

# WORKING ENVIRONMENT INFLUENCING ORGANISATIONAL STRESS ON EMPLOYEES WORKING IN SELECT IT COMPANIES, CHENNAI

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## ABSTRACT

Stress, which affects most of the people in one way or the other, can be defined in general, as the reaction of individuals to demands (stressors) imposed upon them. It refers to situations where the well-being of individuals is detrimentally affected by their failure to cope with the demands of their environment. Stress as a debilitating effect caused by constant pressure, either at work or home, is a modern phenomenon. IT employees and those looking forward to get a job. Due to job insecurity, the IT employees face heavy workload and incredulous deadlines. (i) Heavy workload, (ii) Physically monotonous work, (iii) Risks of violence, (iv) Shift work – irregular working hours, which are few to mention. In this backdrop it becomes imperative to probe into the working environment of IT employees. What is the employees' perception on existing working environment? The objectives are to ascertain employee perception on working environment. The study depends upon primary data. The required data have been collected from the employees working in IT companies in Chennai using a well-structured and pre-tested questionnaire. A sample of 504 IT employees has been chosen using convenience sampling method. The data collected have been subjected to appropriate statistical tools which include percentage analysis and Chi-square test. The stress of middle age employees is high and therefore efforts may be taken by the employer to mitigate their stress by addressing to their problems by establishing the scope for career development. The study would be highly rewarded if this piece of research serves as an eye-opener for the young budding researchers who would like to take up research on stress.

**Key words: Employees, Stress, Working Environment, IT companies, etc.**

## 1. Introduction

Stress, which affects most of the people in one way or the other, can be defined in general, as the reaction of individuals to demands (stressors) imposed upon them. It refers to situations where the well-being of individuals is detrimentally affected by their failure to cope with the demands of their environment (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2006)<sup>1</sup>. Stress as a debilitating effect caused by constant pressure, either at work or home, is a modern phenomenon. Acute (sudden, short-term) stress leads to rapid changes throughout the body. Almost all body systems, (the heart and blood vessels, the immune system, the lungs, the digestive system, the sensory organs, and brain) gear up to meet perceived danger. These stresses could prove beneficial in a critical, life-or-death situation. Temporary stress, therefore, allows us an extra turn of speed in escaping danger. It increases the speed of our reactions when, for example, avoiding a collision while driving; it recharges a mentally or physically exhausted body to cope with greater challenges, and boosts an athlete's performance during an important event. Over time, however, repeated stressful situations put a strain on the body that may contribute to physical and psychological problems. This is termed the chronic (long-term) stress which can have real health consequences and should be addressed like any other health concern. Long-term stress can have serious effects on mental health and behaviour. People under large amount of stress can become tired, sick, and unable to concentrate or think clearly. Sometimes, they even suffer mental breakdowns. Headaches, more frequent colds or flu, sleep problems, general anxiety, fuzzy thinking and feelings of frustration are the most common effects of stress.

### 1.1. Occupational Stress

Work stress is defined as the harmful, physical and emotional responses that occur when job requirements do not match the worker's capabilities, resources, and needs (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, 1999)<sup>2</sup>. Employees with greater level of occupational stress are more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, less productive and less safe at work.

### 1.2. Sources and Consequences of Occupational Stress

Behr and Newman (1978)<sup>3</sup> have identified more than 150 variables involved in stress, with emphasis on the working context and the most prominent factors are workload and high demands, interruptions and pervasive uncertainty, mistrust and unfairness, unclear policies and no sense of direction, career and job ambiguity, no feedback - good or bad, no appreciation, lack of communication, lack of control and job insecurity. As far as the consequences are concerned, stress produces a range of undesirable and expensive consequences (Ross, 2005)<sup>4</sup>, which affect both individuals and organizations. In organizational setting, stress is now-a-days becoming a major contributor to health and performance problems of individuals, and unwanted occurrences and costs for organizations. Consequences of occupational stress can be grouped into those on individual and those on organizational level.

## 2. Review of Literature

Research has determined that working women with rigid schedules report more stress than working women with flexible schedules (Ralston, 1990)<sup>5</sup>. It has been determined that there is a relationship between the lack of job flexibility and depression (Googins, 1991)<sup>6</sup>. A general tendency exists in the literature according to which females experience higher levels of occupational stress regarding gender-specific stressors and have different ways of interpreting and dealing with problems related to their work environment (Antoniou *et al.* 2006)<sup>7</sup>.

Sharpley *et al.* (1996)<sup>8</sup> has found that males have statistically significant lower job stress scores, have found that female managers are under much more pressure than their male counterparts and have found that female teachers experienced significantly higher levels of occupational stress compared to their male counterparts.

Gregory (1990)<sup>9</sup> notifies that, for the female professional, gender stereotyping in the workplace adds to the role conflict stress experiences, while Comish and Swindle (1994)<sup>10</sup> explain that role demands such as that of being wife, mother and professional provoke role conflict. The results of the bivariate analysis conducted by Fotinatos-Ventouratos and Cooper (2005)<sup>11</sup> reveal significant differences in terms of physical and psychological wellbeing amongst the male and female sample.

## 3. Statement of the Problem

In early 2000, there was truly a shortage of IT professionals in India and IT companies, which led to a sudden growth in the number of Engineering Colleges in India. This over supply of engineers in the Indian market has led to increased pressure on both existing IT employees and those looking forward to get a job. Due to job insecurity, the IT employees face heavy workload and incredulous deadlines. (i) Heavy workload, (ii) Physically monotonous work, (iii) Risks of violence, (iv) Shift work – irregular working hours, which are few to mention. In this backdrop it becomes imperative to probe into the working environment of IT employees. What is the employees' perception on existing working environment?

## 4. Objectives of the study

To ascertain employee perception on working environment

## 5. Hypotheses

- H<sub>0</sub>: Age does not influence the level of perception on working environment.
- H<sub>0</sub>: Gender does not influence the level of perception on working environment.
- H<sub>0</sub>: Marital Status does not influence the level of perception on working environment.
- H<sub>0</sub>: Educational Qualification does not influence the level of perception on working environment.
- H<sub>0</sub>: Monthly Income does not influence the level of perception on working environment.

## 6. Methodology

The study depends upon primary data. The required data have been collected from the employees working in IT companies in Chennai using a well-structured and pre - tested questionnaire. A sample of 504 IT employees has been chosen using convenience sampling method. The data collected have been subjected to appropriate statistical tools which include percentage analysis and Chi-square test.

## 7. Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited in terms of sample size pertaining to a narrow group of respondents covering the 504 respondents. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to the whole population. It does not allow the ability to examine how expectations and gratifications might change over time.

## 8. Analysis and Results

### 8.1. Demographic Variables

The attitude, acceptance of responsibility, performance and growth of the employees are mainly based on their behaviour. The attitude, behaviour and social background of the employees predominantly play a vital role in shaping their career. Hence, the socio-economic profile of the sample employees is presented below:

Table 1: Socio-Economic Profile of Sample Employees

Particulars	Number of Employees (N=504)	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
Up to 30	114	22.60
31 – 40	262	52.00
Above 40	128	25.40
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	253	50.20
Female	251	49.80
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	96	19.00
Married	408	81.00
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
Diploma	120	23.81
Under Graduation	130	25.79
Post Graduation	254	50.40
<b>Monthly Income (Rs.)</b>		
Up to 45,000	171	33.90
45,001 – 55,000	148	29.40
Above 55000	185	36.70

Source: Computed from Primary Data

The age wise classification of the employees reveal that majority of them are between 31 and 40 years of age. Among the total 504 employees, 262 (52.00%) are between 31 and 40 years of age, 128 (25.40%) are above 40 years of age and only 114 (22.60%) are up to 30 years of age. Slightly above half of the total employees are males accounting for 50.20 per cent and the remaining 49.80 per cent of the total employees are females. Most of the employees are, therefore, males. Among the 504 employees, 408 (81.00%) are married and only 96 (19.00%) are single. Thus, most of the employees are married. With respect to educational qualification, 120 (23.81%) are diploma holders, 130 (25.79%) are under graduates either in engineering or in science discipline, and the remaining 254 (50.40%) are post graduates from engineering or science stream. Thus, most of the employees are post graduates. From the total employees, 171 (33.90%) earn below Rs.45, 000 per month, 185 (36.70%) earn above Rs.55, 000 per month and 148 (29.40%) earn between Rs.45, 000 and Rs.55, 000 per month. Most of the employees thus have a monthly income above Rs.55, 000.

## 8.2. Two-Table and Chi-Square Test

Five employee attributes and the working environment variables have been selected to examine their association with employee perception. Null hypotheses have been framed and tested to ascertain the variables that significantly influence the level of perception by making use of Chi-square test. The levels of confidence chosen are five per cent.

Table 2: Demographic Variables and Level of Perception on Working Environment

Demographic variables	Level of Perception			Result: $\chi^2$ (df) and Table Value (TV)
	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>Age</b>				
Up to 30	26 (22.80%)	69 (60.53%)	19 (16.67%)	$\chi^2$ : 19.848* (df=4), TV:9.488
31 – 40	31 (11.83%)	173 (66.03%)	58 (22.14%)	
Above 40	36 (28.13%)	77 (60.16%)	15 (11.71%)	
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	52 (20.55%)	148 (58.50%)	53 (20.95%)	$\chi^2$ : 5.082 (df=2), TV:5.991
Female	41 (16.33%)	171 (68.13%)	39 (15.54%)	
<b>Marital Status</b>				
Single	23 (23.96%)	61 (63.54%)	12 (12.50%)	$\chi^2$ : 4.100 (df=2), TV:5.991
Married	70 (17.16%)	258 (63.24%)	80 (19.60%)	
<b>Educational Qualification</b>				
Diploma	27 (22.50%)	76 (63.33%)	17 (14.17%)	$\chi^2$ : 3.333 (df=4), TV:9.488
Under Graduate	20 (15.38%)	85 (65.38%)	25 (19.24%)	
Post Graduate	46 (18.11%)	158 (62.20%)	50 (19.69%)	
<b>Monthly Income</b>				

Up to 45000	43 (25.15%)	105 (61.40%)	23 (13.45%)	$\chi^2$ : 10.340* (df=4), TV:9.488
45001 – 55000	22 (14.86%)	98 (66.22%)	28 (18.92%)	
Above 55000	28 (15.14%)	116 (62.70%)	41 (22.16%)	

\* Significant @ 5% level, df=Degree of Freedom,  $\chi^2$ : Chi-Square Value, TV: Table Value

It is evident that the percentage of employees with low level of perception is high with those whose age is above 40 years. Further, it is evident from the table that the percentage of employees with high level of perception is high with those whose age is between 31 to 40 years. Thus, it can be said that middle aged employees perceive positively the work environment than the younger and elder employees. This is substantiated by the fact that the calculated  $\chi^2$  value (19.848) is greater than the table value at one per cent level. The inference is that there exists a strong association between age and level of perception. Hence, the null hypothesis has been rejected.

It is clear that there are 251 (49.80%) female employees. The perception levels of 41 (16.33%), of 171 (68.13%) and of 39 (15.54%) are respectively low, moderate and high. The percentage of employees with low level of perception is high with male employees. The percentage of employees with high level of perception is also high in the case of male employees. Comparing the percentages, it is seen that the percentage is high with male employees whose perception on working environment is high. Therefore, it can be said that the perception level of male employees is higher than the female employees. However, as the calculated  $\chi^2$  value is less than the table value at five per cent level, there exists no association between gender and level of perception. Hence, the null hypothesis has been accepted.

It is found that there are 408 (80.95%) married employees. The perception levels of 70 (17.16%), of 258 (63.24%) and of 80 (19.60%) are low, moderate and high respectively. The percentage of employees with low level of perception is high with single employees. The percentage of employees with high level of perception is high with married employees. Hence, it can be said that married employees have a higher level of perception towards working environment than the single employees. However, as the calculated  $\chi^2$  value is less than the table value at five per cent level, there exists no association between marital status and perception on working environment. Hence, the null hypothesis has been accepted.

The percentage of employees with low level of perception is high with diploma holders and the percentage of employees with high level of perception is high with post graduates. Since the calculated  $\chi^2$  value is lesser than the table value at five per cent level, there is no significant association between educational qualification and perception on working environment. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

It is evident that the percentage of employees with low level of perception is high with those employees whose income is up to Rs.45000, and it is high with those investors whose monthly income is above Rs.55000. Thus, it can be said that employees of higher monthly income group are having higher level of perception on working environment as compared to lower income group. Since the calculated  $\chi^2$  value (10.340) is more than the table value (9.488) at five per cent level there is an association between monthly income and perception on working environment. Hence, the null hypothesis has been rejected.

## 9. Summary of Results

### 9.1. Findings

Now-a-days, women employees equal male employees in number and skill. The present study has revealed a similar picture.

- Of the total employees, 253 (50.20%) are male employees while 251 (49.80%) are female employees. Thus, the present study bears balanced opinions of both the gender.
- Though the IT industry is open to all age groups of employees, relatively young employees are found to be in large numbers. They include 114 (22.60%) employees in the age group up to 30 years and 262 (52.00%) in the age group between 31 and 40 years. There are only 128 (25.40%) employees above 40 years of age.
- Majority (81.00%) are married and 96 (19.00%) are unmarried.
- Educational qualification is an important criterion for a software professional. Of the total 504 employees, 120 (23.80%) are diploma holders, 130 (25.80%) are graduates either in engineering or in science discipline, and 254 (50.40%) are post graduates either in engineering or in science discipline
- Most of the employees (185, 36.70%) are drawing a monthly salary of above Rs.55,000 per month and the family income of 214 (42.50%) employees is above Rs. 70,000.

### 9.2. Chi-Square Results

#### Age

The average perception index of the middle aged group employees (31 to 40 years) is the highest of all. Moreover, there exists a highly significant association between age and level of perception on working environment.



### Gender

The average perception index of male employees is slightly more than that of female employees. There exists no significant association between gender and level of perception on working environment.

### Marital Status

The average perception index of married employees is higher than those who are single. It is found that there exists no association between marital status and level of perception on working environment.

### Educational Qualification

The average perception index is high for those employees who are graduates. The average perception index of post graduates is slightly below this. It is evident from the Chi-square that educational qualification does not influence perception on working environment.

### Monthly Income

Employees, whose monthly income ranges between Rs. 45,001 and Rs. 55,000 have high perception on working environment. It is found that there exists a significant association between monthly income and perception on working environment.

## 10. SUGGESTIONS

- The stress of middle age employees is high and therefore efforts may be taken by the employer to mitigate their stress by addressing to their problems by establishing the scope for career development.
- Since employees concern more about monetary benefits, workload and interpersonal relationship, companies may pay high attention towards these aspects. Training programmes are also needed to keep the employees morale strong.
- The companies may organise free and periodical medical camps to take care of the employees' health so that the physiological and psychological effects may be reduced.
- It is evident from the results that working environment plays a vital role in deciding employee preference to continue in the same company. Therefore a company's foremost responsibility may be to create and maintain a congenial working environment for its employees.

## 11. CONCLUSION

The focus of the present study is on employees in software industry. Impact of stress on decision styles of IT professionals is another promising field of research. This apart, how stress impacts work efficiency of the employees may also be studied. There is a wide scope for taking up research to examine stress from different angles. The stress of employees engaged in other fields of IT industry may be taken up. The study would be highly rewarded if this piece of research serves as an eye-opener for the young budding researchers who would like to take up research on stress.

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