

# Managing Stress through Changing Lifestyle

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## Abstract

In the past few decades suddenly the significance of the word stress and its management has gained a lot of attention all over the globe. Globalization, industrialization, changing demography etc are some of the reasons adding to it. The changes in the environmental factors are gradually adding to stress in various forms such as increased work load. All this calls for an efficient stress management system.

The objective of the present research paper is to find out ways to efficiently resolve stress arising out of increased workload in an organization, at the individual and the organizational level. The conclusion is drawn on the basis of analysis and interpretation of data collected through questionnaire survey and in-depth interview of the professionals working in Pune city. The end of the paper talks about certain recommendations to manage stress.

## Key words

Stressors, Work-Environment, Work-Stress, Stress Burnout, Stress Management

## 1.1 Introduction

Stress in a layman's language is considered to be negative pressure. It is considered to be caused due to something bad e.g. boss giving formal reprimand to employee for poor performance. In reality the positive incidents may also lead to stress e.g. moving

to a new location on promotion. The first form of stress is called as distress the latter form is eustress (**Fred Luthans, 2005**). There are numerous definitions describing job stress; however the best definition of stress as given by Richard S. Lazarus says, "Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize" (**Robins P. Stephen, et.al, 2012**). According to medical science stress is defined as "Organism's total response to environmental demands or pressures". Stress results from interactions between people and their environment that are perceived as those that exceed their adaptive capacities and threaten their well-being. Over the past several decades United States, Sweden, UK, and Germany have identified a number of work related psychological risks over and above, the traditional occupational health risk. The element of perception indicates that human stress responses reflect differences in personality as well as differences in physical strength or general strength. In the present study we are only concerned with work stress and its impact over human beings.

It is very common to hear from professionals as to how stressed out they are from their work. Employee stress is a serious problem today before every employer and employee. The increased competition due to globalization seems to have direct impact over the workload of companies. Stress is in most cases

directly proportional to work. This increasing stress not only influences individual performance but it also affects the functioning of an organization. An effective model of organization behaviour along with several activities is required for a particular company in order to efficiently rule out the various problems associated with stress.

## 1.2 Review of literature

**Responders, C. A. (2007)**, discussed the impact of stress over the function of emergency departments & communities. According to the author, combating stress effectively requires more than offering individual coping skills and access to counselling for first responders. The impact of stress must be recognised from a variety of sources, including organisational factors & approach to stress prevention in a multi stage and comprehensive manner, paying attention to primary stage interventions.

**A. Murphy, G. E. (Vol. 9 Issue 4)** in his paper analysed demographic factors & lifestyle of an individual based on exercise, alcohol consumptions & smoking which accounted for a significant increase in varying health diseases. He concluded that lifestyle behaviour deserves increased attention.

**Steve Harvey, et al.(n.d.)** in his report discussed different approaches for stress reduction. According to him changing employee perceptions of the work environment through strategies such as increasing participation, communication and social support, reducing role ambiguity and conflict and enhancing control over work tasks can play vital role in controlling stress.

**Judy M. Hogan, et. al.(2002)** stated that the academic stress levels have increased in the last 15 years. Academic stress is high as compared with other occupations and there is a difference in the level of stress in different countries.

To understand stress and its management lets now understand the three sources of stress i.e. environmental, organizational and individual. Human beings work within organizations and the organizations work under a changing environment. Further we see that the uncertain business environment influences the business and the working environment. Also, the employee-employer relationship with in the business influences the level of stress.

### 1.2.1 Factors

**Environmental Factors:** Events in the environment initiate a cascade of physiological responses. Working of a company is affected by both the external environment and the internal environment. Both the factors have a vital role to play in enhancing the efficiency and also dropping it down.

### Macro External Environment



Fig 1

## Micro External & Internal Environment



**Fig 2**

Fig 1 and 2 represent the external as well as internal environmental factors affecting business. Environmental uncertainty influences the design of an organization's structure, it also influences stress levels among employees in that organization. For the present study only external environment factors have been considered as these seem to play a vital role in influencing the stress levels in an organization. *Economic Uncertainties:* When the economy is contracting, people become insecure about their job security. For example, due to the recent downfall in U.S. economy many organizations became insolvent leading to a large amount of unemployment.

*Political Uncertainties:* It basically refers to as to the impact of changing political conditions over stress. Political uncertainties don't tend to create tensions among North American's the way they influence people from Haiti or Venezuela (**Robins P. Stephen, et.al, 2012**).

*Technological Uncertainty:* In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, new innovations are very common, so as to keep in pace with the changing trends and to be up-to-date with recent technological advancements is important as an organization has to adhere to the technological standards. This causes a problem for employees because new innovations can make an employee's skill and expertise obsolete in a very short time. Computers, robotics, automatic machines are a threat to various employees which causes stress in their lives.

**Organizational Factors:** When we talk about an organization, there are various factors which cause stress. Here the scope of our discussion is limited to intra-organizational factors (factors within the organization). Pressures to complete work within stipulated time, working under the autocratic nature of boss and unpleasant co-workers are some common examples which cause stress. Distinguished categories under organizational factors are as follows:

*Task Demands:* - These are stressors associated with a specific job a person performs. Some occupations are by nature more stressful than others. The jobs of surgeons, air-traffic controllers and professional football coaches are generally more stressful than those of general practitioners. These are the basic problems associated with *Task Demands*. It's basically the stress due to professional differences, which depends upon profession to profession. For example, working in an overcrowded office, in a cabin where everyone can see you and where interruptions are constant, could increase anxiety and stress or high speed of assembly lines also causes stress (**Robins P. Stephen, et.al, 2012**).

*Organizational Structure* covers two sub-heads under it,

1. *Organizational Leadership*
2. *Interpersonal Demands*

It defines the level of differentiation in the organization, the degree of rules and regulations and interpersonal demands. Organizational structure shows us how the roles, power and responsibilities are assigned, controlled and coordinated and how information flows between different levels of management. Excessive rules, lack of participation, autocratic style of governance, a rigid formal structure, downwards chain of command (communication channel), and no informal communication are some common defects in an organization's structure which creates stress in lives of employees.

**Individual Factors:** A typical individual works about 40 -50 hours a week. But what these individuals in those 120+ of non-working hours experience and the problems that they encounter in those 120+ hours can spill over to their jobs. Our final category then encompasses factors in the employee's personal life. Primarily these factors include that of family issues, personal economic problems and inherent personality characteristics.

National surveys consistently show that people hold family and personal relationships dear and marital difficulties, breaking of a relationship and trouble with children, these are some of the problems faced by the employee's and these problems create a lot of stress among them.

Economic problems created by individuals who over extend their financial resources is another important factor that can create stress for employees and distract their attention from work.

**Burning out(Fred Luthans, 2005),** some researchers feel that it is a type of stress while others think it is one of the components of stress. Burnout is nothing but the consequences of “losing a sense of basic purpose and fulfilment of your work”. According to John Izzo, a former HR profession in the occupation development area suggests that, “getting more balance or getting more personal time

will help you with stress but it will not help you with burnout.

According to Chzristina Maslach, “As a result of extensive study, it is believed that burnout is not a problem of the people themselves but of the social environment in which they work.

### 2.1 Objectives of the study

The basic objective behind this paper is:

1. To identify individual perception of professionals towards stress and its causes.
2. To study common practices to overcome stress in organizations.
3. To study the impact of work-stress over the personal lives of people.
4. To identify the organizations, helping in Stress Management.

In this paper we shall also study the influence of stress over varying age groups.

### 2.2 Research Method

The research is based on primary data collected through 50 questionnaires and in depth interview of the college students and professionals from Pune city. Two age groups i.e.18-35 years and 35-55 years were considered in the study. Secondary data in the form of articles published in books, journals, magazines, research papers, newspapers and reports were also referred.

The analysis of the data was done through Pie-Charts and Percentage Evaluation.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

On the basis of literature review drawn from various books and journals (as mentioned in the bibliography) and the data collected from the survey of population, the following findings were collected.

#### 2.2 Findings

Pie-charts were drawn on the basis of data collected from the questionnaire survey. These pie-charts are



classified according to the age groups, the upper age group i.e. from 35-55 years and the lower age group i.e. from 18-35 years.

### 2.2.1 Pie-Chart 1

The following pie-charts describe the main reasons for stress with respect to different age groups.

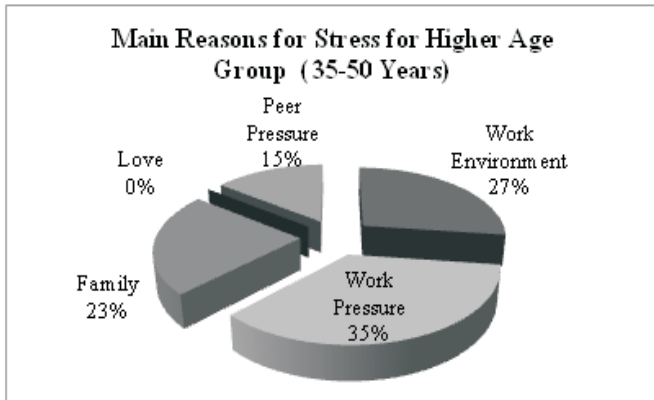


Figure 3

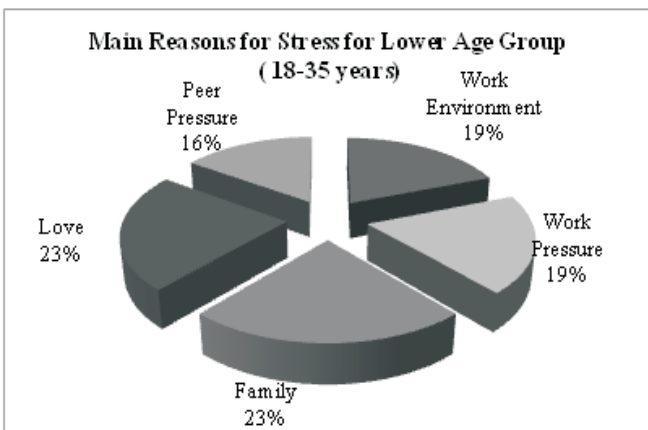


Figure 4

The pie-chart for upper age group clearly reveals that work environment, work pressure and family are the major reasons for stress for people belonging to that age group. In the second age group, in addition to other reasons for stress, 23% of the population voted for love as one of the major factors leading to stress.

In terms of percentage, the followings have been perceived as the most significant factors.

- A) Upper age group: Work Pressure 35%
- B) Lower age group: Love 23% & Family Pressure 23%

### 2.2.2 Pie-Chart 2

The following pie-chart is based on what people do in order to overcome stress.

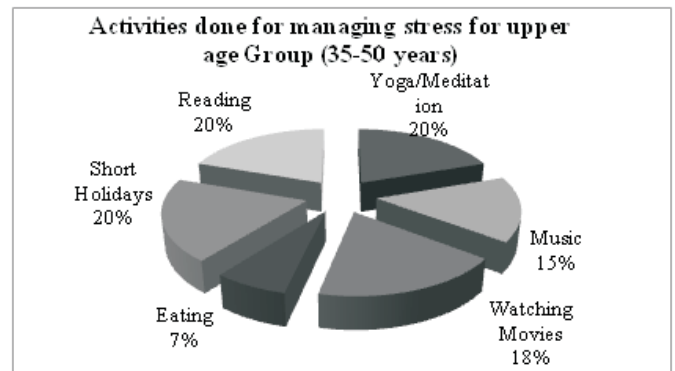


Figure 5

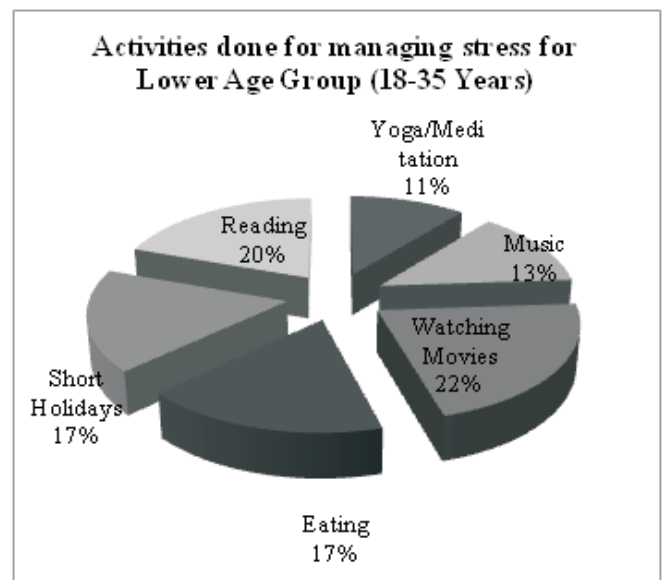


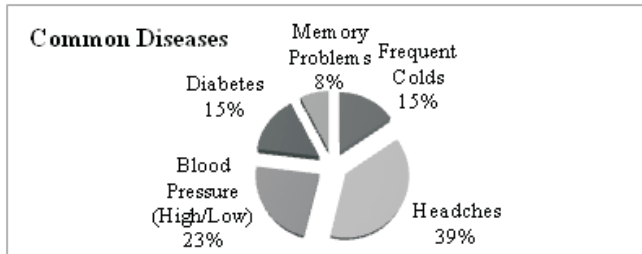
Figure 6

Figure 5 reveals that the upper age group people prefer yoga/mediation, reading and short holidays to overcome stress rather than eating and watching movies. According to figure 6, lower age group people prefer watching movies and reading though a significant chunk i.e., 11% goes for yoga/meditation.

- A.) Upper age group: yoga/mediation 20%, reading 20%, and short holidays 20%
- B.) Lower age group: watching movies 22% and reading 20%

### 2.2.3 Pie-Chart 3

The following pie-chart depicts the common diseases observed in the people undergoing severe stress at the work place.



**Figure 7**

If we study the pie-chart, headaches are considered to be the common disease in both the age groups with blood pressure voted second.

### 2.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation

are common in both the age groups. Work environment is another factor but in case of individual employees only. Talking about diseases, headaches are the most common consequence of it. However, individuals preferred to have activities like job rotation, yoga camps, employee involvement programmes etc. in order to overcome stress.

#### 1.1 Conclusion

After due analysis and interpretation of primary and secondary data collected we can convincingly conclude that long working hours, political environment and technical environment have a major role in building up stress. Isolation and family pressure were also identified as the stress builders

Questions Asked	Common Answers	Common Answers
	Age Group 35-50	Age Group 18-35
<b>Main Reasons for Stress</b>	Work Pressure: 35% Work Environment: 20 %	Love: 23% Work Pressure: 19% Work Environment: 19%
<b>Activities done for managing Stress</b>	Reading: 20% Short Vacations: 20% Yoga/Meditation: 20%	Watching Movies: 22% Reading: 20%
<b>Common Diseases</b>	Headaches: 39% Blood Pressure: 23%	Headaches: 39% Blood Pressure: 23%

Now that we have established the findings, after a collective study, it is noticed that working hours does not influence stress significantly. The responses of individuals with higher work hours were same as those of lower work hours. What influences stress is *work pressure* that is the main factor which could be deduced from both the age groups? Family problems

leading to intense feelings of anger, frustration, anxiety and poor mental health. Surprisingly according to significant proportion of people, cigarettes and drugs tend to relieve stress but their long term use is injurious for health. Most focus groups identified unhealthy work environment and acrimonious employee-employer relationship as



the important factors enhancing stress. The study also revealed that inefficient management and incompetent employees are prone to stress.

Greater consideration should be given to understanding the wider environmental and organizational factors that contribute to poor mental health in employees. Many corporate houses like Deloitte Consulting in Pittsburgh are creating nap rooms to let employees catch some sleep during the work day and to improve their mental health (Stephen P. Robins., 2003).

### 5.1 Recommendations

There are various ways to overcome stress. However, we have found some common and easy to use methods which would help in overcoming stress.

1. **Meditation and Yoga:** Brings short-term stress relief as well as lasting stress management benefits. Yoga incorporates breathing exercises, meditation, and light exercise. One session brings initial stress relief and continued practice brings greater resilience to stress. It's one of the more potent stress relievers. For e.g. there are various 'asanas' (positions) of yoga which work towards overall relaxation of body 'Sheershasana' (Saraswati, S. J., 1992, February 1).
2. **Breathing:** Breathing exercises provide convenient and simple stress relief and the best part is that they can be used anytime, anywhere, and they work quickly. Basically it calms down the heart beat and eases blood flow in our body simultaneously increasing oxygen content.
3. **Laughter:** The physical act of laughing releases tension and brings positive physiological changes. Finding ways to work more laughter into your day can be an effective route to stress relief. For example, in various towns people tend to attend laughter sessions in the morning as a substitute to exercise.
4. **Music Therapy:** Music can alter your physiology in ways that help you to relieve stress. It's an enjoyable, passive route to stress relief. Formal music therapy sessions can help with a variety of stress-related issues. Music acts as natural stress-reliever.
5. **Time Management:** Honing your time management skills can allow you to minimize the stressors that you experience and better manage the ones you can't avoid. When you are able to complete everything on your "to do" list without the stress of rushing or forgetting, your whole life feels easier. Time management helps an individual in order to reduce the work load and it also helps to ease up role overload which occurs due to excessive workload (Fred Luthans, 2005).
6. **Organizational Structure:** A behaviour of an organization depends upon its structure. Organization structure can prove to be beneficial to employees provided it is based on a collegial based approach. Furthermore, organizational communication, organizational culture and behaviour are various other factors which interpretively come under the purview of the organizational structure (Gupta, C., 2011).
7. **Collegial Model of Organizational Behaviour:** The basis of this model is partnership with managerial orientation of teamwork. The employees are motivated towards self-discipline and are self-motivated.
8. **Academic Training:** There is a need for the academic training of professionals at both the master's and doctoral levels in occupational health psychology and stress management. Workplace Wellness focuses on training corporate employees in methods to deal with stress and avoid repetitive strain injuries, opened 14 months ago (Singer, P. (1997, March 9).

**9. Creating Awareness for Health:** Employees should receive continuous education concerning the health risks associated with various work design variables as well as specific risk factors associated with their work and work environment.

Traditionally, stress management recommendations have emphasized individual accommodation strategies. The two most common and significant predictors of stress are job type and supervisory status. Stress management techniques and Mediterranean diet education seem to be beneficial for blood pressure reduction. Such intervention could possibly serve as a complementary treatment along with drug therapy for treatment of high normal blood pressure. **(A. Murphy, Vol.9 Issue4).**

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