

Research Paper

Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy on Reducing Workplace Stress among IT Employees

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ABSTRACT

Workplace stress is a prevalent issue in the IT sector, impacting employee's well-being and organizational productivity. SFBT is a brief, goal-oriented therapeutic approach that emphasizes solution rather than problem, making it suitable for addressing and effectively reducing workplace stress. SFBT interventions significantly reduced stress levels and improved coping mechanisms among nurses (Kim, Lang, and Lee, 2019). Similarly, a study highlighted that positive impact of SFBT on stress reduction in corporate setting (Jones and Woods, 2018). The main aim of this study was to analyse the effectiveness of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy on reducing workplace stress among IT employees. An experimental research design was used, a total sample of 30 participants from the region of Pattukkottai, Thanjavur district were selected. Out of 30 participants, only 10 participants (N=10) who have identified moderate to high level of stress and met with all inclusion and exclusion criteria were only chosen to participate in this study by purposive sampling method. Ten participants were randomly divided into two groups--- 5 in experimental group (N =5) and 5 in control group (N =5). For the experimental group, Solution-focused brief therapy was performed in 5 sessions of 45-60 minutes (1 session weekly), however the control group did not receive any intervention. Workplace stress of the participants from both the experimental and control group before and after intervention, were assessed by using the instrument Workplace Stress Scale (WSS), by Marlin Company, USA, (2001). The effectiveness of SFBT was analysed using paired sample t test. The results showed that the mean score of workplace stress after intervention was significantly lower in the participants of the experimental group than in the control group. In other words, solution-focused group therapy had a significant effect in reducing workplace among IT employees.

Keywords: *Workplace stress, IT employees, Solution-focused brief therapy*

GOQii's Annual India Fit Report 2022-2023 found that 26 per cent of Indians reported feeling stressed by their current work situation, with long working hours, lack of job security, low wages and growing competition cited as some of the major causes of stress (Bandyopadhyay 2023). The modern workplace, particularly in industries like Information Technology (IT), often serves as a crucible for stress among employees. The fast-paced, demanding nature of IT work, coupled with constant technological

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Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy on Reducing Workplace Stress among IT Employees

advancements and high cognitive demands, creates a breeding ground for stress-related issues.

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is a strengths-based, goal-oriented approach to therapy that focuses on identifying and amplifying the client's existing resources and solutions rather than dwelling on problems or deficits. (de Shazer, S., & Berg, I.K., 2007)

Workplace stress is defined as 'the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope' (WHO, 2021). Stress is always important for the working and business organisations and is often connected with the employee's own job role, namely so called role stress (associated to role expectations and responsibilities). Stress impacts the company's functioning and can seriously harm the working process and business outcomes. If the leadership management, employees are not able to cope efficiently with the stress, bad consequences for the organisation are inevitable. All major organisational risks will increase endangering thus the working and business results (Smith, J., and Johnson, A., 2020).

Tarafdar et al. (2019) high lightened technostress, a specific form of stress induced using technology, can negatively impact employee performance and well-being. Given the pervasive nature of stress and burnout in the IT industry, there is a critical need to explore interventions that can effectively mitigate these issues. One such intervention is Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), a strengths-based approach that focuses on identifying solutions rather than dwelling on problems (De Shazer, 1985). Zemp et al. (2018) demonstrated promising results regarding the application of SFBT in reducing stress and burnout among healthcare professionals. This study serves as a foundational reference for exploring the potential of SFBT in other high-stress work environments, such as the IT industry. The research on the effectiveness of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy on workplace stress among IT employees addresses a critical need within the industry. By exploring the potential of SFBT to reduced stress-related symptoms, this research has the potential to inform evidence-based interventions that can enhance the coping skills and overall well-being of IT professionals.

Objective

The objective of this study is to know the effectiveness of SFBT on reducing workplace stress among IT employees.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anaozhang et al. (2022) investigated the Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) for psychological distress among adolescent and young adult (AYA) patients with cancer. A total of 50 Chinese AYA patients diagnosed with cancer were participated randomized into the experimental group and control group. The Brief Symptom Inventory and the Herth-Hope Index were used to measure the psychological distress and hope respectively. The experiment group underwent SFBT intervention for four week (1 session per week). ANCOVA was used to analysed the obtained data. The result indicated that SFBT impact is statistically significant and clinically meaningful. The inclusion of positive emotions, i.e., hope as part of the investigation also significance of promoting positive emotions among AYA patients with cancer.

Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy on Reducing Workplace Stress among IT Employees

Franciskus Rondand Sitindaon and Rahma Widiana (2020) aimed to investigate the Effect of Solution-Focused Brief Counselling (SFBC) on reducing college student stress levels. An active 6 postgraduate psychology students with moderate and high stress levels were participated. This is an experimental study used one-group pre-test – post-test design and the data were obtained through the Stress Scale for College Students (SSCS) and interview. The SFBC intervention used and was conducted in four meetings, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranked Test was used to analysed the obtained data. The result showed that there are differences in stress levels before and after the intervention, and its drastic decrease in participants was observed after the intervention.

Yaxi Li et al (2018) investigated the Efficacy of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy for distress among parents of children with Congenital Heart Disease in China. This was a pilot study consisted of 40 Chinese parents of a currently hospitalized child diagnosed with CHD were selected as participants by using a randomized controlled trial design. Parents were randomized into either the intervention (n=25) or the hospital medical social work treatment (n=15) group. The Chinese Brief Symptom Inventory-18 and the Chinese Version of Herth Hope Index instrument were used. The result indicated that a significant decrease in parental distress and increase in parents' levels of hope in the intervention group. This study supported that SFBT was administrated in a hospital setting as a promising intervention for reducing distress among Chinese parents with child diagnose with CHD.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study has adapted the **experimental research with pre-test and post-test design**.

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated based on the objective of the study.

1. There will be no significant difference in the level of workplace stress among the selected participants before and after intervention administering SFBT.

Sample

The sampling method chosen for this study is **Purposive sampling**. Data was collected from 30 participants from the region of Pattukkottai, Thanjavur district were selected. From the 30 participants, 15 of the participants was eligible to participate in this study. However, out of these 15 participants only 10 participants met with the exclusion and inclusion criteria of the study.

Hence the sample size for the present study was 10 participants who are identified with moderate to high level of stress in workplace.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Both males and females
2. Age between 21 and 40 years
3. Participants from the Pattukkottai region of Thanjavur district
4. Willing to participate in SFBT sessions
5. Both work from office and remote employees were included
6. Has not undergone SFBT sessions before

Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy on Reducing Workplace Stress among IT Employees

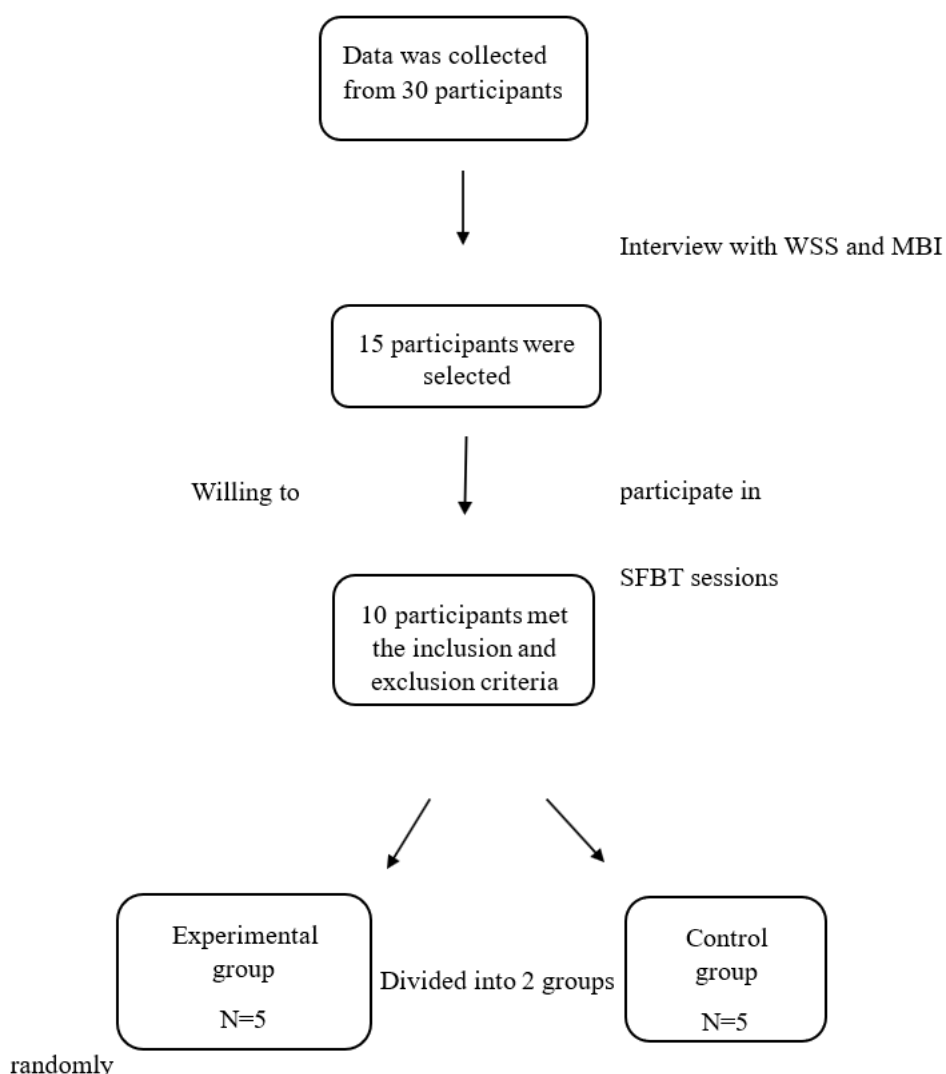


Figure 1: Selection of participants

Description of the instrument used

PART-I: The Socio-demographic profile was developed in order to gather information about the participants age, gender, monthly income, level of designation, and work experience.

PART-II: The Workplace Stress Scale (WSS) was developed by the Marlin Company, North Haven, CT, USA, and the American Institute of Stress, Yonkers, NY, USA (2001). This scale consists of eight items describing how often a respondent feels toward his or her job. The scale is in the 5-point Likert scale (1 to 5) response format, ranging from “Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Very Often”. High scores are indicative of higher levels of workplace stress. participants’ total scores were interpreted as follows: scores of 15 and below: fairly-low,16-20: lower level of work stress,21-25: moderate levels of work stress,26-30: severe levels of work stress, and 31-40: potentially dangerous level of work stress. WSS has a Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of 0.80.

Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy on Reducing Workplace Stress among IT Employees

Method of Data Collection

The data was collected from the IT employees (especially Software engineers aged 21 to 40 years) in the Pattukkottai Taluk of Thanjavur District. All the eligible participants who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were provided with information about study procedure and the need of the study was explained to them in their comfortable language to understand well. After a brief explanation about the study, a consent for participation was obtained from the participants. It was assured that all the information collected from the participants would be kept confidential and used solely for research purpose. Participants who were not cooperative and not willing to participate in the study were omitted. The selected participants were seated comfortably and they were interviewed in person about their demographic variables.

First, the participants were asked to answer the Workplace Stress Scale (WSS). Only the participants who scored moderate and higher level of stress in WSS, and the participants who were willing to SFBT intervention were chosen to participate further in the study. The selected participants were divided randomly into two groups: Experimental group, and control group.

The participants were not made aware of their group belonging.

Experimental Group: The researcher provided weekly sessions of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy to this group of participants for a duration of five weeks. These SFBT sessions consisted of 5 stages, which the participants were guided through by the researcher. The stages include: Rapport Building and Goal Formulation, Miracle Questions, Scaling Questions, Exception and Coping Questions, Compliments and Feedback. The researcher had certified in SFBT and with the help of certified trainers and is also a part of their Master's Degree in Applied Psychology and is fully eligible to guide the sessions. The main goal of this intervention SFBT is to help the participants identify and amplify their strengths and resources to create solutions to their problems in a relatively short period of time. It focuses on achieving concrete, practical outcomes rather than explore deeply into underlying causes of issues.

Control Group: This group of participants were not given any kind of therapy.

After the period of intervention was completed, the participants of both groups were asked once again to answer the WSS. Pre- and post-intervention data were analysed and compared between the groups.

Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy on Reducing Workplace Stress among IT Employees



Figure 2: Overview of SFBT intervention given to selected participants

Statistical Analysis

Data was analysed by applying mean, standard deviation, and paired sample t-test through statistical software IBM SPSS version 20.0.

RESULTS

Table 1: Showing mean, S.D. and t-value of selected participants of experimental and control group in workplace stress before SFBT intervention

Variable	Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value
Workplace Stress	Experimental	05	27.80	4.82	1.55	0.20
	Control	05	26.20	2.59		

(Source: Primary data)

N= Number of participants

S.D.= Standard deviation

NS= Not significant

Ho: There will be no significant difference among the selected participants of experimental and control group in the level of workplace stress before SFBT intervention.

Table 1 represents the mean, S.D. and t-value of the selected participants of experimental and control group in the level of workplace stress before SFBT intervention.

Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy on Reducing Workplace Stress among IT Employees

Based on the results, it can be seen that, in workplace stress, the mean value of experimental group is 27.80 and the mean value of control group is 26.20. The S.D. value for the experimental group is 4.81 and for the control group is 2.59. The calculated t-value is 1.55 and the p-value is 0.20 (p-value > 0.05). This display that the result is not significant. **Null hypothesis is accepted.** So, there is no significant different between the selected participants of experimental and control group in workplace stress before implementation of SFBT sessions.

Table 2: Showing mean, S.D. and t-value of selected participants of experimental and control group in the level of workplace stress after SFBT intervention

Variable	Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value
Workplace Stress	Experimental	05	20.60	3.29	5.68	0.005 (S)
	Control	05	30.60	2.19		

(Source: Primary data)

N= Number of participants

S.D.= Standard deviation

S= Significant

Ho: There will be no significant difference among the selected participants of experimental and control group in the level of workplace stress after SFBT intervention.

Table 2 exhibits the mean, S.D. and t-value of the selected participants of experimental and control group in the level of workplace stress after SFBT intervention. Based on results, in workplace stress, the mean value of experimental group is 20.60 and the mean value of control group is 30.60. The S.D. value for the experimental group is 3.29 and for the control group is 2.19. The calculated t-value is 5.68 and the p-value is 0.005 which is significant at 0.01 level. This display that the result is significant. Hence **alternate hypothesis accepted, null hypothesis rejected.** So, there is a significant different between the selected participants of experimental and control group in workplace stress after implementation of SFBT sessions. In conclusion, it can be demonstrated that after the intervention, the participants in the experimental group decreased in the level of workplace stress and find themselves more capable of handling and coping workplace stress.

Table 3. Showing mean, S.D. and t-value of selected participants during pre and post intervention in the level of workplace stress

Variable	Pre-/Post- Intervention	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value
Workplace Stress	Pre- Intervention	05	27.80	4.82	6.47	0.003 (S)
	Post- Intervention	05	20.60	3.29		

(Source: Primary data)

N= Number of participants

S.D.= Standard deviation

S= Significant at 0.01 level

Ho: There will be no significant difference in the effectiveness of SFBT in the level of workplace stress among the selected participants in pre- and post- intervention.

Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy on Reducing Workplace Stress among IT Employees

The above Table 1 noted the mean, S.D. and t-value of the selected participants pre- and post- intervention in the level of workplace stress. It can be inferred that the mean of participants in workplace stress, pre-intervention is 27.80 and post-intervention is 20.60 and the S.D. is 4.82 and 3.29 respectively. The calculated t-value is 6.47, and the p-value is 0.003 (p-value < 0.05) which is significant at 0.01 level. Hence, **the alternate hypothesis is accepted**. There is a significant difference in the effectiveness of SFBT in the level of workplace stress pre- and post-intervention. The participants' pre-test results showed a moderate to severe level of stress, which changed to a lower to moderate level in the post-test, based on a comparison of the results with the norms. This demonstrates that SFBT is a useful technique for supporting individuals to minimizing their levels of workplace stress.

DISCUSSION

The central aspect of this study is to analyse the effectiveness of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy among Software engineers IT employees who have experienced the workplaces stress. Purposive sampling techniques were chosen for this study. Among 30 Participants were interviewed with Workplace Stress Scale (WSS) and 15 participants were identified to have moderate to high level of stress in WSS and out of that 15 participants, 10 participants fit the all inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected. Finally, the sample size of 10 participants were chosen and they were divided randomly into two groups --- 5 participants in the experimental group and 5 participants in the control group. SFBT interventions was only applied on the experimental group for a duration of 5 weeks (1 session per week; 45-60 minutes per session) and the control group did not undergo any intervention of any kind. Pre- and post-test values of workplace stress was measured. The analyses of the data were done by descriptive statistics mean and standard deviation, independent sample t-test for the experimental and control groups, paired t-test for a repeated measure of experimental and control group after intervention. The results were interpreted and discussed. Based on the findings, it was discovered that there is significant difference in workplace stress in the selected participants before and after intervention.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are:

- Time constraints for the administration of the intervention about a month.
- The sample size was too small
- The study was carried out within the pattukkottai region of Thanjavur district.

Implications of the Study

Considering all the findings and the interpretation provided, SFBT has proven itself to be an impactful intervention among participants who have experienced workplace stress. While SFBT is effective, it has the potential to transform mental health interventions in the IT sector by providing a customized strategy to address the stressors that are common in this field, such as high-pressure situations and tight deadlines. Organizations may find it cost-effective to use SFBT since it may lower employee absenteeism and turnover among IT personnel, protecting continuity and productivity. By prioritizing employee mental health through SFBT, organizations can create healthier work environments, ultimately enhancing employee retention, morale, and organizational success. Overall, the research on SFBT effectiveness in alleviating workplace stress among IT employees holds the potential to drive meaningful change, both at the individual and organizational levels, in the realm of mental health support within the IT industry.

Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy on Reducing Workplace Stress among IT Employees

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focuses on the effectiveness of SFBT on software engineers in IT sector who have experienced a workplace stress. Many studies have been conducted in terms of occupational stress, but there are less interventions which can be used to reduce the effect of stress in IT field.

This research study hopes to open new ventures for further research in this selected IT area.

- Different position of IT employees and other field employees can be used.
- Different age population can be used.
- Other interventions or techniques along with SFBT can be assessed.
- Studies using larger sample size and over a longer period.

CONCLUSION

Based on an extensive review of past studies and literature, the effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) in addressing workplace stress among IT employees emerges as a promising avenue for intervention. SFBT, distinguished by its emphasis on solutions rather than dwelling on problems, offers a pragmatic and time-efficient approach tailored to the unique demands of the IT sector. Research indicated that SFBT interventions can lead to reduced stress levels, increased resilience, and enhanced coping mechanisms among IT professionals. By emphasizing strengths and achievable goals, SFBT equips employees with the tools to manage stress more effectively, thereby mitigating burnout. Furthermore, the brief nature of SFBT makes it particularly suitable for busy IT environments, where time constraints often hinder participation in traditional therapy. However, while existing evidence suggests positive outcomes, further empirical research is warranted to establish the long-term efficacy of SFBT in combating workplace stress and burnout within the IT sector. By leveraging the strengths of SFBT to empower IT professionals in managing stressors and fostering resilience, organizations can contribute to creating healthier and more sustainable work environments in the rapidly evolving IT industry. This demonstrates that SFBT is a useful intervention technique for IT employees who have suffered from stress at work. This study recommends using SFBT as an intervention among IT employees can help to reduce the level of workplace stress and burnout.

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Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy on Reducing Workplace Stress among IT Employees

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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