

**OCUPATIONAL STRESS; A REFUGE IN YOGIC SUTRAS
(SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PATANJALI'S ASHTANG YOGA):
A STUDY OF HRM PRACTICES AND STRESS IN SJVN LTD.**

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ABSTRACT:

Stress has become an issue of major concern these days. Stress is treated as an independent variable beyond the control of a person. Consequences of stress can lead to ill mental and physical health, change in behaviour, depression, aggression, burnout, absence from work and other organisational and psychological consequences. This paper examines the causes of occupational stress generated due to human resource management practices and organisational environment. Paper also discusses the ways to cope with the stress. This paper in particular is a study about work culture of SJVN Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam Ltd, a joint venture of the Government of India (GOI) and the Government of Himachal Pradesh (GOHP) to plan, investigate, organize, execute, operate and maintain Hydro-electric power projects in India Bhutan and Nepal. The present study is confined to examine various important aspects related to human resource management practices prevalent in SJVN Limited which causes occupational stress among the employees and their perception towards coping up the occupational stress. Ancient Indian philosophy is full of wisdom for many ways to cope up with the occupational and any other stress. Many studies have been conducted in this regard. The present study also examines these golden rules, in particular the Patanjali's Ashtang Yogic Sutras for stress busting.

KEY WORDS: Occupational Stress, Human Resource Management Practices, Indian Traditional Wisdom, Patanjali's Ashtang Yogic Sutras.

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INTRODUCTION:

Stress is the physiological and behavioral response to any change in routine environmental demands. A certain level of stress is positive to achieve goals, called eustress. It motivates a person to perform better, but acute stress called distress causes anxiety and lowers performance and causes physical and

mental health problems. It is very important to identify personal and organisational stressors, prevent the ones one can and cope with the ones one cannot avoid. Stress and performance go hand in hand, so it has become a matter of concern for every researcher. Plethora of studies has been conducted over how to cope with the distress evolving various methods to combat with the organisational as well as personal stress. Some of the studies also touched the spiritual aspects also. The Indian Traditional philosophy is quite distinct in solving metaphysical, mental and even physical problems. Many Hindu Intellectual Traditions were evolved and many orthodox schools of study were established. One of these is Yogic school of study which is very forceful in solving the problems like routine and exceptional stress.

Human Resource Management Practices:

To examine the impact of HRM practices over the stress level of employees it is pertinent to present a brief overview of the concept of HRM practices. According to **Likert**, 'Every aspect of a firm's activities is determined by the competence, motivation and general effectiveness of its human organisation'. The human resource management involves planning and analyzing work, searching, screening and selecting appropriate people for the organisation, training and developing them, deciding and providing appropriate remuneration, incentives and fringe benefits to them in lieu of the services, motivating them, installing a good communication system in the organisation and within the departments and resolving their disputes.

Stress:

Stress is a natural and unavoidable feature of human life. It has become one of the major concerns today as it affects the mental and physical health of the employees as well as the organisation. It also affects the productivity, efficiency and performance of the employees and the firm. Different psychiatrists have defined it differently. Selye has defined stress as 'the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it.' Stress is a response to some pressure. The factors which cause stress may be grouped into two groups, organisational stressors and life stressors. The organisational stressors may be task or job demands, physical demands of job, role ambiguity or control, interpersonal conflict at work, etc. The life stressors may be due to any drastic change in life, life trauma, etc.

Indian Traditional Wisdom:

Ancient Indian philosophy is distinctive in its logical way of explaining the metaphysical problems by deeply penetrating into the layers of human

psyche and explaining it in simple words. The Indian philosophy basically is based on the fact that there is an omnipresent order (rta) in the universe which should be understood and coordinated with own life by merging with the metaphysical entity at the source of it (Brahmanas). Many schools of wisdom were established during the medieval period of Brahmanic-sanskritic scholasticism between 1000 BC and early centuries of AD. Traditionally, the Indian schools of philosophy are divided basically into orthodox (astik) and non-orthodox (nastik) schools depending upon their belief in Vedas. There are six schools of orthodox Hindu philosophy (Nyay, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimansa and Vedanta) and three heterodox schools (Jain, Buddhism and Carvaka). Some include Shaiva, Pashupata, Pratyabhijna and raseshvara schools of thought also. There were satvik, tamasik and rajasik ways of life.

Yoga, one of the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy, was compiled by Patanjali. It was a system for control of mind. Patanjali in his second sutra defines Yoga as, "yogas citta-vritti-nirodhah", which means yoga is the inhibition (nirodhah) of the modifications (vritti) of the mind (citta). As Patanjali's Yoga is the system of controlling the mind, it is known as the Rajayoga. Patanjali's writings became the basis for the Ashtang Yoga system derived from the 29th Sutra of the 2nd book. The eight limbs of Ashtang Yoga are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. Yoga has been studied very keenly by various researchers and has been found to be beneficial as complementary treatment for the cancer, heart, asthma, schizophrenia, insomnia, high blood pressure and substance abuse addict patients. It is also seen to be beneficial for the mindfulness based stress reduction programs, sleep anxiety, pain, fatigue, depression, mood fluctuations increasing quality of life. Yoga has been found to be quite helpful for the stress related problems.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY: In the present globalised world employees are overburdened with time bound projects and work schedule. The stress level is so high that major health issues are quite evident which not only reduces the competency of employee but also efficiency level of organisation. Therefore, the burning issue of stress busting is very contemporary.

OBJECTIVES:

- To study outcomes of occupational stress among the employees of SJVN.
- To correlate stress and HRM Practices in SJVNL.

- To identify stress coping strategies at individual level in SJVNL.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The present study is confined to examine the outcomes of occupational stress and the ways to cope with. With this purpose the study was conducted in SJVN Ltd., which is a public sector undertaking in the field of hydro power generation and distribution. Out of a total of 1820 employees, 20 percent sample was taken from 10 of its projects in India, Nepal and Bhutan for the purpose of this study. These employees were stratified into three major groups of executives, supervisors and workmen. Their opinions were taken through a questionnaire holding various aspects of human resource management. There were 364 respondents and questionnaire/schedule method was opted.

METHODOLOGY:

The study was conducted using primary as well as secondary data from various journals, books, articles and other published material. Descriptive research was carried out for this purpose. Data is collected through personal interviews, questionnaires/schedules filled up by 20 percent of the total of the employees and personal observations. It was used to study the employees' perception towards the HRM practices and occupational stress and how they cope up with the occupational stress.

OBSERVATIONS:

In order to examine the impact of various HRM practices over the level of stress of employees, analysis is done in Table 1.1. For this purpose, various work stressors taken are aggression, depression, headache, burnout, body aches, absence, stress, eye problem, breathing problem and skin problem. The HRM practices taken for this are overall HRM practices, training, salary, performance evaluation, fringe benefits, retirement benefits, promotion, superiors encourage, interpersonal relations and superiors listen.

Aggression or aggressive behaviour of an employee is positively correlated with depression, headache, burnout, body aches, absence, stress, eye problem, breathing problem and skin problems; whereas, it is negatively correlated with training, salary, performance evaluation, fringe benefits, retirement benefits and interpersonal relations. Thus, it can be concluded that if the employees are facing any problems at work like headache, body aches, stress, eye, skin or breathing problems and problems arising due to absence the employees can be aggressive at workplace.

Depression is significantly and positively correlated with aggression, headache, burnout, body aches, absence, stress, eye problem, superiors encourage, superiors listen and skin problem. It is significantly negatively correlated with training, salary, performance evaluation, fringe benefits and retirement benefits. Dealing with the physical problems such as continuous **Headache**, reveals that aggressive behaviour of the employee leads to headache. The lingering health problems like body aches, skin, eye and breathing problems may be due to long working hours in tunnels, etc. which are related to work also causes headaches. An increase in training so that the employee can handle his work related problems properly can reduce his headaches also. Friendly relations can also do the same to ease the stress.

Burnout is another very severe health problem. It may cause serious type of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feeling a lack of personal accomplishment. It may occur due to prolonged exposure to stress. Therefore, to reduce the chances of burnout the job should be well defined and should not be ambiguous. **Body-aches** increase with the increase in aggression, depression, headache, burnout, absence, stress, eye problem, breathing problem and skin problem. It decreases if the employees are satisfied with overall HRM practices, training, salary, performance evaluation and retirement benefits.

Absence of the employees from work is positively correlated with aggression, depression, headache, body aches, superiors encourage, interpersonal friendly relations, superiors listen and skin problem. The **Training** is negatively correlated with aggression, depression, headache, burnout, body aches, stress, eye problem, breathing problem and skin problem. It is significantly positively correlated with overall HRM practices, salary, performance evaluation, fringe benefits, retirement benefits, superiors encourage, interpersonal relations and superiors listen. Thus, an increase in training can lead to satisfaction with the HRM practices, salary and other benefits and relations with superiors and peer group. Lack of training can cause stress, depression, burnout and health problems. The analysis also suggested that position and **Salary** of the employees is negatively correlated with aggression, depression, headache, burnout, body aches, stress, breathing problem and skin problem. It is significantly positively correlated with training, performance evaluation, fringe benefits, retirement benefits, promotion, superiors encourage and interpersonal friendly relations.

Performance evaluation of the employee is significantly negatively correlated with aggression, depression, headache, burnout, body aches, absence, stress, eye problem, breathing problem and skin problem. It is significantly

positively correlated with overall HRM practices, training, salary, fringe benefits, retirement benefits, promotion, superiors encourage, interpersonal relations and superiors listen. **Fringe benefits** are negatively correlated with aggression, depression, and skin problem and positively correlated with overall HRM practices, training, salary, performance evaluation, fringe benefits, retirement benefits, promotion, superiors encourage, interpersonal relations and superiors listen. In the similar way, the **Retirement benefits** are also significantly negatively correlated with aggression, depression, headache, body aches, stress, eye problem and breathing problem. It is positively correlated with overall HRM practices, training, salary, performance evaluation, fringe benefits, retirement benefits, promotion, superiors encourage, interpersonal relations and superiors listen. The **Promotion** is also positively correlated with overall HRM practices, salary, performance evaluation, fringe benefits, retirement benefits, superiors encourage, interpersonal relations and superiors listen.

If the **superiors are encouraging**, the employees are less likely to be stressed out and this is positively correlated with depression, absence, skin problem, overall HRM practices, salary, performance evaluation, fringe benefits, retirement benefits, promotion, interpersonal friendly relations and superiors listen. It is significantly negatively correlated with training, which means that if training is given to the employees they are less likely to need the time and again help of the superiors. If the **Superiors listen** to the problems of the employees actively they are likely to be less stressed out at work. The results show that it is negatively correlated with training, it is positively correlated with overall HRM practices, performance evaluation, fringe benefits, retirement benefits, promotion, superiors encourage, interpersonal relations, depression, absence and skin problem. If the superiors are sympathetic this may improve the productivity, satisfaction of the employees with work and organisation and efficiency of the organisation and employees.

Friendly Interpersonal relations according to the results, friendly and good interpersonal relations with the peer group are negatively correlated with aggression, training and breathing problem. This is to say that aggression, depression and other psychological problems can obstruct the friendly relation of the employee. Interestingly, more training can reduce interaction with the peer group. It is positively correlated with overall HRM practices, absence, salary, performance evaluation, fringe benefits, retirement benefits, promotion, superiors encourage and superiors listen.

Table 1.1
Stress and HRM Practices: A Correlation Matrix Analysis

	Aggr	Depr	Head aches	Burn Out	Body aches	Skin prob	Absenc e	Stress	Eye prob	Breathin g prob	HRM P	Trainin g	Salary	Performance evaluation	Fringe benefit s	Promotio n	Retiremen t benefits	Motiva- tion	Inform al relation s	Superior s	
Aggression	1.000																				
Depression	.592**	1.000																			
Headaches	.612**	.478**	1.000																		
Burnout	.258**	.359**	.016	1.000																	
Body aches	.613**	.635**	.660**	.205**	1.000																
Skin problems	.432**	.325**	.226**	.445**	.203**	1.000															
Absence	.137**	.258**	-.070	.406**	.137**	.425**	1.000														
Stress	.641**	.523**	.716**	.094	.617**	.247**	-.033	1.000													
Eye problem	.534**	.327**	.620**	.011	.414**	.273**	-.061	.591**	1.000												
Breathing problems	.481**	.047	.470**	.100	.289**	.318**	.023	.458**	.489**	1.000											
HRM practices	-.007	-.082	-.053	-.097	-.219**	-.080	-.163**	-.038	.005	.022	1.000										
Training	-.375**	-.125*	-.357**	-.116*	-.316**	- .332**	.010	-.342**	-.358**	-.403**	.277**	1.000									
Salary	-.368**	- .185**	-.186**	-.121*	-.237**	- .202**	.031	-.190**	-.079	-.149**	.016	.181**	1.000								
Performance evaluation	-.339**	- .159**	-.216**	-.124*	-.274**	- .186**	-.185**	-.234**	-.230**	-.140**	.326**	.269**	.300**	1.000							
Fringe benefits	-.169**	-.125*	-.068	-.079	-.096	-.127*	-.037	-.082	-.081	-.099	.273**	.244**	.359**	.261**	1.000						
Promotion	-.020	.016	.092	-.015	.010	.092	-.026	.074	.052	.075	.162**	.034	.232**	.287**	.506**	1.000					
Retirement benefits	-.320**	-.120*	-.260**	-.046	-.201**	-.053	.054	-.228**	-.320**	-.191**	.158**	.178**	.169**	.486**	.296**	.215**	1.000				
Motivation	.007	.102*	.015	-.029	.026	.121*	.160**	.027	.053	-.062	.165**	-.118*	.145**	.112*	.212**	.243**	.185**	1.000			
Informal relations	-.185**	.008	-.040	.051	-.051	.083	.141**	-.056	.101	-.119*	.210**	-.114*	.186**	.143**	.203**	.218**	.313**	.567**	1.000		
Superiors	.040	.106*	.093	.042	.074	.128*	.167**	.074	.084	-.012	.191**	-.116*	.030	.098*	.311**	.361**	.275**	.590**	.461**	1.000	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1.2
Occupational Stress

Sr. No.	Statements	Yes	No	Total
1.	Meditation practices	268 (73.6)	96 (26.4)	364 (100)
2.	Yoga	303 (83.2)	61 (11.1)	364 (100)
3.	Medical aids	280 (71.2)	84 (23.1)	364 (100)
4.	Proper rest intervals	308 (84.6)	56 (15.4)	364 (100)
5.	Picnics	202 (55.5)	162 (44.5)	364 (100)
6.	Family-get together	248 (68.1)	116 (31.9)	364 (100)
7.	Clubs	252 (69.2)	112 (30.8)	364 (100)
8.	Cultural activities	236 (64.8)	128 (35.2)	364 (100)
9.	Counseling	141 (38.7)	223 (61.3)	364 (100)
10.	Proper timing to task assignment	240 (65.9)	124 (34.1)	364 (100)
11.	Holidays	275 (75.5)	89 (24.5)	364 (100)
12.	Leave travel concession	292 (80.2)	72 (19.8)	364 (100)
13.	Sports facilities	269 (73.9)	95 (26.1)	364 (100)
14.	Stress management workshops	174 (47.8)	190 (52.2)	364 (100)

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows percentages.

Source: Data collected through questionnaire.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN SJVN

Every individual deals with the stress differently. It is very difficult to cope with the stress. The organisation and the individuals as well, should take preventive measures beforehand. With the objective of taking a view point of the employees how they deal with the stress, the following study was undertaken. The responses of the respondents were enumerated under Table 1.2. which gives the perceptions of the respondents regarding the ways to reduce occupational stress. The (73.6 percent) respondents think that the **meditation** reduces stress very effectively. 83.2 percent of the employees held

the view that **yoga** is also very helpful in keeping them peaceful throughout the day and de-stresses them. 71.2 percent of the employees had taken **medical help** in times of deep stress. A large majority of employees (84.6 percent) believed that there should be enough **rest intervals** in between. Very few responses were in favour of **counseling** (only 38.7 percent) to cope with workplace tensions. A large majority (65.9 percent) held the view that **proper timings** should be provided to finish the **job assignment**. Many employees agreed that they are not given enough time to complete an assignment, instilling great mental tension, which they carry home too. Only 47.8 percent of the respondents indicated that the stress management workshops are beneficial. The **cultural and co-curricular activities** were a favorite among 64.8 percent of the employees. Outlets like **picnics** (55.5 percent) and **family get-togethers** (68.1 percent) were also assumed to have an effect to reduce the stress. Going to **clubs** was found suitable by 69.2 percent of the employees. 75.5 percent of the employees resumed to going to **holidays** and a total of 80.2 percent of the employees availed **leave travel concession** for this purpose. 80 percent of the employees availed LTC also.

INDIAN TRADITIONAL WISDOM AND COPING WITH STRESS

The Indian scriptures contain knowledge and solutions for almost everything from very ancient times. There are many approaches in Indian scriptures and knowledge which can help in regard to the problem of stress like meditation, yoga, prayers and even Ayurveda. The Holy Scriptures like Geeta, Vedas, Upnishads, Brahamanas and Ayurveda present with many forms of stress relievers. The study of Indian scriptures is endless but only a few lines of any of these can change the life of a person. Some stress relievers are physical like Yoga and the others are psychological like Geeta, Vedas, Vedantas and many-many others. Thus, to cope with the internal stressors the Indian Traditional wisdom can play an important role.

On the basis of the guidelines from the respondents the present study further examined the knowledge given in Holy ancient scriptures of India. **Bhagvad Gita** is one such Holy Scripture which preaches Karma which is its central focal point. It advocates that the person should do his job without any expectations in return. The work should be done with utmost devotion, dedication and integrity. Furthermore, the Gita delivers the message that one should not take stress about his past deeds because these have passed-out, neither should one think about the future because it is not nearby and may create a lot of stress and tensions. Thus, one should do his job which is given to him by the God in this birth. One should live in the present and discharge his duties honestly for the present. The Geeta is also a promoter of detachments from the worldly and material needs and dreams. Attachments are the main creators of the stress.

Vedas, Upnishads and Brahamanas are the guidelines for the conduct of a human being. It preaches a Satvik life style or the simplicity. These give the right kind of social behaviour and conduct within the society and at home. The Tamasik and Rajasi lives are the creators of stressors in life so these Holy Scriptures advocate a Satvik life which is a life of service to others, simplicity, good morals, honesty and cooperation.

Other Holy verses are those relating to the **Yoga** which can help reduce the occupational stress. Many kinds of yog-asanas have been given by various sages of ancient India. Some of these asanas are for the well-being of the human beings, which tones up the muscles, gives strength to these and relaxes them in time of need. The daily exercise of some of these asanas is quite effective for the release of tensions. Other kinds of asanas are for the psychological well being of a person. There are many kinds of such mental exercises named as meditations to evade the thought process. It needs no equipment or machinery for the exercises. One has to sit at a peaceful place with his concentration at one focal point be it a candle, or a picture of God or at the breathe going in and out. One has to block the thoughts arising from inside. Slowly the time of this thoughtlessness is increased and the mind is more and more peaceful. The meditation is a great soother of any kind of stressors. There are many such exercises to control the mind or the tensions arising from within leaving one a healthy and peaceful being.

(Yoga-sthah kuru karmani sanyugam tyaktva a dhananjay!

Sidhhi-asiddhyoh samo bhutva samatvam yoga ucyate)

--- Bhagavad Gita 2.48

YOGA AS STRESS BUSTER

Yoga (the school of Patanjali) is one of the six orthodox (astika) schools of Hindu philosophy and forms. The other five schools of Astika Hindu philosophy were Nayay (the school of justice), Vaisheshika (atomist school), Samkhya (enumeration school), Mimansa (Vedic exigesis) and Vedanta (Upanishad tradition). The Carvaka, Jainism and Budhhism were considered as the Nastik School of Hindu Philosophy. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras begin with the statement **Yogas chitta-vitti-nirodha** which means Yoga limits the oscillations of the mind. Patanjali's Yoga sutra outlines the sovereign path of Raj yoga (Ashtang Yoga) composed of 195 sutras or aphorisms in 4 padas or chapters. These were Samadhi pada, Sadhana pada, Vibhuti pada and Kaivalya pada. 6 basic commentaries on Yoga Sutras are Yoga Bhashya by Vyasa, Tattva-Vaisharadi by Vachaspati Mishra, Yoga-Varttika by Vijnana Bhikshu, Raja-Martanda by Bhojaraja, Bhasvati by Hariharananda, Aranyaand Patanjala-Rahasya by Raghavananda Saraswati. Samadhi pada contains 51 Sutras;

Sadhana pada contains 55 Sutras, Vibhuti pada contains 56 Sutras and Kaivalya pada contains 34 Sutras.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras accept the Sankhya division of the world into 25 tattvas or principles, Purusha (self), Prakriti (Nature), Budhi (intellect), Ahamkar (ego), Manas (mind), 5 Budhhi-Indriyas (sensory capabilities), 5 karma-Indriyas (action capabilities) and 10 elements. The second part of the Sutras also describes the 3 Gunas; Rajsik, Satvik and Tamsik. Patanjali's Yoga insists on the concentration of mind and active striving. For today's world these are 195 guidelines to lead an ethical and right life. The heart of Patanjali teachings is an eight-fold path of Yoga (Ashtang Yoga). These are: **Yamas**, which are the social behaviour of treating the people around us. These contain the principles of non-violence (Ahimsa), Truth and honesty (Satya), non-stealing (Asatya), non-lust (Brahmcharya) and non-possessiveness (Aparigraha). **Niyamas** are the guidelines for inner discipline and responsibility. These contain Purity (Sauca), contentment (Santosh), austerity (Tapas), study of the sacred text (Sawadhyay) and living with an awareness of the Divine (Ishwar-pranidhana). **Asana** are the steady and easy postures to prepare the body for meditation by freeing the body and mind from tension and restlessness. **Pranayama** is control of breath by inhalation, retention and exhalation of breathe in a proper rhythmic pattern. **Pratyahara** is the withdrawal of senses through meditation and breathing exercises. **Dharana** or concentration is focusing the mind on one focal point thereby stilling the mind. **Dhayana** is uninterrupted meditation without any object even all aspects of life. The last and the ultimate goal of Patanjali's eight-fold path is **Samadhi** or absolute bliss uniting with the Universe. Some call it the union of God and human being or the atma. His work basically focuses on the quieting of the thoughts arising in mind which is the outcome of tensions and stress in life and at workplace. Yoga is the cessation of all mental fluctuations which is utmost important to cope with the severe stress. When the stress level is out of control, the thoughts of various kinds bombard the mind and may cause serious mental ailments and illness. Therefore, it is very important to quite the thoughts and ease out the mind so that a solution can be found out to deal with the cause of the stress. The solutions or the ways out can be found only if the mind is at peace and steady. Thus, it can be said that practicing the 8-fold path of Patanjali may lead to a stress less and peaceful work life.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- HR mission, vision and core values statement should be developed.
- Clear cut objectives should be framed for the job, department and organisation so as to avoid any kind of conflict.

- Policies and programs should be evolved in regard to reduce the employee stress at workplace.
- Performance evaluation system should be incentive based.
- Regular survey about the job satisfaction can also be conducted periodically to improve the organisational growth.
- Team-work, social relations and superior- subordinate relationships should be encouraged in the organization.
- Cultural and co-curricular activities can be organized in the work place
- Employees should be encouraged to go on holidays periodically.
- Lectures, workshops, hands-on training sessions on yoga can be organized.

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