

**A CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON COPING STRATEGIES TO REDUCE
OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG INDIAN SOLDIERS UNDER PERSONNEL
BELOW OFFICER RANK**

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Abstract

The paper aims to study the ways in which occupational stress, generally faced in organizations and a matter of growing concern, can be reduced. Personalities can broadly be categorized into two groups ie, optimistic and pessimistic. Individuals in each of these categories exhibit different approaches to life situations. These approaches can further be classified into two parts, individual level and organizational level. The Indian Army has also employed a few methods to handle the stress it experiences in the organization such as liberalized strategies, setting up of educational institutions, enhanced salary packages, cordiality in the officer-soldier relationship, better travelling facilities, improved family accommodation amenities, organizing various awareness seminars, counseling programs etc. Here, an effort is made to survey the various approaches that the Indian soldiers adopt to lower the level of occupational stress with special reference to PBOR (Personnel Below Officer Rank).

Key Words: *occupational stress, optimistic, pessimistic, Indian Army, PBOR*

1.1 Introduction

Stress is inevitable to life and can, in no uncertain terms, be deemed as entirely bad. However, it is also evident that the excess of it can have far-reaching physical and psychological consequences on the health of the individual. A concerted endeavor to control, reduce or learn to endure the threats causing stress is known as coping. It is a self-motivated, circumstantial reaction to stress. Coping can also be defined as a set of tangible responses to stressful incidents that are meant to solve the problem and lower stress. It also refers to altering the intellectual and behavioral efforts to surmount, reduce or endure the internal or external pressures that evolve out of a traumatic situation. Our outlook towards stress often relies greatly on stringent deep-rooted beliefs, based on the circumstances we find ourselves in. In order to handle stress, we are often required

to review the way we think and discover newer coping approaches. Coping helps the individual to handle or correct a problem and control the emotional response to that problem.

A weakened immune response and the declining activity of natural killer cells are often the main cause for the inability to cope effectively with stress. Individuals display inherent differences in the coping techniques they employ to manage stressful circumstances, which include both veiled and unveiled activities. A detailed research on the coping mechanism based on different personalities reveals that there are mainly two types of persons i.e., optimistic and pessimistic and the means used to deal with stress vary from person to person. The prominent techniques implemented by optimistic persons are problem convergence, subduing competitive tendencies and obtaining encouragement from family and friends. In pessimistic personalities, the methods that are commonly observed are that of denial or detachment, distancing from the goal and concentrating on the outpour of emotions.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The PBOR category of the Indian Army has shown high levels of Occupational stress, since it is the group under operational level. The causes of such occupational stress in this category are namely weak inter personal relationship, lack of officers, unavailability of speedy legal system, inefficient direction, poor mental fitness of professionals, deficient service of spiritual counselors, denial of leave at the required time etc. Hence, significant moves are needed to lower or inhibit these occupational stress indicators.

1.3 Significance of the study

A report in the Times of India mentioned of a substantial rise in suicides and fratricides that occur in the Indian army. Most of these unfortunate events take place in the PBOR category, because of which many strategies were implemented to lower or avoid occupational stress. However, no detailed research has been carried out hitherto, in this area. Hence the study on the coping mechanism of occupational stress among PBOR is greatly pertinent.

1.4 Objectives of the study

1.4.1 To ascertain the customary practices used to lower occupational stress.

1.4.2 To identify the coping mechanism used by the Indian army to reduce occupational stress.

1.5 Research Methodology

Study is descriptive in nature and is solely built on different appraisals of literature.

Theoretical structure on coping mechanism of occupational stress

2.1 Customary Stress Management Methods Deployed in Organizations

Stress is a disguised assassin and is a predominant cause for physical illness and disease. Hypertension, heart disease, ulcers, diabetes and even cancer are allied to stress. The problem has

only critically intensified due to the lifestyle changes attributed to modern life. A few of these prescriptions are:

1. Relaxation Techniques: It is an effective method that helps in reducing symptoms of stress and lowers the incidence of illnesses such as high blood pressure and heart disease. Usually, such relaxation begins at the lower part of the body and moves up to the facial muscles in such a way that the whole body is calmed. Deep breathing and muscle relaxation are advised to calm the body and relax the mind.

2. Meditation: Meditation implies a series of acquired techniques for redirecting of thought that creates a modified state of cognizance. It requires such deep concentration that the person who is meditating becomes oblivious of any external stimuli and attains an altered state of consciousness.

3. Biofeedback: This is a process of controlling and lowering the physiological effects of stress by supplying a feedback about the existing physiological activity and is usually supplemented with training in relaxation. Biofeedback training is carried out in three stages: (a) creating a realization of the specific physiological response (b) learning methods of restraining the physiological response in a calm state (c) and applying that control in the situations of daily life.

4. Creative Imagination: Creative imagination is an individualistic experience that taps the visualizing capacity of the individual. Before visualizing, one must determine for oneself a convincing aim, as it helps develop one's self-reliance. This diminishes the possibility of unnecessary thoughts intruding upon the mind and supplies the innovation that is required for converting an imagined scene into reality.

4. Exercise: Exercise can deliver an effective channel for the physiological stimulus faced due to stress. Work-outs, on a daily basis, enhances the working of the heart, boosts the functioning of the lungs, sustains lowered blood pressure, decreases fat in the blood and enhances the body's immune system. In short, stress is greatly reduced by physical activities such as swimming, walking, running, cycling, skipping, etc. A regular practice of these exercises at least four times a week, each of 30 minutes duration, is one of the highly recommended techniques to control stress. Each session must also have a warm-up, exercise and cool down phases.

5. Time Management: The quality of your life depends largely on the way you engage yourself in. The extent to which an individual is prepared to handle and counter balance the demands of life, and the dexterity with which one can maintain stability in life determines his/her ability to cope with stress. Assertiveness, time management, rational thinking, improving relationships, self-care, and overcoming unhelpful habits such as perfectionism, procrastination, etc. just a few of the many life skills that can be absorbed and implemented to help overcome the tests of life.

6. Assertiveness: Assertiveness is a trait or skill that helps to reveal, explicitly and

assertively, our emotions, requirements, desires, and thoughts. It is the ability to say 'no' to a pressure. A key principle of reducing time stress is to modify one's discernment of time. Spending one's time in doing the things that he values, or that prod him on to achieve his goals is the pivotal rule of time management. It relies heavily on being credible about what you know and doing it within the prescribed time framework, avoiding all thoughts that cause anxiety and making positive statements.

7. Improving Relationships: This comprises of three vital skills: (a) giving a listening ear to the other person (b) giving expressions to your thoughts and feelings (c) accepting the other person's opinions and feelings, even if they differ from your own. It also means giving up misplaced jealousy and a sulking attitude.

8. Self-care: Caring for one's own self by keeping ourselves healthy, fit and relaxed, we will know what we want to do, and organize our life to strike an effective balance between the two.

9. Rational Thinking: A lot of stress-related complications result from inappropriate thinking. There exists a close link between the way you think and the way you feel. In a stressed situation, our inbuilt selective bias tends to engage in unpleasant thoughts and images from the past, which affect our insight of the present and the future.

10. Diet: Medical science suggests that the secret of healthy living is to eat three well-balanced and wholesome meals daily. The nutritional requirement of an individual depends on his activity level, genetic structure, climate, and health history. A balanced diet can brighten one's disposition, revitalize a person, nourish the muscular system, improve circulation, inhibit sicknesses, toughen the immune system and enable one to cope with the stresses of life in a better way.

11. Positive Approach: The reasons for a positive attitude are: having quite a precise opinion of reality; a goal-oriented outlook of life and duty; acceptance and an open mind for different standpoints of others; accepting recognition for success and responsibility for failure. But most important of all is to be open to novel ideas and have a good sense of humor, being able to laugh at oneself. These will help us to remain focused, and view things from the correct angle.

12. Positive Thinking: The power of positive thinking has been lately accepted among wider circles as an effective prescription for lowering and coping with stress. Optimism, which is the tendency to hope for positive results, has been closely associated to the physical and emotional well-being of the individual.

13. Social Support: Social support can be described as the presence and accessibility of people whom we can trust, people who are concerned about, appreciate, and love us. A person who is of the belief that she/he fits into a social network of communication and mutual indebtedness will enjoy social support.

2.2 Strategies for controlling stress

2.2.1 Organizational strategy

- Employee health and welfare: These involve different types of health examination, health enhancement activities, counseling on health-related issues and providing decent well-being services, i.e. sanitation, washroom and bathroom facilities, canteens etc.
- Administrative style: The administration should essentially employ a philosophy that is considerate and approachable in every aspect that affects the staff. In addition, this should be supplemented with effective communication systems.
- Change management: Organizations, in general, undergo changes from time to time. It is imperative for the management to understand that change, in any form, is one of the most prominent reasons for stress at work. Hence, a well-chalked out system of communication of the happenings of the organization must be maintained and any modifications should be well taken care of at all levels. This would abolish the possible stressful effects of change.
- Specialist activity: Specialist activities, like those encompassing the recruitment and training of staff, should consider the possibility for stress in certain jobs. Training should be imparted to the employees to identify the stressful components in their work and the techniques available for coping with these stressors. Moreover, economic principles should be the founding principles of job design and work organization.

2.2.2 Individual strategy

- Discovering new skills for coping with the stress.
- Availing assistance through counseling and other measures.
- Receiving social support.
- Embracing a healthier way of life and living style.
- Benefiting from medical aid of prescribed drugs whenever needed, for a restricted period.

2.3 Steps taken by Indian Army to reduce occupational stress

- Relaxed leave guidelines to their employees.
- More frequent provision of free permits to home towns.
- Maximum endowment of government family accommodation in peace areas by completing married accommodation schemes.
- Improved officer - soldier communication.

- Setting up of rest and recoup centers in operational areas.
- Enhanced pay revision.
- Heightening of allowances.
- Founding educational establishments under Army welfare education society.
- Instituting placement cells at regimental centers for more developed post retirement prospects.
- Establishment of efficient and speedier grievances redressal systems by setting up Armed forces Tribunals.
- Setting up of railway booking centers and online train reservation at unit level, doing away with the use of warrants/concession forms.
- Creating a pool of trained counselors at unit level by continual training programs for PBOR's at psychiatric centers.

3.1 Findings and Conclusion

Since stress is an important cause for physical and mental illnesses, it has been rightly described as a silent killer. Health concern like hypertension, heart disease, ulcers, diabetes and even cancer are related to stress. The ever growing modern day changes in lifestyle also intensify the stress factor. Therefore, suitable coping strategies are required to surmount this occupational stress which involves utmost care both at the organizational and individual levels. From the details furnished above, we realize that the Indian Army must take critical steps to safeguard its soldiers from the threat of stress, a few of which are listed below:

- Incorporating revisions in pay scale.
- Providing increased and improved family accommodations in peace stations.
- Offering valuable counseling to the persons suffering from occupational stress.
- Organizing fitness-oriented exercises, festive celebrations and family get-togethers
- Conducting awareness programs, distributing training aids etc.
- PBOR category is engaged in jobs, involving high occupational stress. Hence, necessary actions are taken by the army to reduce stress among its soldiers.

Suggestions

- A suitable supervisory system has to be initiated regularly to ascertain whether these measures are rightly implemented.
- From the reviews and interactions with army personnel, I perceived that no active cell exists to solve the work demands of the military personnel. Therefore, it would

be advisable to set up a counseling center with the view of working out a solution to the above mentioned problem.

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