

STRESS LEVEL MANAGEMENT AMONG IT EMPLOYEES DURING LOCKDOWN: A CASE STUDY OF KOCHI CITY

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ABSTRACT:

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns forced significant changes in work environments, particularly within the IT sector. This study explores the stress levels experienced by IT employees in Kochi during the lockdown period, focusing on factors contributing to stress, its impact on work performance, and the strategies employed to manage it. The research was conducted through a structured questionnaire, with data collected from 120 respondents. The findings suggest that while most employees experienced heightened stress due to increased workloads and remote working challenges, various coping strategies.

Keywords: *Stress management, Work performance*

INTRODUCTION:

Stress is a prevalent issue in modern work environments, particularly in the high-pressure IT industry. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this issue, as IT employees were suddenly required to transition to remote working conditions. This shift brought about unique challenges, such as balancing work with home responsibilities, technological constraints, and a lack of social interaction. This study aims to investigate how these challenges impacted the stress levels of IT employees in Kochi and how they managed their stress during this period.

Definition and Nature of Stress: Stress is defined as an adaptive response to external pressures that are perceived as challenging or threatening to an individual's well-being. It can manifest in various physical and psychological forms, affecting an individual's performance, health, and personal life. In the IT sector, stress is often caused by factors such as tight deadlines, long working hours, and rapid technological changes.

Stress in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: The pandemic introduced new stressors for IT employees, including the need to quickly adapt to remote work, manage increased workloads, and navigate the blurring lines between personal and professional life. The lack of physical separation between work and home, coupled with the uncertainty of the pandemic, further contributed to elevated stress levels.

Importance of Stress Management: Effective stress management is crucial for maintaining employee well-being and productivity. Organizations that prioritize stress management can reduce absenteeism, improve job satisfaction, and foster a healthier work environment. During the lockdown, stress management became even more critical as employees faced unprecedented challenges.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study utilized a descriptive research design, focusing on the stress levels of IT employees in Kochi during the lockdown. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire that included questions related to the causes of stress, its impact on work performance, and the coping strategies used by employees.

Data Collection and Sampling: The sample size for the study was 120 respondents, selected using convenience sampling. The primary data was collected through online surveys, while secondary data was gathered from existing literature on stress management and the impact of COVID-19 on the IT sector.

Statistical Tools Used: The data was analyzed using various statistical tools, including percentage analysis, correlation tests, chi-square tests, and ANOVA. These tools helped identify significant relationships between variables and provided insights into the factors contributing to stress and the effectiveness of different coping strategies.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Demographic Profile of Respondents: The majority of respondents were young professionals aged below 30, with a balanced representation of genders. Most respondents had less than five years of experience in the IT sector and were working from home during the lockdown.

Stress Levels During Lockdown: The study found that 95% of respondents experienced significant stress during the lockdown. The primary causes of stress included increased workloads, lack of proper work-life balance, and technological challenges. Most employees reported feeling overwhelmed by the sudden shift to remote work, which often required longer hours and greater responsibility.

Impact on Work Performance: Stress had a notable impact on the work performance of IT employees. Many respondents reported decreased productivity, difficulty concentrating, and a higher likelihood of making mistakes. The lack of social interaction and support from colleagues further exacerbated these issues, leading to feelings of isolation and burnout.

Coping Strategies: Despite the high levels of stress, many respondents employed effective coping strategies to manage their stress. These included regular physical activity, such as walking or exercising, engaging in hobbies, and maintaining social connections through virtual means. Meditation and relaxation techniques were also commonly used to alleviate stress.

DISCUSSION

The Role of Remote Work in Stress Management: Remote work played a dual role in stress management during the lockdown. On one hand, it allowed employees greater flexibility and comfort. On the other hand, it blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, leading to increased stress. The study highlights the need for organizations to implement clear policies and provide support to employees working remotely to help them manage their stress effectively.

Gender Differences in Stress Experience: The analysis revealed some gender differences in stress experiences, with female employees reporting slightly higher levels of stress than their male counterparts. This could be attributed to the additional responsibilities many women faced at home during the lockdown, such as childcare and household chores. Organizations need to consider these differences and provide targeted support to help all employees manage their stress.

Long-term Implications of Stress: The long-term implications of stress during the lockdown could be significant if not addressed properly. Chronic stress can lead to serious health issues, such as cardiovascular diseases, mental health disorders, and decreased immune function. It is essential for organizations to recognize these risks and implement comprehensive stress management programs to support their employees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- **Implement Flexible Work Policies:** Organizations should consider implementing flexible work policies that allow employees to manage their time effectively and reduce stress.
- **Provide Access to Mental Health Resources:** Providing employees with access to mental health resources, such as counseling services and stress management workshops, can help them cope with stress more effectively.
- **Encourage Regular Breaks and Physical Activity:** Encouraging employees to take regular breaks and engage in physical activity can help reduce the physical and mental toll of stress.
- **Foster a Supportive Work Environment:** Creating a supportive work environment where employees feel valued and connected can help reduce feelings of isolation and improve overall well-being.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the COVID-19 lockdown significantly impacted the stress levels of IT employees in Kochi. While the transition to remote work was necessary, it brought about new challenges that many employees struggled to manage. The findings underscore the importance of effective stress management strategies and the need for organizations to provide ongoing support to their employees. By addressing the causes of stress and promoting healthy work practices, organizations can help their employees maintain their well-being and productivity, even in challenging times.

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