

Stress Management and Immunity in Corporate Employees During COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the impact of Corona Virus Covid-19 outbreak in corporates and immunity due to psychological distress. It aims in identifying the stressors and how to cope up with them, also how distress can be converted in eustress and emotional wellbeing and how these changes can lead to good mental and physical health-The paper is a literature review. The article also aims at providing the coping mechanism for stress along with their scientific aspect. The article explains how immunity is affected by stress. In this article, what sort of stressors and how these stressors are affecting the corporate employees is also mentioned. The articles are searched on google scholar, research, ncbi, academia, PubMed, researchgate.

Keywords: COVID-19, Corona virus, corporate environment, stress, Immunity

Stress that is a feeling of physical and emotional tension. Stress which is often characterized as causing emotional and mental problem, also leads to physical problem. In corporates, economic stress on the industry arising out of the nationwide lockdown forced by the Covid-19 health emergency is expected to last well beyond one quarter, according the respondents of an ASSOCHAM-Primus Partners' joint survey, which has caused immense stress not only in stake holders of company but also in downline employees. There has been huge cut in paychecks and also many companies have not been able to provide salaries to the employees. According to Maslow theory of Motivation if basic needs of an individual are not fulfilled, it causes stress. It is very important to understand the difference between Eustress and Distress. Whenever under pressure individuals perform and achieve targets and objectives, it is called Eustress and when one is unable to manage himself, unable to achieve targets and feels that he cannot sort it and run away is distress. When it gets more severe it leads to depression. Work from home has also been a new norm these days, where the informal interaction has been reduced. Domestic Violence and child abuse has been also increased with this new norm, which is due to stress as people are not able to go out and getting frustrated by sitting near laptop and phones.

When we are stressed, the immune system's ability to fight off antigens is reduced. That is why we are more susceptible to infections. The stress hormone (corticosteroid) suppresses

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the effectiveness of immune system. Not only this when there is distress among people it leads to taking abusive substances like cigarette, alcohol and that subsequently results in deterioration of physical health. Hypertension is also a result of stress. Moreover, it has also been found that during stress heart rate increases which causes strain in circulatory system and which eventually reduces immunity in body. In an experiment done by Kiecolt-Glaser in 1986 it was found that immune responses were weak in those students which were going through some sort of stress as compared to those which did not have distress. Wherein it is false that eustress boosts the immune system.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

J. L. Salak-Johnson (2007) in his research on stress and immunity has reported, stress is considered to suppress the immune system and may lead to an increase in the illness due to presence of pathogen.

Violence against women and girls have increased during COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic which resulted into physical distancing has affected livelihoods and eventually increase the risks of women and girls experiencing violence. Health and financial stresses in the home, including loss of livelihood or earnings, restricted access to basic services and inability to leave an abusive situation; stress related to social isolation and/ or quarantines; and confinement of women within the home with violent partners has resulted in increase in violence not only towards women but also children (WHO-April 2020)

Psychological distress can result from pandemic and epidemic outbreak which is largely used to refer mental health. (Drapeau et al., 2011). Psychological distress which has not been managed as individual find it difficult to cope up with stressful situation may lead to depression (Cummins et al., 2015; Drapeau et al., 2011; Marchand, 2004). The pandemic situation is of intense distress for whole world (Shultz et.al 2015). Poor Psychological health is also due to rejection, isolation and discrimination. (Brook et.al .2020).

Pandemic leads to business disruptions, job insecurity due to closure of workplaces. (Ferguson et al., 2006). The situation has negative impact on individual's financial capacity due to loss of income source and pay checks. (Zhou et al., 2020). Job insecurity and being laid off from the organisation has affected the mental health of the individual drastically. The income reduction highly causes psychological disorders. (Mihashi et.al 2009)

Norris et al., (2002) in his studies concluded that financial issues for an individual are associated with high level of severe and persistent psychological disorders.

How to cope up with Stress

- **Self-Awareness** -In corporates, people are very stressed about jobs and income during COVID-19 time. Self-Awareness about knowing their own strengths and opportunities related to their strengths can lead to eustress and emotional wellbeing. People who are looking for source of income or another job can write down their 5-10 strengths or skills or hobbies like photography and then can related it to opportunity available as per their hobby Like finding sites where they can get paid to send photographs. This will not only channelize the energy but can create source of income for them. As the saying says, "something is better than nothing".
- **Mindfulness**-Mindfulness is to be present in the present moment. It means when you are emotionally, psychologically and physically present at the present moment. I can be started even when you wake up, when you are even brushing your teeth, sitting in park.

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example -When you are brushing your teeth, watch when you move your brush towards right side, feel it, when you are moving your brush towards left side of your mouth, up and down. Your thoughts and actions and emotions can be present at the moment. Similarly, when you are sitting in the garden or walking on the road, look around what's there. Watch birds, trees, feel the wind, feel voices of the birds. According to neuroscience, amygdala which is responsible for stress and anxiety; its volume gets low by practicing mindfulness and meditation and the connection between amygdala and prefrontal cortex increases which eventually reduces stress.

- **Express-** Talk about your feelings, emotions, worries to your loved ones. Researches and studies in Harvard have also found that expression in any form, even in the form of writing, art, music, dance helps reducing stress and anxiety.
- **Shift your Focus-** Identify those things which you do not have control over and focus on things that you can work with the resources available to you.
- **Yoga and Meditation-** Even in the busy schedule, keep some time for only you even if it is 5-10 min. Every day these 5-10 minutes which is spent on yoga and meditation helps to release stress. According to neuroscience while practising yoga and meditation, neural activity in brain strengthens which leads to increase in volume of hippocampus which is responsible for happiness and reduces volume of amygdala which is responsible for stress.
- **Sleep Pattern** -Try to follow a regular sleep pattern. At least 7 hours of sleep is important.
- **Avoid drugs or alcohol** -People often mistake by treating them as stress reliever but in fact it is stress creator as it is responsible for altering the brain chemistry. It causes release of higher amount of cortisol and adrenocorticotrophic hormone which is responsible for increasing stress.
- **Laughter-** Laughter lowers blood pressure and reduces hypertension. It provides good cardiac conditioning especially for those who are unable to perform physical exercise. Reduces stress hormones (studies show, laughter induces regulation of at least four of neuroendocrine hormones—epinephrine, cortisol, dopamine and growth hormone, associated with stress response). Boosts immune function by raising levels of infection-fighting T-cells, disease-fighting proteins called Gamma-interferon and disease destroying antibodies called B-cells.
- **Relaxation Technique-** Relaxation techniques are often employed as one element of a wider stress management program and can decrease muscle tension, lower the blood pressure and slow heart and breath rates, among other health benefits.

RESULTS

The literature reports that, due to stress there is huge impact on mental and physical health of employees and how low immunity has impacted health. Different researches have shown that mindfulness, meditation, laughter, sleep pattern, finding their strengths and opportunities helps in changing their distress in eustress and emotional wellbeing and how this change plays an important role in increasing their immunity which indirectly also leads to have good physical health along with good mental health.

CONCLUSION

COVID -19 is a pandemic which is increasing day by day and affecting people's life. Most of the researches have only focused on how to improve immunity by taking healthy food and exercise. Aspect of eustress and emotional wellbeing in increasing immunity has been

overlooked. The paper broadens the coping mechanism from distress and how it improves physical and mental health.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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