

# Occupational Stress, Mental Health and Coping among Junior and Senior Sales Executives

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**Abstract---** *The study was planned to investigate the impact of job level differences on occupational stress, mental health, job satisfaction and coping among junior and senior sales executives. A random sample of 160 executives working in different private profit making companies at two levels was collected in Hyderabad and Bangalore metropolitan cities. Well developed sub-scales of Occupational Stress indicator like mental Health, Job Satisfaction and Coping behavior were used for the present study. The junior executives are experiencing more job stress and lower mental health. However these two groups did not differ in their job satisfaction and coping behavior. However the seniors are found to be better with work home balance.*

**Keywords---** *Stress, Mental Health, Coping, Job Satisfaction*

## I. INTRODUCTION

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS has received a great deal of management attention and media coverage. It is though to be endemic in many area of work, especially in relation to implementation of new technology. With the introduction of new technology and with the increasing use of digital methods, computerization and increased versatility of customer requirements, job demands as well as work conditions deprive workers of need fulfillments. The advent of the so-called "information age" is causing significant changes in work methods which require new skills among workers, demanding innovative managerial technique and sometimes necessitating organizational changes.

The rapidly evolving technology has resulted in job reduction and elimination of some occupational groups; the obsolescence of skills has resulted in dissatisfaction, job insecurity and occupational stress.

Recent studies of so-called health organizations suggest that policies benefiting workers' health also benefit the productivity of the organization. A healthy organization is defined as one that has low rate of illness, injury, and disability on its work force and is also competitive in the market place. National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health's (USA) research has identified organizational characteristics associated with both healthy, low stress work and high levels of productivity.

Experience of stress is inevitably involved in the execution of any type of work. Stress has an adaptive value. It motivates the individual to attend to the task and get rid of the tension or demand the unattended task produced. But if the stress in work is beyond the individual's limit, its deleterious effects could be seen on his body as well as on the behaviour. It is this excessive job stress and its effect on individual's job satisfaction, job involvement, job conformance etc, which gain the attention of many researchers. Individual's experience of job stress may influence individual's involvement in their jobs.

Hans selye (1936) was the first to popularize the concept (stress) and its consequences on the organisms as General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). He defined stress as the on specific response to any demand whether positive or negative, that is made on it. This led to the theoretical formulation that stressors are external event or conditions that affect the organisms. Since then, Selye's work on stress provided an impetus to the interest of many and was defined in various ways. Various investigators have viewed the term stress differently. It is considered as stimulus having the potential to alter the state of the individual as a result of adaptive failure (Homes and Mesuda, 1974). In view of the way in which the individual respond to the perceived stresses, based on the valance between the requirement to make an adaptive response and the response of the individual, many theorists considered stress as the response, (Appley and Trumbal, 1977). Stress is also viewed as an interacting variable between external forces the resistance shown by the individuals (Mcgrath, 1970).

Staw & Ross (1985) investigated the job satisfaction of a national sample of 5000 male workers over a five-year interval and they found that job satisfaction was very stable over time regardless of whether the worker changed their jobs or occupations.

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The study conducted among emergency medical officers from a large public emergency service showed the workers experienced greater job related stress. Also they (21.7%) were significantly dissatisfied with their jobs. The main factor for their satisfaction level was high pay. The best-paid workers tended to be more satisfied with their jobs.

Cross sectional studies conducted in an Aeronautical industry (1996) showed high prevalence of hypertension (25%) in the study sample when compared with the control group (13.3%). Coronary heart disease (9.3%) is more in the study sample when compared to control group (2.6%). Risk factors like smoking, regular alcohol intake, obesity, diabetic, excessive food intake were in the study group than in control group. However the serum cholesterol is high in both the groups.

Coping refers to behaviour that mediates the impact that society has on their number through protecting people from being psychologically harmed by problematic social experience (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978). A model in coping style suggest that there are likely to be individual differences in the methods that people adapt to cope with given situations and that the coping alternatives that are perceived to be available to each person will affect his subsequent perception of stressful events. There is prior evidence that coping is continuous force, shaping what will occur during subsequent coping episodes and that individuals are relatively consistent in the coping is a continuous force, shaping what will occur during subsequent coping episodes and that individuals are relatively consistent in the coping strategy which they adapt (Cohen and Edwards, 1988; Dolan and White, 1988; Fleisgman 1984).

The above studies indicate that there is need to examine the job level differences in the experience of mental health, job satisfaction, job pressures and coping strategies among executives.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Sample

The sample consisted of 160 sales executives working for pharmaceutical companies spread over different locations in Hyderabad and Bangalore cities selected randomly for the present study. The sample includes only males executives (junior and senior executives) and functions includes sales, and marketing.

Questionnaires were distributed to sample of 250 sales executives at two levels i.e., junior and seniors within the company. A total of 188 individuals responded the questionnaire of which only 160 were usable further out of 160 there were 80 replies for the senior executives and the rest were from the junior mangers.

### 2.2. Material

Job satisfaction was measured using a Job Satisfaction Scale of Occupational Stress Indicator (Coopaer et all 1988). It consists of 22 items measuring intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction with the job and the organization rated on a 6 point cale with 6 indicating maximum satisfaction. The reliability coefficient was calculated using Crown Bach's Walch as 0.94. This scale has shown good validity correlation with Warr et al (1979) satisfaction with the Job Itself Scale (Robertson et all 1990).

The physical and mental health of the Occupational Stress Indicator (Cooper et al 1988) was used to assess the health and well-being of the respondents. The Mental Health Scale consists of eighteen items of mental health symptoms, which were rated on a 6- point scale, some of which were reverse score. This scale has shown good validity correlation with sub-scale of Crown Crisp Experimental Index (Crown & Crisp 1979) measuring free-floating anxiety, somatic anxiety and depression (Robertson et all 1990). The Physical Health Scale consisted of 12 items relating to somatic symptoms, which the respondents were asked to rate on a six point Scale from 1 (never) to 6 (frequently). For both scales, the lower score indicated greater well-being.

The information on job level leaving full time employment was obtained on the questionnaire for inclusion in the analysis. Respondents provided the job profile and grade on the basis of which they were recognized as executives for the purposes of the analysis.

The source of stress scale of the occupational stress indicators (OSI) (Cooper et all 1988) was used to measure the source of pressure at work. This consisted to six sub-scales viz., factors intrinsic to job, relationship with others, career and achievement, organizational structure and climate; home/work interface. The items were rated in terms of the degree of pressure. The respondents were asked to indicate if their job was very definitely a source of stress or very definitely not, on a scale of 1 to 6.

### III. RESULTS

The data collected is analyzed and presented below.

Table 1: Means, SD and 't' value for the scores on Job Satisfaction

Junior Executives				Senior executives				t value	P value
Factors	Mean	SD	SE	Mean	SD	SE			
JS	23.718	4.11	0.658	23.852	4.177	0.911	0.2085	@	
OS	23.692	4.354	0.697	21.952	4.811	1.05	1.6571	@	
JS+OS	47.487	8.019	1.284	45.804	8.3	1.811	0.7131	@	

JS= Job Satisfaction, OS=Satisfaction towards organization,

@= Not significant at 0.05 level.

The Table - 1 show mean scores of job satisfaction level of the executives (both junior and senior executives). The scores obtained by these two groups were not found to be significantly different (t= 0.208, 1.65 and 0.72 respectively). On factors like job itself and organizational satisfaction, the mean values for the total scores are also found to be not significant.

Table 2: Means, SD and 't' value for the scores on Mental Health

Seniors Executives				Junior Manager				't' value	P Value
Factors	Mean	SD	SE	Mean	SD	SE			
MA	18.77	3.54	0.57	17.28	4.32	0.94	2.26	***	
MR	17.13	2.19	0.35	16.38	2.31	0.48	1.26	@	
MW	12.26	2.78	0.46	11.05	2.56	0.56	1.66	@	
MA+MR+MW	48.15	6.33	1.13	44.71	6.22	1.35	2.48	***	

MA= state of mind, MR= Resilience, MW= Confidence level.

\*\*\*= P value significant at 0.01 level, @= P value not significant at 0.05 level,

Further, the scores on mental health scale (Table no 2) shows that the two groups are found to be significantly different on state of mind (t=2.26). However these two groups did differ on resilience and confidence level (t= 1.26 and 1.66 respectively). The senior executives are experiencing better mental health than the junior executives (mean values 18.77 and 17.28) respectively.

Table 3: Means, SDs and 't' values for the score on Job stress factor wise

Junior executives				Senior Executives				't' value	P value
Factors	Mean	SD	SE	Mean	SD	SE			
PW	24.282	4.217	0.675	21.19	5.688	1.241	2.1887	***	
PR	24.487	6.468	1.036	23.429	6.225	1.358	0.6194	@	
PC	14.487	3.402	0.545	13.19	2.639	0.576	1.6356	@	
PO	14.641	3.24	0.519	13.38	3.879	0.78	1.3459	@	
PP	15.49	2.425	0.388	13.286	4.204	0.918	2.3119	***	
PM	17.667	3.709	0.594	13.905	4.073	0.88	3.5215	***	
PH	20.462	4.34	0.695	19.524	5.382	1.174	0.6875	@	
PD	14.949	3.26	0.522	14.143	3.054	0.66	0.9525	@	
Total	146.546	75.583	2.495	132.047	23.955	5.227	2.5064	***	

PW= Work load, PR= Relationship, PC=Recognition, PO=Organisational climate, PP= Personal responsibility, PM=Managerial role, PH=Home work balance, PD= Daily hassles, @= Not significant at 0.05 level, \*\*\*= Significant at 0.05 level.

The results on source of pressure in their job are shown in Table No.3. The young and middle aged executives were found to be significantly different in the experience of occupational stress (t= 2.50). Further the scores obtained by these two groups were analyzed factor wise and presented in the same table. The results show that the younger age group is experiencing more workload, pressure on personal responsibilities and managerial role (t values of 2.18, 2.31, and 3.52 respectively). However, these two groups did not differ statistically on the following factors viz. Relationship with others, recognition in their job, organizational climate, home work balance and daily hassles. (t= 0.62, 1.64, 1.35, 0.69, 0.95 respectively).

Table 4: Means, SDs and 't' values for the score on coping strategies

Junior Executives				Seniors Executives				
Factors	Mean	SD	SE	Mean	SD	SE	't' value	P value
CT	22.743	4.247	0.68	23.476	2.876	0.627	0.7925	@
CP	16.026	2.211	0.34	14.288	2.348	0.512	2.8311	***
SS	12.692	2.26	0.356	12.857	2.689	0.599	0.2403	@
Total	51.974	6.706	1.074	50.619	5.394	1.177	0.8504	@

CT= Problem focus, CP=Work balance, SS=Social support.

@= Non significant at 0.01 level, \*\*\*= significant 0.05 level

The scores on coping stress was analyzed and presented in Table -4. The two groups are found to be significantly different on life/work balance. The mean values indicate that the younger age group were more life/work balanced than the middle age group (mean values- 16.1, 14.28 respectively). However these two groups did not differ on problem focus and social support. (t value- 0.79, 0.24 respectively).

Further the scores on Job satisfaction, Mental Health and Occupation stress and coping were obtained and product moment correlation was used and the results are presented in Table -5.

Table 5: Correlation Coefficient among Variables

Factors	Mental Health	Occupation stress	Coping
JS	0.128	0.072	0.427*
MH		-0.296*	0.487*
Occupation stress			0.14

JS: Job Satisfaction; MH: Mental Health

The result in the above indicates that Job satisfaction on mental health found to be positively significantly correlated with coping. However, mental health is negatively correlated with occupational stress. It can be explained that as job satisfaction and mental health increases coping behavior increases. However when stress increases mental health decreases.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

These results represent a picture of occupational stress, its sources and effects for comparable groups of junior and senior sales executives working in pharmaceutical companies with similar job functions. Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction was not a problem in these organizations. The experience of occupational stress due to pressure from overload, personal responsibilities and managerial role, mental health was well expected by the junior executives as they are to show their ability to reach higher position in the organizations., This emphasizes the way in which the organization/ industry widening problems may bridge the junior executives and senior executives. These above factors divide pervasiveness of the intensity is emphasized by the appearance of these variables in several of the significant differences.

Further it is also clear that there is an apparent source of similar job satisfaction in both the groups. However the levels of pressure from being overloaded, personal responsibilities, managerial role, mental health and pressure from life/work balance were present.

The junior executives and senior executives were found to be experiencing more pressure which is an intrinsic to the job as the primary predictor of mental health.

Stress management programmes, both individual focused and organizational focused may be conducted. The individual focused strategies like relaxation techniques, biofeedback, meditation, exercise can be under taken. The organizational focused strategies like adapting organization structure, selection and placement, training, altering physical and environmental job characteristics, job rotation, and emphasizing health concerns can done to minimize stress.

### *Learn to bury; the habit of worry*

Most of us worry from time to time. Some worry occasionally, only when difficult situations arise, or others, worry (which can also be called "What if..." thinking), is pervasive, and starts to take over their lives. They live with constant misplaced worry and anxiety over just about any possible scenario such as; health, job security, a key relationship, children, money, the things people may say and do, and more. If they have nothing specific to worry about, they will think something up. When the worrying gets to this level it has developed from a natural symptom of everyday life to a problem that needs to be dealt with. Unrealistic worry which is based on exaggerated concerns of future harm is an exhausting problem for millions of people. It diminishes the ability to enjoy your job, family, friends and achievements because you live in fear of what might go wrong. Worrying leads to a loss of perspective and contributes to health problems, like stress and other disorders of the nervous system. It's also known to reduce effectiveness and productivity. You may feel that worrying helps you to prepare for a situation. E.g., if you worry about your job every day and you don't lose it, your mind will conclude that it was worrying that paid off. However the fact is that worry can stop you from being proactive. When we worry, we may experience one or more of the following symptoms: begin to get warm, sweat, shake quietly, experience a cold shiver run down the neck and feel the hair on arms stand to attention.

You can learn to zap excessive worry with the following tips

1. *Recognize when you are worrying: It takes practice to recognize the pattern but over time you will become proficient in noticing when you are worrying. Worry is a greedy energy and if you let it run unchecked, it will take as much of your attention as you let it.*

2. *Self-talk: Once you are able to identify that you are worrying, experiment with this strategy: In your mind, respond to the worry with something like this: "Thank you for sharing. I appreciate your concern. But there is nothing more to be done right now, so I'm going to stop thinking about this." Then get yourself to focus on something else. Sooner or later, the worry will return. Repeat the above. This is an iterative process.*

3. *Create worry time & zones: Pick a specific location for your worry party and limit yourself to this location for worrying. Do your rants/raves only in this place and for the time you have specified. That's right; there is a time limit to the moaning / groaning! Make sure the zone is not a place where you spend most of your time or has other people in it. Keep the office as cheerful as possible.*

4. *Make connections: Be part of something larger than yourself. Connect with organizations, family, friends and neighborhood. By increasing your connections in life, you will increase feeling of strength and reduce sense of vulnerability.*

5. *Stay in the moment: Being aware and staying in the moment is a good antidote to worry. Since worry often has to do with the future and sometimes the past, staying in the moment means there's nothing to worry about. Take a deep breath, and get a feel of where you are now. Where are you sitting? What's around you? Are you warm, or cool? Notice what's going on right now - In this moment.*

6. *Hope for the Best & Prepare for the Worst: A positive attitude works wonders and prevents us from falling into the dark pit of worry. Write down the daily blessings life bestows on you. It's a remarkable tool for helping us see the cup as half full. At the same time, prepare yourself to accept the worst by identifying the worst-case scenario. Then, set out to improve upon the worst-case result. Meanwhile, ask yourself, "Just how likely is this worst-case scenario?"*

7. *Take action: Often just deciding to take the action can loosen worry's grip on you. Do the things you're avoiding and you'll find that, rather than worry about them, you can cope with them.*

8. *Question yourself: Ask yourself the following types of questions: "Is my worrying realistic or unrealistic?" "Productive or non-productive?" If you've been worrying constantly for years and your worry appears to be deep rooted; consider talking to your Stress Counselor or a Mental Health Professional (Prachi, 2008).*

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