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Occupational Stress Of Employees In Food Industries – A Theoretical Study

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Abstract - A person might feel under pressure if the demands of their job are greater than they can comfortably manage. Occupational stress is the negative psychological and physical impact of workplace pressures, environment, or responsibilities in employees. It can result from a worker's inability to perform their job due to a lack of resources or capability. Occupational stress can lead to long term health effect throughout the development of psychological behavioral or psychological strains. This paper represents the occupational stress lifestyle of the employees working in food industry sectors and measures to prevent them from stress.

Key words: Occupational, Work place, psychological strains, measures, stress

I. INTRODUCTION

Food industries play a major role in providing food, job opportunities and economic growth. It also helps us to ensure food security and public health. In food industries, pressure at the workplace is always unavoidable due to the demands of the organisation or contemporary work environment. Occupational pressure in food industries perceived as acceptable by an individual, may keep workers alert and motivated, able to work and learn, depending on the available resources and personal characteristics. However, when that pressure becomes excessive it leads to stress. Stress can damage an employees' health and their performance in work. Occupational stress in food industry is significant issue, often stemming from high demands tight deadlines, physical strain, and potential lack of control over work processes, leading to burnout and possible negative mental health outcomes. The fast paced nature of the food industry, especially during peak hours, can create immense pressure to prepare the food product quickly without sacrificing quality. Food industry tasks often involve physically demanding tasks, such as standing for long period of time, lifting heavy objects and repetitive actions. When it comes to food safety concerns, ensuring food safety and adhering to strict regulations can be stressful, particularly when faced with potential consequences for non-compliance.

What is Occupational stress?

Occupational stress is the response that people have when dispense with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability.

- Occupational stress occurs in a broad range of working circumstances but it is often made substandard when employees feel they receive lesser support from co-workers and higher officials.

- There is often a confusion between the pressure of task assigned or challenge and occupational stress which sometimes can be used as an excuse for bad management practice.

Occupational stress can be caused by impoverished work organisation, by poor work design and management (for example, lack of control over work processes), unsatisfactory working conditions, and lack of support from colleagues and supervisors (ILO, 2021)¹. Recent research findings observe that the most stressful type of work is that which values excessive demands and pressures that are not matched to workers' knowledge and abilities, where there is small opportunity to exercise any choice or control, and where there is little support from other co-workers. Employees are less likely to experience occupational stress when demands and pressures of work are matched to their knowledge and abilities, the control can be exercised over their work and the way they execute it, the support can be received from colleagues and participation in decisions that concern their jobs is provided.

II. MAJOR STRESS FACTORS IN FOOD INDUSTRIES

A. Excessive Workloads

In food industries, each employee has been assigned with different set of workloads in order to complete the task successfully. Individual workloads play a vital role in the growth of food industries annual production per year. But when the workload has been dispensed unevenly, the employee comes under the direct contact with stress as the work assigned to him was completely mismatched. This also occurs when there is a lack of human resource recruitment shortage in the management.

B. Recruitment Shortages

Due to lack of human resource recruitment, the existing employees not only face physical health problems but also they have forced to face all the possible mental illness such as pressure and hypertension. In food industries, all employees are racing against time due to lack of employee shortage which also impacts the growth of production. In this factor of stress in food industry, salary has been shown as the core reason for the human resource shortage as the designated income is not satisfied compared to the task assigned by the management or organization.

C. Lack of Team work/support

Any food industries production depends on the major twin factors such as dedication and teamwork. Improper support or lack of team work can cause not only affects the production margin but also the mental health of the employee by reducing the enthusiasm and dedication in completing the given task or job by the higher officials.

D. Pay and Shifts

Occupational stress condition of an employee also depends upon the salary of the person and their time period of work. The monthly income of the employee should match the job role at the particular time period assigned by the organization or food industry. If not, the employee goes under an extreme mind frustration that leads to unmet expectations, inability to control situations, irritability, anxiety and other mental health conditions. Most importantly, the Amygdala, the part of the brain that deals with emotions, becomes highly active, potentially intensifying the feeling.

E. Lack of Work control

“Lack of control” has been shown as a key driver of burnout in workplace research. While burnout and depression are two different conditions, many of the symptoms present in the same way such as sleep disturbances, agitation, decreased concentration and performance, etc. Even though, some levels of stress at work are experienced by all the employees normally, the incidence of workplace burnout increases when some employees are given limited control over their workspace and individual role. A lack of work control,

or feeling powerless and constrained in workspace can lead to reduced motivation, reduced creativity, increased level of stress, burnout, health problems and other behavioural symptoms.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN FOOD INDUSTRIES

Occupational stress is stated like electricity. If the electricity voltage is set up at right volts, it can make the electric bulb light up and provide a brilliant illumination. Such glow-up quality in an employee helps the person to properly channel their stress, resulting in a feeling of fulfilled job satisfaction, work efficiency, creativity and better adjustment to workspace and life. But, if the electric voltage that receive is higher than the actual capacity, it bursts out the electric bulb. Therefore, the occupational burnout is the harmful effect of stress resulting in health deterioration, ineffectiveness, irritation, exhaustion, inaction, and a group of other problems. Generally, employees with roles requiring continuous work and direct contact with people (teachers, trainers, salesmen, personnel roles) experience burnout more than employees with less direct contact with people (Antony Joe Raja et al., 2015)². Mechanical roles and high routines can also produce burnout. Stress is a natural experience, which can be managed properly, that will help in the growth, change, development and performance of the individual, both at work and at home. However, the magnitude of the challenges of workspace stress is apparent within a swathe of stress literatures (McVicar et al., 2013) but the eminent sources that have been found to be the sources of occupational stress are those dimensions concerning the content and context of work (Zhang et al., 2019)³.

As a result, the derived benefits of the human resource is considered adverse in proportion to the input in performance and cognitive abilities, predetermined strain outcomes such as low morale, poor health, burnouts manifesting in form of absenteeism, emotional exhaustion, negative affective conditions, depersonalisation and reduced work accomplishment and eventual withdrawal intentions are imminent. Increasingly, firm stress has also been found to have a spill over effect into nonworking domains of individuals with high propensities of causing family problems equally, personal health issues and other plethora of life crises (Chen et al., 2018)⁴. From the foregoing considerations, the interrelated factors that causes stress within the work area, evidence found in literature suggests that work stress can negatively impact both organisational and extra-organisational outcomes. Occupational stress has become a growing concern because it is found to have significant economic implications for the organisations and bad publicity (Kelloway et al., 2008). Thus, where an individual's intrinsic characteristics of hard work demands is not reciprocated with adequate appreciation in the form of financial entitlement (like salary or bonuses), work security, career and esteem progression, then it is likely to obtain negative emotions and sustained employee's occupational stress.

A. Mental Health Problems

At workspace due to random scenario which risks to mental health, also called psychosocial risks, may be related to job content or work schedule, specific characteristics of the workplace or opportunities for career development among other things.

Mental health risks at workspace include:

- a) under-use of skills
- b) excessive workloads
- c) long or inflexible hours
- d) lack of control over work
- e) unsafe or poor physical working conditions
- f) organizational culture that enables negative behaviours
- g) limited support from co-workers
- h) discrimination
- i) undefined individual role
- j) job insecurity or inadequate pay
- k) conflicting work demands.

These employees often operate in unprotected working environments, work long hours, have little or no access to social or financial protections and face discrimination, all of which subvert mental health. However, socio-emotional risks are found in all food industry sectors, some of the employees are more likely to be exposed to them than others because of their work performed at all given tasks. Health based, humanitarian or emergency employees have tasks that carry a high risk of adverse events, which will provide a negatively impact in each and every employee's mental health (Greenhaus et al, 2003)⁵ Setting of an occupation can elaborate on a wider issue that negatively impact and affect mental health of an employee such as inequality and discrimination based on factors such as, gender identity, race, sex, social origin, religion, age or migrant status. Employees who suffer with critical mental health conditions are most likely to be excluded from employment and experience inequality at work. Sometimes, being out of work for long period of time suddenly also grant access a risk to mental health. Unemployment, financial insecurity, and recent job loss are the major risk factors for suicide attempts among the employees in food industries.

B. Physical Health Problems

Occupational stress can also have a harmful impact on physical health. A study by (Li et al., 2018)³ observes that occupational stress was connected with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease among employees in the food industry. Another study by (Tsurugano et al., 2018) found that occupational stress was accompanied with a high risk of hypertension among Japanese employees who works in industry sectors. (Choi et al., 2019)⁹ examined the association between occupational stress and metabolic syndrome among Korean employees. The authors found that occupational stress was significantly associated with an increased risk of metabolic syndrome, a high risk factor for cardiovascular diseases, such as high blood pressure, high blood sugar, and abdominal obesity. (Kouvonen et al., 2018) investigated that the association between habitual workplace or occupational stress and insufficient physical activity among the public sector employees. An increased risk of insufficient physical activity, a risk factor for various physical health issues, including cardiovascular disease has been observed in the food industries at recent times. (Lee et al., 2019)⁸ studied the relationship between occupational stress and gastrointestinal symptoms which has been observed among Korean employees. (Katherine Pollak et al., 2008)⁶ They found that occupational stress was crucially related with gastrointestinal symptoms, such as abdominal pain, bloating, and indigestion, which can have a negative impact on physical health and well-being especially for the employees working in food industries at appropriate timings and shifts.

C. Reduced Job Satisfaction

There are many workspace behaviours observed by the employees when they are dissatisfied with their given tasks or workspace. Here are some of those indicators:

- a) Hesitation of work – Employees who avoid their work may be silently wishing that the assigned work would be undone or finished by someone. Some employees who are dissatisfied with their work will waste the allotted time given to them to complete the given tasks and then make excuses. When someone spends minimal time into preparing for and carrying out their work, the results obtained are mediocre. Unfortunately, hesitation of work is common in food industries due to many economical or financial reasons such as insufficient salary.
- b) Lack of eagerness – When employees lack of interest or eagerness in working hours they seem to be disinterested and they do not spend energy into completing their given targets. We may notice that they can be easily distracted by their smart phones, chatting with co-workers by keeping their tasks pending, wandering from their proper workspace which affects the quality of the product manufactured especially in food industries. They may also be busy in investing time to their personal business during work hours or express a boredom attitude.
- c) Declining performance – When employees aren't devoted to their jobs especially in food industries, they are bound to put in less effort, which results in lesser output. In this case, the work of the employee may be delayed as they don't spend their knowledge and abilities into their work with fulfilment. Such employees have a unconcerned attitude and always wishes to do only the bare minimal tasks instead of giving their best in class performance for the work to be completed successfully such as achieve the production target of the month etc.

- d) Tardiness – When employees are not satisfied with their assigned targets, they cannot be motivated to carry out their respective responsibilities with them. Such employees have a habit of early departures and irregular arrivals during peak times of the organization for example, purchase period of a food industry. Instead of being at work on time, a dissatisfied employee always wishes to stay at home and escape from the given work. Such activities represent into absenteeism of employee. This stress factor is often observed in food industries nowadays.
- e) Stress and negativity – Each and every work will have different types of tense scenario moments, but dissatisfied employees are likely to be stressed out often on a regular basis due to incapability of handling the upcoming pressure in the organization. Those employees will feel negative about their role and the workplace they work and become irritable with low contentment. They may complain more than others for example, often about the food developing projects, Quality managers, clients, or co-workers.

D. Absenteeism

(Shi et al., 2018)¹⁰ examined the prevalence of job stress and burnout among healthcare workers in China. The authors found that job stress and burnout were prevalent among the participants and that job demands, lack of control, and social support were significant predictors of job stress and burnout. (Wang & Zhao et al., 2016)⁷ investigates the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between job stress and intention to leave among township health inspectors in China. The result shows that job stress was negatively associated with job satisfaction and positively associated with intention to leave, and that job satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between job stress and intention to leave.

E. Burnout

Occupational stress can lead to burnout and emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion. A study by (Chen et al., 2018)⁴ found that occupational stress was a significant predictor of burnout among employees in the service industry. They found that occupational stress was associated with increased emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization. A study has been examined that the associations between occupational stress or burnout, and well-being among manufacturing employees who worked in food industries at South Korea. Occupational stress was found to be positively associated with burnout and negatively associated with well-being. (Shechter et al., 2020)¹¹ investigated the relationship between burnout, fatigue, and turnover intentions among information technology professionals. It confirmed that burnout and fatigue were significant predictors of turnover intentions, with emotional exhaustion being the strongest predictor. (Sood et al., 2021)¹² examined about the burnout occurred among the healthcare professionals in India during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that healthcare professionals have experienced a high levels of emotional exhaustion, and reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization, all components of burnout.

IV. THE CONCLUSION

Occupational stress is a serious and most notable issue with far-reaching consequences for both employees and food organizations in future. By understanding the causes and impacts of occupational stress in food industries, employees can work together to create healthier and more supportive work environments. This includes implementing stress management strategies, providing adequate resources and support, and fostering a culture of open communication and respect. Hereby, an attempt is made to provide an overview of the occupational stress factors of the employees which could tell about the critical health effects and occupational characteristics in food industry sectors. Thus, occupational stress has to be cured with some preventive steps in order to prevent reduction of productivity and efficiency, a decline in job satisfaction, morale and cohesion and increase absenteeism in each and every food industry.

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