

The Effectiveness of Stress Management Interventions on Reducing Occupational Stress: A Study with Special Reference to an Apparel Firm in Sri Lanka

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Keywords: *Stress management; Occupational stress; Effectiveness.*

Introduction

It has been identified through many research projects that workplace stress is unavoidable and it brings adverse effects to the individual employees as well as to the productivity of the organization they work for. Presently, there is a growing recognition of work-stress as an important occupational health problem. Health based occupational stress contributes to an increasing proportion of worker compensation claims, health care, disability, absenteeism and productivity losses (Agrawal, 2001 and Arnold, 2010).

The apparel industry is a growing sector which contributes immensely for the growth of the Sri Lankan economy through foreign currency earnings along with employment and many other positive effects (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 1997). It is marked as an area which carries a high rate of stress related issues regarding work practices and the working environment (Fonseka, 2006). It mainly causes occupational health problems and productivity losses. These issues have not been properly addressed in the Sri Lankan context and some research questions still remain unsolved. For example, “Do firms make enough effort to manage stress of their employees? Another issue is that “is there enough awareness created by the organizations

regarding stress management and how the workers cope up with their stress?” Accordingly, this study focuses on these issues and mainly concentrates on occupational stress and stress management interventions in apparel industry.

Objective

The main objective of this study is to identify the effectiveness of stress management intervention on reducing occupational stress among the machine operators in an apparel firm in Pallekelle Industrial Zone in Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Accordingly, this study hypothesis: **H₀** - stress interventions do not have impact in managing stress of the employees in apparel industry; **H₁** – stress interventions have impact in managing stress of the employees in apparel industry.

Methodology

The study uses the form of exploratory research where both quantitative and qualitative techniques are adopted. The study had chosen a garment factory located in the Palekelle Industrial Zone under the Board of Investment (BOI) projects of Sri Lanka. It is manufacturing and exporting “intimate-wear”. By adapting a convenient sampling technique, a sample of 10% of the workers was selected from the population; Total sample consists of 76 machine operators and they were equally divided in to two groups; experimental group and control group. In addition, secondary data was collected through internal reports and various publications of the firm, annual reports of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, electronic media and other publications.

Questionnaire was used to collect primary data which consists of the “Likert scale” questions where the respondents were selected and answer from a series of statements i.e: strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, strongly agree; where, high scale score is 5, which is strongly agree and that indicates higher level of occupational stress. Interviews were conducted with the management and the respondents prior and after the stress interventions. Group wise comparisons were done using pre-test and post-test designs to analyse the effectiveness of the stress management interventions. The paired t-test is used to test the effectiveness of stress management interventions by comparing the values of means from the pre-test and the post-test conditions of the experimental group and the control group.

Results and Discussion

Pre-test- Post-test analysis: The reliability check verified the accurate representation of the population of this study. It is marked as $\alpha = 0.7$ for pre-test and $\alpha = 0.6$ for post-test. The independent sample t- test carried out to test stress level of the employees by pre and post-test approaches for the experimental group shows a mean of 2.47 for pre-test and a mean of 2.06 for post-test. It is evident that a moderate change has taken place in the measures and the means are statistically different.

t- Test results for pre-test condition: $t = 0.41, df = 74, p = 0.68$

t- Test results for post-test condition: $t = -3.8, df = 74, p = 0.001$

As shown above, the p-value for pre-test condition is greater than 0.05, which means that H_0 can not be rejected. Therefore, no variability is found in pre-test level between the both experimental and control groups. So, the stress level is the same before the interventions. But the p-value for the post-test condition is marked at 0.001, which is much fewer than 0.05. Therefore, H_0 can be rejected. It indicates that there is significant difference in stress levels between both groups after

the stress management intervention made with the experimental group. So, the results emphasize that stress management interventions significantly reduce the stress of the employees in the apparel industry.

The Figure 1 in Annexure A shows that the pre-test and post-test measures of self-ranked stress levels and job satisfaction levels. It further indicates that a significant change has taken place among the employees, those are in the “Extremely stressed” level along with moderate changes in the other factors.

According to Figure 2 in Annexure A, the dissatisfaction level of the employees have dropped while their satisfaction levels have increased which confirms the stress interventions were able to influence on the improvement of the satisfaction levels of the employees which has a positive effect on individual wellbeing and organizational productivity.

The results of the analysis confirm that stress interventions are effective and it is worthy to have such concepts to manage the inescapable stress of the workers. The comments given by the respondents and the managerial staff clearly express how contented the respondents were about the stress interventions. It shows that the management seems to acknowledge that stress interventions are an effective technique that can be used in an organization to manage stress.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Survey findings clearly indicate that the stress interventions made a statistically significant change in reducing and managing stress management of the workers in the apparel firm. Qualitative information gathered through interviews supports the fact that interventions have an effect in reducing stress and altering the thoughts of the employees to take away unconstructive emotions that influence work negatively. Therefore, the study recommends that stress

management interventions should be used in organizations rather than providing health care when the issue is severe. It is also advisable to develop the cognitions and stress management skills of the employees which would pull them away from mental and physical ill health. The research emphasizes, rather than helping the employees when they are in a state that requires medical attention it is very much appropriate to create a “improved psychological state” that would facilitate them to cope and survive better.

References

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Annexure A

Figure 1: Comparison of the Self Ranked Stress Levels

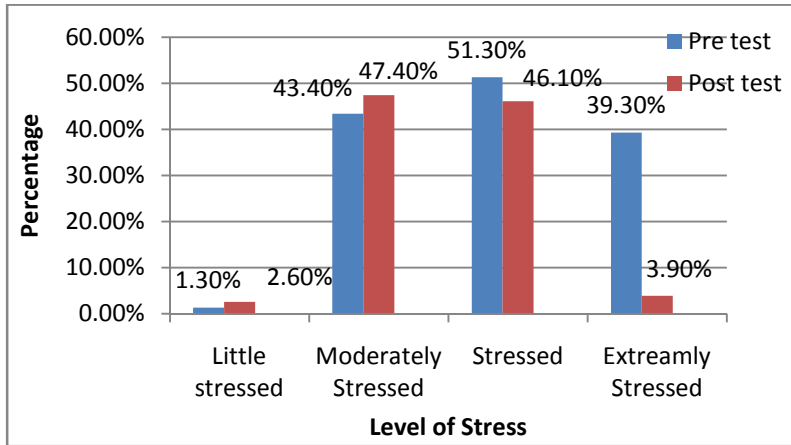


Figure 2: Comparison of the Self Ranked Job Satisfaction Levels

