

# Occupational Stress Interventions in Health Care Sector

<sup>1</sup>Bulomine Regi. S & <sup>2</sup>Dr. T.Rita Rebekah

<sup>1</sup>Ph. D Research Scholar (Part-Time), Reg.No.17224011062019, Department of Management Studies, affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tiunelveli (India)

<sup>2</sup>Dean & Associate Professor, Xavier Institute of Business Administration (XIBA), Palayamkottai. affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tiunelveli (India)

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### Corresponding Author

Email: drregi23[at]gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

Occupational stress has been a long-standing concern of the health care industry. Studies indicate that health care workers have higher rates of substance abuse and suicide than other professions and elevated rates of depression and anxiety linked to job stress. In addition to psychological distress, other outcomes of job stress include burnout, absenteeism, employee intent to leave, reduced patient satisfaction, and diagnosis and treatment errors. Workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional responses that can happen when there is a conflict between job demands on the employee and the amount of control an employee has over meeting these demands. However, if stress is too much and persists for a long time, it could lead to physical and mental illness. This paper was focused on the causes of stress, occupational stress, interventions on occupational stress on health care sector.

## 1. Introduction

Stress is a socio-psycho-physiological response to any stressful event and is a multidimensional phenomenon. Stress is directly linked to seven of the ten leading causes of death in the world, with cardiovascular disease being the leading cause for both men and women. Stress at any work place, is the adverse reaction people have, to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work. Workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional responses that can happen when there is a conflict between job demands on the employee and the amount of control an employee has over meeting these demands. However, if stress is too much and persists for a long time, it could lead to physical and mental illness. Occupational and organizational stress is a key cardiovascular risk factor known.

The epidemiology of occupational stress may be considered in three stages: Stage first includes known to be risk factors which causes stress; stage second is the stress response; stage third includes the consequences of the life history — either forms of distress (medical, psychological, behavioral) or forms of eustress (healthy stress).

## 2. Objectives of the study

The purpose of the study is to

- To identify the sources of occupational stress,
- To identify the adverse health effects of occupational stress interventions

## 3. Causes of stress



#### 4. Causes of occupational stress

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) defines occupational stress as “the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker.”

The following workplace factors (job stressors) can result in stress:

- Job or task demands (work overload, lack of task control, role ambiguity)
- Organizational factors (poor interpersonal relations, unfair management practices)
- Financial and economic factors
- Conflict between work and family roles and responsibilities
- Training and career development issues (lack of opportunity for growth or promotion)
- Poor organizational climate (lack of management commitment to core values, conflicting communication styles, etc.)

Stressors common in health care settings include the following:

- Inadequate staffing levels
- Long work hours
- Shift work
- Role ambiguity
- Exposure to infectious and hazardous substances

Stressors vary among health care occupations and even within occupations, depending on the task being performed.

In general, studies of nurses have found the following factors to be linked with stress:

- Work overload
- Time pressure
- Lack of social support at work (especially from supervisors, head nurses, and higher management)
- Exposure to infectious diseases
- Needlestick injuries
- Exposure to work-related violence or threats
- Sleep deprivation
- Role ambiguity and conflict
- Understaffing
- Career development issues
- Dealing with difficult or seriously ill patients

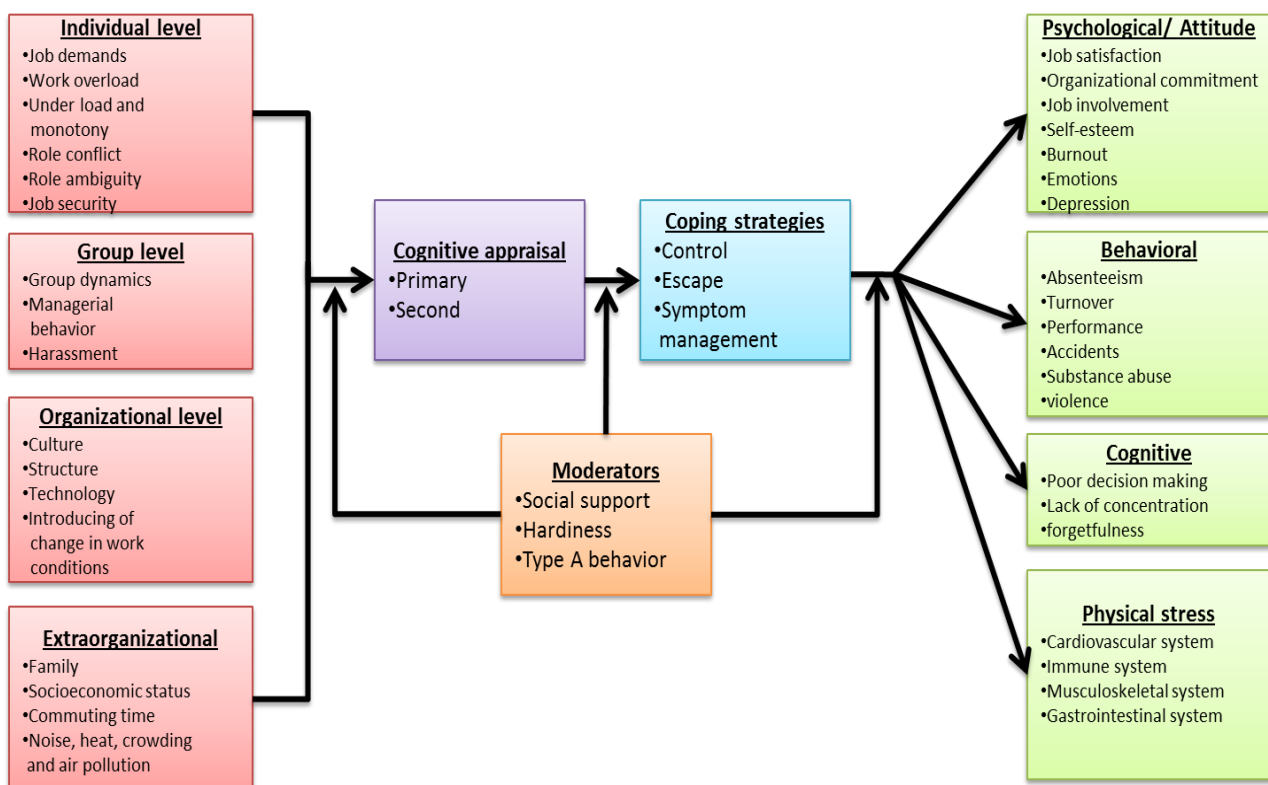
Among physicians, the following factors are associated with stress:

- Long hours
- Excessive workload
- Dealing with death and dying
- Interpersonal conflicts with other staff
- Patient expectations
- Threat of malpractice litigation

The quality of patient care provided by a hospital may also affect health care worker stress. Beliefs about whether the institution provides high quality care may influence the perceived stress of job pressures and workload because higher quality care maybe reflected in greater support and availability of resources.

#### 5. Model of occupation stress

### A Model of Occupational Stress



## 6. Occupational stress interventions

### Organizational Change Intervention

The most effective way of reducing occupational stress is to eliminate the stressors by redesigning jobs or making organizational changes. Organizations should take the following measures:

- Ensure that the workload is in line with workers' capabilities and resources
- Clearly define workers' roles and responsibilities
- Give workers opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs
- Improve communication
- Reduce uncertainty about career development and future employment prospects
- Provide opportunities for social interaction among workers

### The most commonly implemented organizational interventions in health care settings include

- Team Processes,
- Multidisciplinary Health Care Teams, and
- Multi-Component Interventions.

**Team process** or worker participatory methods give workers opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs. Workers receive clear information about their tasks and role in the department. Team-based approaches to redesign patient care delivery systems or to provide care (e.g., team nursing), have been successful in improving job satisfaction and reducing turnover, absenteeism, and job stress.

**Multidisciplinary health care teams** (e.g., composed of doctors, nurses, managers, pharmacists, psychologists, etc.) have become increasingly common in acute, long term, and primary care settings. Teams can accomplish the following:

- Allow services to be delivered efficiently, without sacrificing quality
- Save time (a team can perform activities concurrently that one worker would need to provide sequentially)
- Promote innovation by exchanging ideas
- Individuals cannot integrate and link information

**Multicomponent interventions** are broad-based and may include

- Risk Assessment,

- Intervention Techniques, And
- Education.

### Successful organizational stress interventions have several things in common:

- Involving workers at all stages of the intervention
- Providing workers with the authority to develop, implement, and evaluate the intervention
- Significant commitment from top management and buy-in from middle management
- An organizational culture that supports stress interventions
- Periodic evaluations of the stress intervention

Without these components (in particular, management support) it is not likely that the intervention will succeed.

## 7. Stress management intervention

Occupational stress interventions can focus either on organizational change or the worker. Worker-focused interventions often consist of stress management techniques such as the following:

- Training in coping strategies
- Progressive relaxation
- Biofeedback
- Cognitive-behavioural techniques
- Time management
- Interpersonal skills

## 8. Conclusion

These types of interventions that has shown promise for reducing stress among health care workers is innovative coping, or the development and application by workers of strategies like changes in work methods or skill development to reduce excessive demands. The goal of these techniques is to help the worker deal more effectively with occupational stress. Worker focused interventions have been the most common form of stress reduction in workplaces. Although worker interventions can help workers deal with stress more effectively, they do not remove the sources of workplace stress, and thus may lose effectiveness over time. Mental health support intervention may be needed in the event of a significant event at a health care organization

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