

Occupational Stress at Workplace: Study of the Corporate Sector in India

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Abstract: *The main focus of this study is to identify the level of frequency of the job stressors for corporate individuals surveyed and trace out the distressing factor that affects most individuals. The paper also throws light onto the areas explored where changes can be made by the employees, managers, and the Human Resources (HR) department so as to reduce the stress factors by making a change. The emphasis was mainly on the corporate sector of India to assess the degree to which indicators of job stress at workplace (Work timings stretched, Inadequate break times, Repeated heavy workload, Unfair distribution of work, Monotony at work, Deadline Pressures, under utilization of skills and working relationships) influences Indian native's mental and emotional well being. The data was collected by surveying employees of various Corporate through a structured questionnaire. The sample size was 62. Both primary and secondary sources of data were extensively used for analyzing this study. 87% of the respondents felt stressed due to work related issues, 79% felt flexible working hours relieves tension.*

Keywords: *Employees, Job stressors, stress indicators, work-related issues, flexible working hours.*

I. Introduction

Stress is often coined as a medical term or a psychological phenomenon because of its possibilities in deteriorating the health condition of a person and the stimulus that triggers the fight or flight response respectively. Modern time is the age of anxiety and stress which itself will be affected by number of stressors as concluded by Coleman (1976). Occupational stress in the workplace can make people dread walking in to the office every morning and then make them worry about their jobs at night. It has become more globalized and has the tendency to affect all workers irrespective of the job profile or category, the only difference being the intensity levels. Beehr and Newman (1978) defined Stress as a situation which forces a person to deviate from its routine functioning due to change in psychological or physiological condition. When staff is unhappy, they are less efficient, less effective and more likely to squander work hours or ultimately quit. Stress affects not just morale, but a company's bottom line. The main area of this study is occupational stress caused to an individual because of the corporate culture in today's time. As fascinating and alluring it may seem, this package comes with certain cons for most of the people. Juggling between their work and life to strike that balance, meeting with the high demands of the market, giving into the competition at workplace to prove their worth et al. With this and many more struggles which the corporate culture gives in return to what it offers, makes it impossible to achieve the goal for a few.

Stress is not always dreadful, as some people are derived to work much better with certain amount of stress as it provides them motivation, creativity and mild feeling of euphoria but the concern lies where too much stress or repeated stress can have negative physical, mental and emotional consequences on a person's mind and body. Striving to achieve a mark or a goal set is often in the mind of many but by putting health at stake would mean deriving yourself backwards to accomplish that target as excessive stress can interfere with the productivity and impact the physical and emotional health. Ability of an individual to deal with it can mean the difference between success and failure for themselves. A person can't control everything in their work environment, but that doesn't mean being powerless—even when stuck in a difficult situation. Finding ways to manage workplace stress isn't about making huge changes or rethinking career ambitions all the time. The bottom line is, focus on the one thing that's always within a person's control: Themselves.

Pressure and stress

Pressure at the workplace is something unavoidable due to the demands of the present-day scenario in the corporate field. As an individual it should be known that there is a thin line between pressure and stress. Pressure is always there as it's essential that people experience challenges within their lives that helps in pushing themselves to feel motivated. Certain level of an increase in pressure is acceptable and can improve performance and the quality of life. However, when that pressure becomes unmanageable, there comes the necessity to identify the level that has altered into stress and is persistently affecting an individual's attitude and behaviour at the workplace. The pressure of working life can lead to stress, if it is excessive and long term.

Stress is the adverse reaction of extreme pressure, which an individual is unable to cope up with for various reasons such as absence of proper delegation and authority to complete a certain task, not being able to match the job demands with emotional and physical ability etc. Some of the factors of work stress include lack of control on the job, excessive workload, poor working relationships within the workplace, repeated stretching of working hours. It is believed that, not all individuals are same, so is the cause of stress to them.

Work-related stress

It arises when people are presented with work demands and pressures that do not match their knowledge and ability and thus challenge them to cope with it. Stress may sound to be a common factor related to workplace and job but the pressure leads to stress when there is little or no help and support from supervisors and colleagues.

Work-related stress is often caused by the way the jobs have been designed and the working system of an organisation, poor management, lack of support within the organisation.

II. Coping With Job Stress In Today's Competitive Environment

For employees in the corporate sector, the journey in the job feels like a roller coaster ride to an extent that they lose the self control and just work with the flow often neglecting the impact that it will have on them. Emotions are contagious and stress directly affects the emotional state of an individual besides the physical aspects. Stress is not a negative phenomenon;

2.1. Reducing job stress by taking care of yourself

Stress at work interferes with the ability to perform the job due to various effects of it like distraction, headaches, feeling of depression, social withdrawal, loss of interest in the work etc. even if the individual is passionate about the work or feels committed to it, the first thing that should come to the mind is taking care of yourself. When the needs of the body are taken care of, the person is more active and resilient to stress. The better one feels, the better they are equipped to combat job stress.

2.1.1 Get Support

The most effective and vital way to get through times of stress is to reach out to family and friends. It might not be a way out for every person but just sharing the feelings can most of the times bring down lot of stress that's caused mentally to an individual. For some, accepting support is a sign of weakness but at times most family and friends feel wanted that they are being trusted enough to be confided in and it will only strengthen the bond.

2.1.2 Proper rest

People often avoid this simple formula of dealing with stress either by getting entangled in social gatherings which are an obligation at times, family requirements or most of the times due to work itself. Some people feel that they can suffer but their work mustn't but they forget that their body is not a machine which can work according to their needs. In short what you give, you will get back and pay for it later.

For example: Due to work overload, an employee is been called for 7 days at a stretch taking off the weekend and is not compensated with a day off in the next week. This repeated action can cause lot of stress to an individual and may make them feel like machinery.

2.1.3. Connection with your inner-self

It's often believed that one understands oneself better than anyone else but at times ability to think and process those feelings need connection with our inner self. Some people have strong intuitive power but seldom use it for decision making purposes especially on the job. One should always pay attention to their feelings and factor them into the decision making at work. If emotions are ignored, it becomes difficult to fully understand the motivations and needs, or to communicate effectively with others.

2.2. Reducing job stress by organizing and prioritizing

It's not always possible to do every piece of work at the same time or juggling between work and life outside work. There comes the need of prioritizing the work within the office or outside the office because both set of things affect the work at job. People need to understand that they are human beings and not super humans; the need to define their own limits is necessary often to put the best foot forward at the place of work and outside it. It's imperative to comprehend that both the lives are equally central, the only fact is sometimes one is important over the other but what needs to be taken care of is that those things need to be organized and prioritized to lead a hassle free life most of the times.

2.2.1. Don't over-commit

Individuals have the habit to keep their plate full, trying to fit too much into one day or trying to feel superior by undertaking jobs which will just overburden them. If those tasks cannot be eliminated they can be prioritized as it's not possible everything holds equal weight. Some tasks can be done later and the one which needs more attention can be done first. People need to be realistic in their approach before committing themselves to anything at work.

2.2.2. Delegation of responsibility

The need to do it all by yourself approach is not worth all the time because appreciation might come your way but in that course what all is required to be given up needs to be foreseen. It might be worth it at that moment but might not be later. It's the capability of an individual to think what's beneficial in the long run.

If other people can take care of the tasks, why not let them? A person's desire to control or oversee every little step can attract unnecessary stress in the process. Be careful of the desires because what is wanted is not always needed.

III. Role Of Managers And Employers In Helping Employees Deal With Job Stress

Managers and employers play a vital role in shaping the future of employees as they are the support pillars who can make or break any situation for them. It should be in their best interest to keep stress levels in the workplace to a minimum level. They are sometimes the role model for an employee's behaviour in certain situations, as they may act like their manager in that given state. There are some organizational changes that managers and employers can undertake to reduce stress at workplace related to the job in hand as that's the point of ignition for stress.

3.1. Improve communication with employees

Employees often try to be in the good books of their superiors and for that they try to create a professional rapport with their managers. It should be the duty of the manager to strike a conversation now and then with the employees which should be friendly and efficient and not disreputable so as to build a comfort level at the workplace. Sharing information related to them or little feedback now and then in a good spirit can be helpful at times.

3.2. Employee participation

- Seek and encourage participation from the employees in matters related to their job, this will increase their commitment and build their self esteem which will directly reduce any kind of stress as they feel indispensable.
- Managers should make sure that the workload is suitable to employees as per their abilities and resources to avoid any kind of unrealistic deadlines. Just to get the work done approach is not feasible time and again Show that they are valuable and so is their time to get the things done.
- Social participation and interaction amongst employees should be arranged time after time as peers are the workplace friends who curtail stress most of the times.
- Not having enough work at job can be a stressor for some, as an empty mind is devil's workshop.

IV. Role Of Human Resources In Managing Work Related Stress

HR can help organizations create a culture that respects people's personal lives and their obligations outside work. They can also help employees set reasonable goals and expectations for themselves. When work becomes a routine and slowly monotony creeps in, there is the challenge to break the chain and implement ideas to create an atmosphere of connection with the organisation.

- **Coach and train managers** on having reasonable expectations from employees.
- **Utilising the in between break/meal time** or dedicate a day or few hours to plan an event. Invite suggestions to get employees involvement and perk-up the excitement.
- **Arranging lunch meet** outside the workplace boundaries, organizing a get together to have some chit chat session or gaming session when at workplace.
- **Wellness programs** can also improve overall employee health and cut back on stress and sick-day losses. It may involve bringing in a nutritionist to speak with staff, sponsoring a cooking class or subsidized gym memberships. Organizing a company sports team can also give employees something fun to do together after work that can build friendly teamwork and competition.
- **Family-friendly policies** can be incorporated by welcoming families into employee events. By maintaining a family-friendly attitude, employees get an opportunity to engage their family members in the other half of their lives which is spent at the workplace and around those people. Employees who have a comfortable home life are also likely to feel more satisfied with their jobs and maintain healthy relationships at work.

- **Strengthening the Inter-personal relationships at work** can also be encouraged among staff members by developing a rewards system. For example, HR might develop certificates that colleagues can award each other anonymously for a job well done or for displaying qualities that the company values in its policy. At the end of the month or quarter, staff can exchange the certificates for gift certificates or prizes. This will also make employees work better with a positive attitude.
- **Turning work into play** by incorporating humorous activities, anecdotes, role plays or fun training materials into training sessions, meetings and activities as and when possible. This can help lighten up the job environment and add an incentive for employees to participate and learn.
- The ultimate goal is for HR to remain available to resolve issues and to proactively step in and give employees the impetus and opportunity to work together in an effective way. The HR department should set an example for building a positive work environment by combating job stress at workplace.

V. Research Methodology

5.1. Objective of the research

- (a) To identify the root cause of work-related stress and analyze the factors associated with job stress.
- (b) To delve into the inadequacy of the managers and the employers of the organisation in dealing with issues related to job stress at workplace at times and the role of HR department in it.

5.2. Research Design

Conclusive-Descriptive research carried out through sample surveys (Cross-sectional Studies), online survey research.

5.3. Sampling Method

- The sampling size for this research is of 62 respondents.
- The techniques used are descriptive and purposive research.
- The area of research has been the working professionals in the corporate sector who have experienced or are experiencing work related stress in their jobs.

5.4. Tools

- The survey has been carried out by preparing a questionnaire covering the relevant factors related to stress on an online survey platform.
- The survey link was the uploaded to some social networking sites, research platforms and also distributed to known acquaintances.

5.5. Data collection

- Primary data: Mainly through questionnaire responses consisting of categorical responsive questions and few frequency scale responsive questions (often, sometimes and rarely).
- Secondary data: Journals, published papers, articles, handbooks were referred to gain further insight pertaining to the topic.

VI. Data Analysis And Interpretation

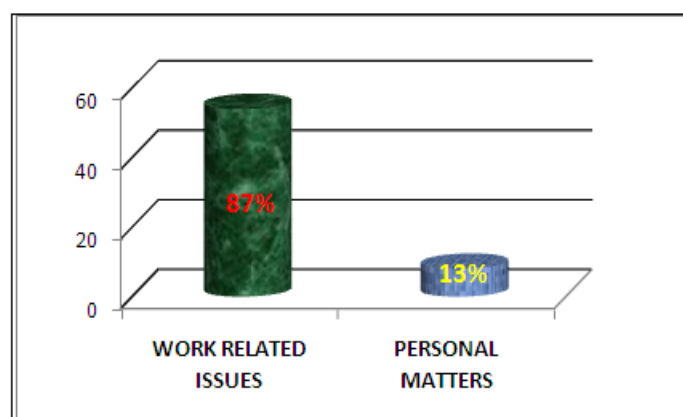
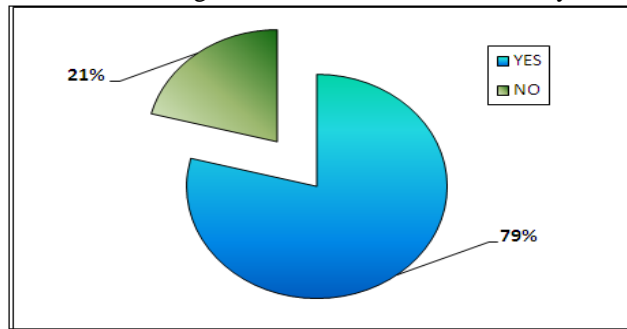


Figure 1: Employees who have been stressed

• Interpretation

87% of the respondents stated that they felt stressed with work related issues which clearly demarcates the employees who are stressed due to work and who feel stressed due to personal matters.

Figure 2: Flexible working hours or work from home facility relieves tension

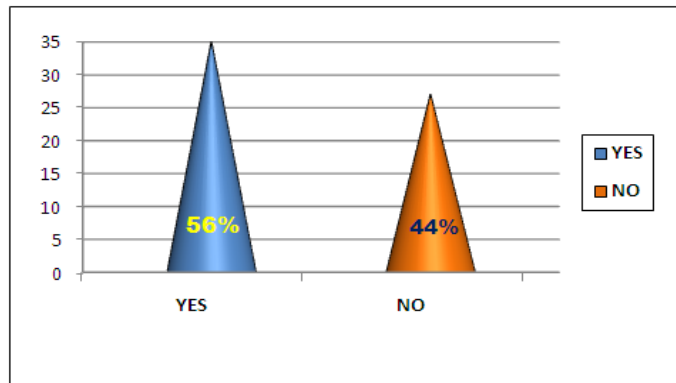


• Interpretation

79% evidently conveys that flexi working hours are helpful for majority of the employees in alleviating stress due to work. Work from home facility is also one of its kinds which are gaining momentum in Indian workplaces, giving liberty to its employees to carry out their work tasks from the boundaries and comfort of their home. Keeping all the benefits of technology aside, the most successful companies trust their employees- whether they're across the world or right under the boss's nose. The reason behind adopting these facilities by a company shows the level of understanding for its employees and the necessity of it without disrupting work.

For reference: Godrej's Flexi work hours allows an employee to compress their work hours if they have pitched in a total of 42 hours in a week. This is not restrained to just women employees but to their counterpart as well. "Sunshine Wednesdays" where the employee can leave when the sun is still shining and "Be Hot- Be home on time" are the policies incorporated by Godrej.

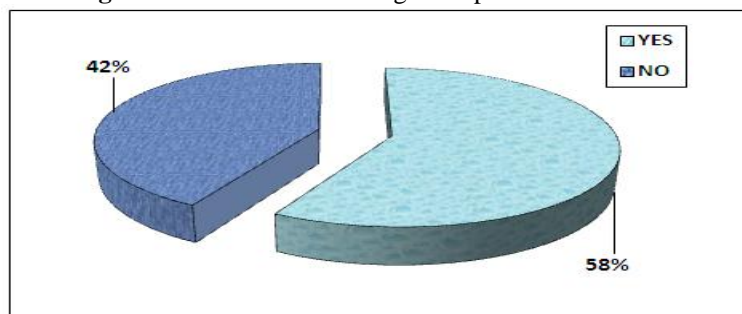
Figure 3: Unplanned leaves due to stress giving random excuses



• Interpretation

56% of people surveyed agreed upon taking unplanned leaves due to stress and making up excuses for the same. This visibly demonstrates the fact that when stress starts taking toll on the person, work commitments take a back seat, thereby making excuses reasonable enough to shift the focus from work. Though, no doubt there are people who don't find it right or morally fit to make excuses as 44% of them opted for an answer choice "NO".

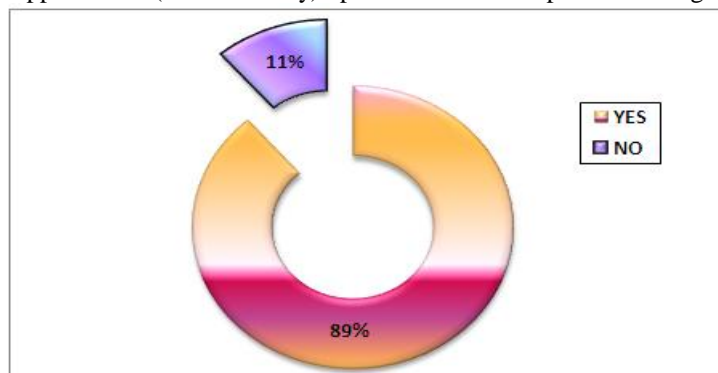
Figure 4: Stressed about being underpaid or undervalued



- **Interpretation**

In today's scenario, competition is increasing day by day and labour market is in surplus state where demand is less than the supply posing a barrier between employer and employee relations with conflicting issues mainly related to salary which in turn makes employees feel underpaid in their organisation. More than half i.e. 58% respondents feel underpaid or undervalued in their respective workplaces making it a cause of stress as majority of people either work for funds or fulfilling their self esteem.

Figure 5: Appreciation (non-monetary) uplifts mood and helps in trimming down stress

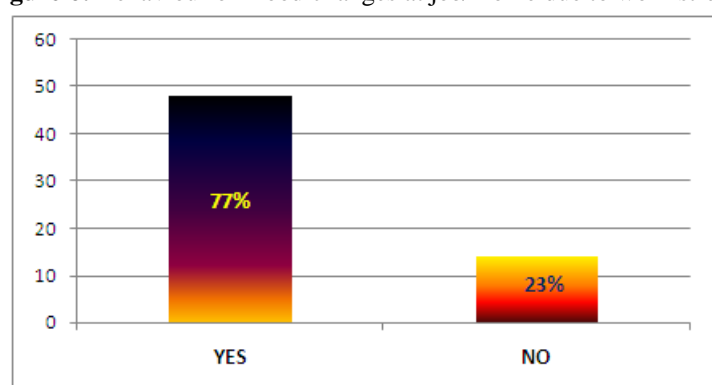


- **Interpretation**

These interviewees were also surveyed for, if they receive any kind of Appreciation (non-monetary) for which 74% agreed upon it and 89% (55 out of 62) of them accepted that appreciation does help in uplifting mood and reducing stress.

Recognition and respect at work is a fundamental human need, which is, in fact a stimulator in itself. Appreciation can be of many types from a simple as word of praise, certificate of best performance to gift coupons, option of taking a day off etc. keeping in mind and suiting the individual's needs. Being appreciated is one of the most important factors that help in increasing motivation and satisfaction as well as health and well being of an individual as on the contrary, rejection of one's ideas or social insult have greater negative impacts as it is considered to be an "Offence to self" which hampers the dignity and self respect of the individual causing stress.

Figure 6: Behaviour or mood changes at job/ home due to work stress.



Interpretation

77% of the individuals agreed upon the fact that their behaviour does change due to work stress which is one of the prime factors of stress. Change in behaviour/mood includes petulance, loss of concentration, infuriation, agitated etc which affects work at job and these things being communicable affect the environment of the workplace as well. This should be handled tactfully by the supervisor/ manager either by talking or calling it off for the day if the problem persists. Employees should also be counseled that work stress should not be taken outside the work place as it disturbs the harmony of home and relations outside the office boundary as well.

6.1. Stress Related Factors

Some of the factors that caused stressed to employees (ranking on the higher side from often to sometimes and rarely being the least effective factor taken in consideration) were:

- **Work timings**

63% of the participants in the survey attributed high stress levels to work timing issues, which can be minimized through proper channeling of work hours and incorporating flexi work hour schedules etc.

- **Repeated heavy work load, deadline pressures, monotony at work, unfair distribution of work, and under utilisation of skills**

Approx. 82% of the individuals rated these five factors to be affecting their stress levels at work. Work load and deadline pressures can be onetime factors but their repetitive nature can be troublesome later. It's a two-way process wherein, the employees need to disintegrate their work and be specific as to when it needs to be finished or needs to be got done as "procrastination" is an affliction which later on hovers resulting into work load and pressures to meet the deadlines.

- **Lack of communication with management**

45% out of the surveyed people rated it as a factor that does bother them and 30% often felt stressed about the inaccessibility of getting heard by the management. HR department is often looked upon as the bridge between the two ends. Their active participation would help employees to be taken in notice by the management but this is possible only when the organisation follows a participative approach where the department has the authority to pass on the matters that needs the attention of the management.

- **Burden of new tasks with ongoing tasks and juggling with the demand of different managers**

58% approx. reported that they often feel stressed about these two factors amongst the rest. The managers need to understand that time is a finite resource and time management is not always the key for getting tasks completed, it will only result in over-burden and unfinished tasks at the end of the day. Priorities must be set, conscious ongoing strategy needs to be prepared to help the team spend the time on the right things at the right moment.

Every manager being an individual has different set of expectations and approach towards getting the work done and thus too many managers mean too many assignments and fulfilling the demands of all can be chaotic and cumbersome for many. Unity of command needs to be followed in order to process the smooth functioning in the organisation.

VII. Renew And Removal Strategies

- Stress can be at times a positive force for some, focusing a person's attention or say letting them prioritize the work, perk up determination and put things in action rather than procrastinating. But at the same time, without a clear approach in mind and calm demeanor, it can trigger negative effect and thus, loss of focus.
- A person needs to renew themselves to get the grip of the situation and workload and for that the individual needs to renew themselves which is renewal of health through exercise and sleep which are the most common types. Other than that, removal is the another category wherein the person eludes itself from the work struggles by spending time with friends and family, going to concerts, using relaxation techniques by visiting the spa etc. Another fit in this can be engaging in intellectual activities or hobbies of their own interest.
- These techniques should also be adopted by the organisations to help their employees inculcate these habits of using renew and removal techniques. Companies should be putting efforts to spread awareness for the same and not only that, they should help them establish regimes of such activities. As it's said and done, "Practice what you preach", organisations should put efforts by putting forth the facilities on the premises as well.
- Example for such is financial services group USAA, whose campuses include meditation rooms, outdoor game areas etc. Another example is, ScoopWhoop, a creative Indian internet media company, based in New Delhi, provides their staff the opportunity to ride bicycles provided on campus and take them anywhere around to grab some fresh air, adding badminton court and basketball court in the premises. These not only help in rejuvenation of body but also the mind to let creative ideas flow in.

VIII. Managing Stress In The Moment

All is said about managing stress which focuses on what needs to be done and what can be done to avoid the surmounting pressure that makes place for stress to creep in. But, what is not talked often is how to deal with it at the very moment when a person is under stress at workplace because when an individual enters the workplace, he/she is already laden with stress wither from yesterday's work or home related burdens. These things just pile up even further when the person starts a new day at work with added pressure of work. Personal and professional life is inseparable but to avoid over stressing situations, the key is to manage stress in the moment.

8.1. Talk to yourself

When a person is under stress, people start talking to themselves unconsciously as if there are two people inside one body. Screaming and screeching negative voices on one hand and on the other side, a calm representative of one's own self who is often subdued by the negative agent. Stress is the time when the calmer agent needs to be listened to, to get hold of the situation before reacting or blasting on others. Cooling down is very important and making yourself understand that these situations have arrived in past as well and managing it again is not a problem. The "I can do it" attitude is what matters most at this time and this can only be done by talking to your own self.

8.2. Solicit for a friendly ear

Every person has someone who they can rely on and in the moments like these, a friendly ear comes as an advantage. The purpose of this is not only to vent your frustrations but also giving an opportunity to the other person to gauge on the matter presented and may be that can give a new perspective and connotations to the situation, which the mind is not able to foresee due to blockage of negative thoughts.

8.3. Project an impression of calmness around others

Stress is contagious and so is mood. If one person talks frantically to the other, there are high chances of getting the response in the same tone which would further create tensions between the people and around affecting the work environment. If matters need to be resolved, work it up as it should be when faced with the same situation but on the flip side.

8.4. Think about the time when the period of stress will be over

A break in the thought process is necessary and instilling the feeling of happiness and alleviation when the job will be done. Slow down and process the thoughts to think over what all can be done once the burden is over. Sometimes by channelizing these thoughts to the after work situation gives a boost to the energy levels and a new energy is developed to do away with the tasks as soon as possible.

IX. Conclusion

- Stress is natural and is directly related to nature of work. It is definitely controllable but it requires employee counseling on regular time basis.
- Atmosphere of the office and manager support are the major reason of job stress. If there is cooperation and coordination within the team and with the manager, one feels motivated to give their best.
- Friendly atmosphere at workplace reduces stress due to excessive workload. Get together party on weekends as well as trips on tourist places in groups can help in reducing mental stress.
- It is more necessary to focus on the techniques of reducing stress as well than to know the cause of stress alone. The appropriate way to deal with stress is to make sure there is a correct balance between good stress and bad stress. Employees need good stress to stay motivated and productive.
- Family and work are inter-related to the extent that experiences in one area affect the quality of life in the other. So, it's important to strike the right balance between the two and understand the degree of priority of work and family in life.
- The managers should be friendly and should motivate the employees to push them to do better and keep trying.
- Feedback is important but balancing the negative and positive feedback is important. Managers to need to analyze the mood and temperament of the employee first and accordingly put forth the feedback. It should be done on one to one basis, especially while communicating the negative feedback.

X. Limitations

- Less no. of respondents could be surveyed as source of questionnaire supplied for responses was through social media platform and personal contacts only.
- Took corporate sector as a whole, not pertaining to particular position or job cadres.
- Stress management techniques and role of HR department mentioned, confines to the knowledge obtained through discussions with corporate employees and matters available on internet.
- Time frame to manage this study was also limited.

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