

Individual Determinants of Occupational Stress and Associated Psychophysiological Outcomes

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Abstract:

Occupational stress is a prevalent pathological phenomenon in contemporary workplaces. This is attributable to a confluence of factors intrinsic to contemporary work roles and external pressures that directly impact individuals in their professional lives. This study aims to illuminate the primary determinants of occupational stress and to explore the nature of the psychological and physical ailments that often ensue.

Keywords: occupational stress, work pressure, psychological disorders, physical illnesses.

Introduction

A significant legacy of capitalist systems and dominant pragmatic cultures is the linkage of individual fulfillment and basic needs to the activities, experiences, and roles individuals undertake within society. The escalating demands placed on individuals have given rise to a multitude of pressures, resulting in a range of social and psychological problems. Occupational stress has emerged as a central topic of interest for sociologists and industrial psychologists due to its profound impact on both employees and organizations. This is not a coincidental phenomenon; rather, research has focused on stress due to its detrimental effects on mental and physical health. When individuals are unable to manage the sources of their stress, their bodies undergo a physiological response known as the "fight or flight" reaction, leading to a host of problems. Key questions arise regarding the ability of both individuals and organizations to address and manage the psychological phenomenon of stress and its associated physical and psychological consequences. Furthermore, what are the primary psychological and physical repercussions of stress, and what solutions can be implemented to mitigate this phenomenon?

This study aims to analyze the fundamental elements associated with occupational stress, exploring its relationship with burnout and its negative consequences for organizational employees, including the resulting physical ailments. Employing a descriptive methodology, this research will define the core concepts related to our study and provide an in-depth analysis and explanation of the primary determinants that contribute to this phenomenon. This study is divided into three main sections:

- ✓ **Chapter 1: The Nature of Occupational Stress**
- ✓ **Chapter 2: Causes and Sources of Occupational Stress**
- ✓ **Chapter 3: The Effects and Risks of Stress**
- ✓ **Conclusion**

Chapter 1: The Nature of Occupational Stress

Since the phenomenon of stress has come to the forefront of public discourse and become increasingly prevalent, the term 'stress' has been employed frequently and often indiscriminately. It is used to describe a wide range of life events and circumstances, from confronting unexpected situations to expressing the diverse consequences of such events. Moreover, the rich semantic content of this term has positioned it at the intersection of multiple disciplines, including physics, psychology, psychiatry, and neuroscience. Consequently, it is unsurprising that this scientific and general concept has become a source of ambiguity and confusion (Bruno, Q., 2001, p. 46). Indeed, researchers have identified over 300 definitions of stress. Given this diversity, there are several theoretical perspectives to which these varying definitions can be attributed (Dobson, B., 1982, p. 02).

The first perspective posits that stress is a product of pressure; according to this view, stress is a stimulus that induces a state of intense tension in individuals. It primarily focuses on external sources of stress and effectively captures the cumulative nature of stress, whereby increased pressure corresponds to a heightened likelihood of individual surrender. When external stimuli become overwhelming, internal collapse becomes inevitable. In this context, Rice defines stress as "any stimulus or change in the internal or external environment that is of sufficient intensity, severity, and duration to tax the adaptive capacity of the living organism to its maximum, and which, under certain conditions, may lead to maladaptive behavior, maladjustment, or physiological dysfunction resulting in disease. The greater the

duration of the stress, the greater the accompanying physical and psychological disturbance" (Butler, G., 1993, p. 05).

The second perspective uses the term stress to describe the physical and emotional response to external stressors. This response can be acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term). Hans Selye defines stress as "a nonspecific, systemic response of the body to any demand upon it, whether it comes from the environment or the individual himself, in the form of a challenge which he must meet or overcome" (Abdul-Mouaaty, H., 2006, p. 20).

The third perspective emphasizes the interactive nature of stress, which is considered the most widely accepted view as it does not focus solely on one aspect of stress. Rather, it takes into account both the individual and their environment and the interaction between them. While a group of individuals may be exposed to the same stressors or situations, their response and coping mechanisms may vary depending on individual differences, gender, or culture. For instance, during a public transportation delay, some individuals may become agitated and anxious, while others may remain calm and relaxed. "

Section 1:A Definition Of Occupational Stress

It is a series of natural and necessary reactions to preserve the self that help us respond to external and internal environmental forces and aim to achieve balance and harmony with the demands of life. Stress is a preceding stage of burnout (Abd Al-Aziz, M., 2010, 57).

Section: Definition of Work Pressure

There are several definitions for work pressure presented by a group of researchers. Most notably, "Beer" and "Newman" defined it as a condition arising from the interaction of work-related factors with the individual, leading to a change in their psychological and physical state, forcing them to deviate from naturally performing their work.

"Farouk" defines it as a state of mental and physical stress resulting from incidents that cause damage or disturbance, or resulting from factors of dissatisfaction or general characteristics that prevail in the work environment. It also occurs as a result of the interaction of all these causes, and the intensity of pressure depends on the individual's response to the impact of these factors during interaction with the situation (Al-Naas, M., 2008, p. 30).

A single concept of work pressure can be agreed upon as the negative effects and consequences that the work environment may cause for the worker at the psychological and physical levels, such as tension, anxiety, frustration, and other related physiological diseases.

Section 3: Definition of Burnout

There are several definitions of burnout, and researchers have differed in their definitions of this concept according to their orientations and cognitive perspectives.

“Maslach” defines burnout as a psychological state characterized by a set of negative qualities such as tension, instability, and a tendency towards isolation, as well as negative attitudes towards work and colleagues (Bakri, 2023, p. 04).

“Freudengerger” means burnout: “exhausted, worn out, the individual exhausts himself by exploiting his energy and strength or resources excessively” (Savior and Forget, 1983). The individual does not suffer from burnout unless all his energy is depleted, and (Laxonier, 1984) has drawn a parallel between the individual who experiences a depletion of his energy in his job over time and the vehicle that consumes all its fuel, which forms the basis on which his job is based.

Chapter 2: Causes and Sources of Occupational Stress

The classification of occupational stress in terms of sources is based on two main divisions: one related to the bureaucratic and organizational aspect, which is based on procedures and regulatory bylaws, as well as the physical and physiological environment and the prevailing organizational climate within the institution. The other division is related to aspects connected to daily life and social and relational aspects in their various dimensions, and can be identified as follows:

Section 1: Bureaucratic and Administrative Sources of Occupational Stress

Thinkers and specialists in the administrative aspect of organizations have classified the sources of bureaucratic stress into several divisions:

Subsection 1: Physical and Physiological Requirements

The physical and physiological factor in organisms has a significant impact on the individual from various physical and psychological aspects. An individual's behavior within an organization is merely a reflection of a set of relationships and interactions within the organization. Any tension within this interactive system, whether material or human, represents an element that constitutes a source of stress for the individual. Among the most important elements affecting the individual within the work environment, we find:

Lighting Intensity: The degree of lighting is considered one of the factors affecting working conditions. The more adequate and suitable the lighting is for the worker, the more it reduces the burden and suffering associated with work and increases productivity. Good lighting means lighting that does not strain the eye (Abu Qahf, 197, 2001).

The level of lighting can greatly facilitate or hinder the performance of most tasks. The results of several studies have indicated that increasing the level of lighting leads to an improvement in the level of performance, taking into account the limit that this performance improvement can reach, beyond which the effect of excessive lighting will negatively affect the level of performance. Other studies have indicated that bright lighting can lead to confusion, disorientation, and damage to the visual sense for some workers (Halmi, 2013, p. 578).

Noise: Noise is considered a discordant mixture of sounds emanating from machines and spreading in the work environment, affecting the performance of workers and reducing their productivity. Moreover, excessive noise in workplaces negatively affects the worker's health in the medium and long term (Ghiath, 2014, p. 113).

It is often observed in a work environment characterized by a lot of noise and din resulting from machines, equipment, and individuals within it that workers exhibit nervousness and irritability within the work environment. They are also characterized by anxiety, tension, and increased levels of the adrenaline hormone secreted by the adrenal gland, which causes them to lose a lot of focus at work and consequently a decrease in productivity and an increase in accidents and professional mistakes. In addition to that, the worker may suffer from psychological and physical harm as a result.

Heat: "Moushensiki" considered the discomfort resulting from heat to be unrelated to the high degrees of this latter, but rather the result of three interacting variables: high temperature,

humidity, and stagnant air. This makes the stress tolerable, which confirms that heat is considered a source of occupational stress for the worker (Bouali, 1993, p. 23).

Ventilation: Ventilation has a significant impact on an individual's performance, activity, and behavior in general. It has been shown that if the speed of air movement increases to 147 feet per minute, the comfort and efficiency of workers increase. Studies have shown that poor ventilation quickly leads to feelings of drowsiness, lethargy, fatigue, boredom, distress, and a desire to leave the workplace. “Thus, ventilation helps in disrupting the individual's balance, leading to the appearance of symptoms resulting from stress” (Abu Qahf, p. 199).

Wages and Incentives: Wages and incentives are considered the primary source of individuals' entry into organizations, and the individual's status and position among their colleagues depends on wages. Undoubtedly, the degree of an individual's satisfaction with their work depends to a large extent on the value of what they receive in cash and kind, and whether this wage is commensurate with the effort they exert in work. The inadequacy of wages is considered one of the most important sources of pressure that an individual faces in their work, which results in a high rate of turnover and leaving the job.

Subsection 2: Job Demands

Studies have confirmed a relationship between the type of profession and stress. Professions vary in nature in terms of responsibilities, methods of performance, and the results arising from the behavior or what the individual does. This variation leads to the creation of different degrees of pressure exerted on the individual (Askari, 2000, p. 37).

The following are the most important job demands:

Workload: Any difficult and complex work produces symptoms of psychological and physical stress. Hammadouch differentiated between two types of workload: quantitative workload, where the individual is required to perform tasks within a specific time, and qualitative workload, where the job content is very complex and requires a high degree of skills and competencies to perform tasks and work (Hammadouch, 2004, p. 21).

Working Hours: The expansion of the social, economic, and organizational fabric has imposed a large amount of human activity over the hours of the day, causing workers to work

in shifts throughout the entire day, which does not align with the worker's biological and psychological changes. This is where the feeling of stress begins, as the worker finds themselves in certain circumstances and emergencies restricted by these shifts, which generates a kind of fear of punishment in case of exceeding them, such as deductions, warnings, and other administrative measures related to the organization.

Organizational Structure: Ahmad Yusuf Doudin defines the organizational structure as the formal mechanism through which the organization is managed by defining the lines of authority and communication between superiors and subordinates. It is also defined as the system of authority, accountability, and relationships between organizational units that determine the form and nature of work for each organization (Ben Ali, 2014, p. 17).

Subsection 3: Role Demands

The job role is of paramount importance to the organization's activity and ensuring its stability. The individual and their activities are considered a basic unit in the organization, no less important than the material and technological means in the organization. According to the functionalist school, the role is linked to the job activity that a person performs within a general system of roles that are pre-determined to ensure job balance and meet the needs of the general service of the system. An imbalance can occur at the level of the requirements of the role that the individual occupies if the other roles do not contribute to meeting each other's requirements, which hinders the system from achieving its goals and requirements. Role conflict occurs when others are unable to anticipate other roles or deviate from the general values that govern the organization and do not align with personal values, or when these roles overlap, causing a general imbalance within the system. The absence of role expectation and role ambiguity reflects a state of chaos that the organization may experience as a result of the conflict that may arise, which negatively affects the job performer psychologically and socially, causing a state of frustration and job instability.

Subsection 4: Work Pressure

Pressure increases if these expectations are contradictory to each other or the individual's expectations or personal values. This is what is called role conflict. If these expectations are ambiguous and unclear, then what is called role ambiguity occurs. If these expectations

impose a burden on the individual beyond their capacity and abilities, then what is called role overload occurs (Abu Qahf, p. 199).

Subsection 5: Personal Requirements

Personality is generally considered an intervening variable that mitigates or increases the negative impact of the situation on the individual. Since each person has a different personality, with its distinguishing features and unique characteristics, the individual's reaction in work organizations plays a major role in determining stress.

Section 2: Sources of General Stress

Subsection 1: Daily Life and Its Changes

An individual's life contains several daily changes, which may be suitable or unsuitable for them. The individual experiences various life events with their positives and negatives, which carry different degrees of pressure. In addition, the crises that occur and create new situations in the individual's life also contribute to stress.

Subsection 2: Family Life

The family can be a source of some pressure due to its expectations of the individual and the conflict between its demands and the demands of work. Significant changes in family life, such as death and illness, create a lot of pressure on the individual, such as financial worries (Hamdi et al., 1990, p. 30).

As we have shown in our presentation of the sources of stress, the sources of stress are numerous and varied. For stress to occur, several factors related to the physiological and organizational environment, as well as general sources, contribute. While there is agreement on the most important points or reasons leading to stress, the impact or contribution of this source in causing stress within the organization and the individual remains different in the view of many, as well as the difference in their ranking and naming by some.

This explains the existence of major axes for the sources of stress on which there is agreement, while they differ in classifying different sources into one of the major axes.

Despite the research and studies that have addressed the topic of stress, there has been no single and accurate classification of stress sources to date. This may be due to the different cognitive approaches of these researchers and the relativity present in the human and social sciences. This is what has made us see that some points may be classified in one source rather than another, while others have included some points in another source, and others have grouped several points in one point. This is what has made us point out some sources, which makes us today in urgent need to delineate the characteristics of stress and its various sources. This is especially necessary through field studies, as each profession has its specific sources due to the difference in working conditions, the nature of the profession, and responsibilities. This generalizes stress sources as a difficult matter, considering the difference in stress from one individual to another and from one profession to another.

Chapter 3: The Effects and Risks of Stress (Physical and Psychological Effects on Employees)

Hans Selye states, "We have begun to understand today that many common diseases arise from a failure to adapt to stress more than they result from the effects of any external factor" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 91). He termed a group of diseases such as asthma, high blood pressure, chronic fatigue, diabetes, and kidney disorders as "diseases of adaptation" or "adaptation disorders," considering them the result of a type of old stress that the body has not resolved well.

Since the 1960s, there has been increasing interest in the relationship between life events and physical and psychological disorders through a psychosocial approach (consulting, SRM, 2008, p. 17).

Regarding physical diseases, stress plays a significant role, although we must not forget that other factors may contribute to the onset of diseases, which we have previously discussed. Long-term stress can lead to heart problems. There is also a link between stress and high blood pressure. Studies conducted on patients with type 1 and type 2 diabetes have clarified the role of stress in the onset and development of the disease. There is a relationship between the stress hormone and the secretion of insulin, which may accelerate the onset of the disease. Similarly, about chronic pain, a relationship has been observed between pain symptoms and stress in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome (Marilou, B., Boujout, E, 2014, p. 144).

In the following, we will present some diseases closely related to stress:

Section 1: Stress and Cardiovascular Diseases

The term cardiovascular disease refers to a group of disorders that affect the heart and blood vessels (vessels are the tubes through which blood is constantly transported to all parts of the body). These include coronary heart disease, heart attack, cerebrovascular diseases (stroke), peripheral vascular diseases, heart failure, rheumatic heart disease, congenital heart disease, and cardiomyopathy. Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death worldwide, claiming more lives than any other disease. In 2012, approximately 17.5 million people died as a result of cardiovascular diseases, representing 31% of total deaths worldwide (World Health Organization, 2015).

There are many symptoms of functional heart and blood vessel disorders in which stress is considered an important cause, such as various forms of cardiac arrhythmia, bradycardia, angina pectoris, and myocardial infarction (coronary artery blockage in the heart). It is well-known that there is a strong correlation between emotional state and cardiovascular diseases, and this is not surprising as the heart has always been seen as the seat of emotions, anxiety, love, hate, happiness, and sadness. This is found in common expressions such as “kind-hearted,” “warm-hearted,” “cold-hearted,” and others.

Regarding the relationship between stress and cardiovascular diseases, we can mention an important study by Friedman and Rosenman, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 1975. In this study, they followed 3,500 healthy individuals for eight and a half years and reached several conclusions, such as:

- Type A personality, which is more prone to stress due to its fast-paced lifestyle, has double the probability of developing heart disease.
- They also found that men were more susceptible to heart attacks than women.
- The data obtained from the study concluded that heart attacks in men were primarily due to work stress.

Section 2: Stress and High Blood Pressure

Many of us talk about high blood pressure, but do you know the real reason behind it? The fact is that only 20% of cases of high blood pressure have specific organic causes such as diabetes, obesity, and high cholesterol levels. This leaves 80% of patients without a known cause, which Franz Alexander, one of the pioneers of psychosomatic medicine, called "essential hypertension" in 1950, defining it as follows: "A clinical syndrome characterized by a chronic elevation in blood pressure in the absence of a clear organic cause" (Ibid, p. 225).

In response to stress, a temporary increase in blood pressure can be observed, which has a psychosomatic origin. An example of this is the so-called "white coat effect," which is a good example of the transient increase in blood pressure resulting from the hospital environment and the stress it provokes. Theoretically, this increase, as mentioned earlier, is transient and disappears with the disappearance of the source of stress. However, we can also observe a persistent type of high blood pressure, which in some cases is very severe. In this case, stress does not act alone but is combined with other factors, where the more psychosocial factors an individual has, the higher the risk of developing it. This means that stress indirectly affects the persistence of high blood pressure by affecting the quality of the individual's life and deteriorating it.

Section 3: Stress and Peptic Ulcer

Stress and Peptic Ulcer For years, there have been several attempts to explain the origin of peptic ulcers. Currently, there is a consensus that it is the result of the interaction of several factors. Despite this, there is an emphasis on the importance of stress in the onset of the disease, and studies in this field date back more than 150 years. Among these studies, we can mention the study of Wolf and his colleagues on the relationship between emotional responses, daily life events, and excessive gastric secretion (secretion of amino acids). This was through helping a patient who had a gastric fistula (a complication of a stomach disease where the contents of the stomach empty into other organs, whether digestive or not). Among the various results they reached, they found that continuous and intense psychological stress led to ulcers in the gastric mucosa, through an increase in gastric secretion, which resulted in erosion of the latter for a long period.

Section 4: Stress and Headaches

Headaches are also considered one of the consistent effects of stress. It is a disorder characterized by recurrent headaches, often confined to one side, and can be more generalized. Sheldon argues that this disorder has a physiological basis resulting from contractions of the muscles surrounding the head, preventing blood flow to the head (Loukia, H., Ben Zeroual, F., 2006, p. 20).

Section 5: Impact on the Individual's Immunity

Since the emergence of the psychoneuroimmunological current, there has been interest in the relationship between the nervous system, the endocrine system, and the immune system (the immune system is a system of biological processes carried out by organs, cells, and particles within living organisms to protect them from diseases, toxins, cancer cells, and foreign particles. This vital system identifies the causes of disease, such as microbes or viruses, and neutralizes or destroys them. organisms that cause disease. It is sensitive to psychological and environmental factors, and the foundations of this interaction began to be clarified.

The role of stress and other psychosocial factors in the appearance of what are called autoimmune diseases has been studied (autoimmune diseases are a group of diseases that occur as a result of the failure of the body's immune system to recognize its organs and parts, as it cannot recognize the genetic fingerprint specific to the body's cells, so it treats them as if they were foreign to it and begins to attack them using immune cells and antibodies). It was generally found that issues such as the termination of human relationships (bereavement, divorce, abandonment) have a significant impact on this condition (Benjamin, S., op. cit., p. 91).

Section 6: Stress Management

A combination of organizational change and stress management is often the most beneficial approach to preventing stress at work. Both organizations and employees can employ strategies at the organizational and individual levels. In general, organizational-level strategies involve modifying work procedures, and employee assistance programs, and finding a thorough analysis of empirical studies. Experimental behavioral interventions, compared to relaxation and organizational interventions, have been found to have the greatest impact on improving employees' symptoms of psychological distress. A systematic review of

stress reduction techniques among healthcare workers found that cognitive-behavioral training reduced emotional exhaustion and feelings of personal accomplishment. Occupational stress that needs to be addressed is an imbalance between work and life outside work. The Work, Family, and Health Study was a large-scale intervention study aimed at helping ensure that employees achieve a degree of work-life balance. Intervention strategies included training supervisors to engage in more family-supportive behaviors. Another study component provided employees with increased control over the time and place of their work. The intervention led to improved home life, improved sleep quality, and better safety compliance, especially for lower-wage employees.

Many organizations manage occupational stress related to health and safety in a fragmented way. For example, one department may host an employee assistance program, while another may manage exposure to toxic chemicals. The concept of Total Worker Health, initiated by NIOSH, provides a strategy for integrating different levels of worker health promotion activities programmatically. TWH integrates health protection (safety/occupational health); for example, reducing exposure to airborne contaminants, and health promotion (wellness); for example, a smoking cessation program. A review of 17 TWH interventions, which integrate organizational-level occupational safety/health components and individual employee health promotion components, indicated that integrated programs can improve workers' health and safety. NIOSH experts have recommended several practical ways to reduce occupational stress. These include:

- ❖ Ensuring that the workload is consistent with the capabilities and resources of employees.
- ❖ Designing jobs to provide meaning and motivate employees to use their skills.
- ❖ Clearly defining employees' roles and responsibilities.
- ❖ To reduce workplace stress, managers can monitor the workload given to employees. During their training, they should also allow employees to understand the awareness of stress and its risks.
- ❖ allow employees to participate in decisions and procedures that affect their jobs.
- ❖ Improve communication - reduce uncertainty about career development and future job prospects.
- ❖ Provide opportunities for social interaction among employees.

- ❖ Create work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside of the job.
- ❖ Bring in an objective outsider such as a consultant to suggest new approaches to ongoing problems.
- ❖ Promote a participatory leadership style to involve as many people as possible in solving problems that cause stress.
- ❖ Encourages work-life balance through family-friendly benefits and policies.

One insurance company conducted several studies on the effects of psychological stress on prevention programs in hospitals. The program activities included educating employees and management about work stress, making changes to hospital policies and procedures to reduce organizational sources of stress, and creating employee assistance programs. In one study, the rate of medication errors decreased by 50% after implementing prevention activities in a 700-bed hospital. In another study, there was a 70% decrease in malpractice claims in 22 hospitals that implemented stress prevention activities. In contrast, there was no decrease in claims in a matched group of 22 hospitals that did not implement stress prevention activities. There is evidence that working from home can reduce occupational stress. One reason why working from home gets high marks is that it gives employees more control over how they complete their work. Remote workers report higher job satisfaction and a lower desire to find a new job. Employees who work from home also experience less stress, improved work-life balance, and higher performance ratings from their managers

Conclusion:

Stress impacts various aspects of an individual's life, from family and home to the workplace and various institutions. Wherever an individual goes, they are exposed to a variety of pressures. Given that a working individual spends a significant portion of their time at their workplace, the feeling of stress resulting from work extends its effects to encompass the entirety of the individual's life, as the individual is a holistic entity.

The consequences of stress become evident to both the worker and the organization. A worker who is experiencing occupational stress will, primarily, have their performance affected, which in turn affects the performance of the organization, as they are a vital component. Therefore, individuals strive to adapt and cope with the various pressures and stresses they

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encounter in an attempt to minimize their impact. This is done to create harmony between themselves and their profession, as well as between themselves and their environment. However, the feeling of stress experienced by a working individual may sometimes lead them to exert more effort and energy in an attempt to keep up with these pressures and overcome them. This, in some cases, may compromise the worker's own goals or lead to dissatisfaction with their work or themselves.

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