Improvement than public sector employees or vice-versa.

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CONCLUSION

Our results show that the employees in the private sector had more stress than in the public sector. We also found that Role Overload, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Poor Participation, Powerlessness, Intrinsic Improvement, Low Status and Strenuous Working Condition had a significant relationship with the sector of employment i.e., private and public sector. According to our results, private organisations should pay more attention in improving the well-being of their employees and the psychosocial profile of their organizations. To reduce stress in order to enhance the performance as well as bring a positive personality trait to maintain a good work life balance so as to improve productivity, some training modules should be introduced. Stress coping programmes for physical and mental well-being should also be introduced as a part of employees' wellbeing initiative and employees should also take their own initiative to reduce stress through mindfulness.

Implications

Policy Makers: The concerned authorities should implement job descriptions that are more or less consistent to the job roles in order to bring in basic clarity of roles, to reduce ambiguity and conflicts in roles especially with respect to private sector, since the private sector employees are more at risk for burnout and occupational stress when compared to public sector in the present study. The employers could take initiative in introducing some kind of physical and mental well-being training programmes that can enhance the performance of the employees and improve productivity of the organisation. Managers of private and public sectors can take initiative to minimize role overload, role conflict (creating policies and practices that do not place the executives dealing with clients directly in difficult situations), role ambiguity (clearly define duties and responsibilities), poor participation, strenuous working conditions and intrinsic improvement.

Limitations of the Study

The sample size for this study was restricted to only 60 (30 from private sector and 30 from public sector) to represent the population in Delhi, India and the data collection was done online due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation which might affect certain factors in the outcome of the research as the responses were recorded under uncontrolled environment. The study did not cover every part of India. It was restricted only to Delhi, India. There may be sampling issues as the data was collected online using Google form due to COVID 19 pandemic i.e. there are chances of participants not providing accurate information. Some promotional schemes could be given to the participants for providing the real data so that the study would have been more accurate. Some participants might hide true expression or misrepresent their identity or their true feelings about the content of the questionnaire. This study suggests that some further studies should also be done across states of India on a larger population.

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Conflict of Interest

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