

Stress: The Workplace under Pressure

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to verify the relation between stress and quality of life in a business enterprise in the city of Três Rios (Rio de Janeiro). Ten employees participated in this research, 60% female and 40% male with an average age of 25 years. Interviews were conducted, the interviewees had the opportunity to mention some questions according to their own perceptions about their level of stress and the general climate of the organization, in order to identify the factors that influence the increase of stress.

Key words: stress, quality of life, workplace.

INTRODUCTION

Along the evolution of capitalist society, the workers were increasingly striving to adapt to the new means of mass production to attend the needs of industries and the constantly evolving technology.

With the pursuit of increased productivity aiming for better performance and competitiveness, companies propagate numerous harms to the physical and mental health of employees. Such damage has significantly increased over the years as employees sacrifice themselves for to the organization.

A research by the International Stress Management Association (ISMA) reported that Brazil ranks 2nd in the stress level, behind only Japan. In Brazil, a significant portion suffer from Burnout syndrome which is defined by an emotional overload caused by exhausting working conditions. It is also revealed that professions requiring interpersonal and direct involvement are the most conducive, in other words, more employees suffer from Burnout disorder.

This article was based on the study about the occupational stress present in the workers routines. It was analyzed the relation between routine in the workplace and the influence on their daily lives inside and outside the organization, based on ten employees interviewed in a retail trade in the city of Três Rios (Rio de Janeiro).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

According to *Revista Exame* in its edition 2015, it was reported the presence of stress in the workers' daily life and it was pointed out several reasons that cause this exhaustion routine. Thus, 51% of employees interviewed complained about task priority issues, 49% cited unrealistic goals and 43% addressed the issue of function distortion. Chiavenato (1994) defined the organizational climate as the psychological atmosphere of the organization itself, and stress can be extremely harmful to the organizational climate.

World Health Organization published an informative article about the risks that work stress causes in employees' lives. Among the many dangers and consequences of this problem in the labor scene, psychosocial issues such as mental disorders, cardiovascular (heart and blood vessels), skeletal muscle (muscle and joints) and reproductive issues are cited. And stress can lead to behavioral problems such as alcoholism, narcotic use, smoking and sleep disorders.

A report from the Atlas da Saúde website showed that a great deal of muscle pain is acquired within the workplace, with repeated movements, forced posture, use of force, high levels of noise that cause some tension. The page also reveals the other path of stress with psychosocial problems: job dissatisfaction, repetitive work, fast pace, low levels of autonomy, and lack of support from colleagues, bosses, and other company employees.

Considering this, one should be aware of the forms of prevention, avoiding risks. After all, the fast pace can pose serious risks to personal life. And in cases where the problems are already in their most acute phase, such as continuous muscle pain, it is recommended to consult a specialist for therapeutic activities, physiotherapy, etc.

Aiming at the well-being of their employees, famous companies have implemented alternatives for their employees to get out of the exhausting environment and relax while still maintaining productivity. Microsoft, the US company that makes software, electronics, and computers, has created meeting areas under trees proposing that they get out of the ordinary and feel more comfortable in a nature-filled environment. Amazon, an e-commerce company, has developed The Sphere, three planted domes with a capacity for 800 employees to "think and work differently". There are low-cost solutions if companies don't want to invest in creating such environments, such as hiking, outdoor meetings like US retailer LL Bean who set up work tents for employees. As a result, even short-term outdoor activities relieve the burden on employees, benefiting their health and the institution as employees with a lighter load become more productive within the workplace.

Marchiori (2008) said that if organization is a social institution, made up of people and defined by their roles and relationships, the existence of work environments that preserve employee satisfaction and respect for the human being is fundamental. Thus, the greater the employee's involvement with the organization, the greater their commitment.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the construction of the article was a qualitative study, where there is a focus on the subjective character of what is being analyzed, there are no objective answers. The proposal is to leave the interviewees free to express their views on the theme, thus seeking to understand the behavior linked to the theme worked. In this case, an interview was conducted, which is a conversation with a certain line of thought related to the topic.

The study started with preparing interviews. To start the interviews, we introduced ourselves and we asked for permission to build the study. After approved, we selected employees of both sexes from different possible positions. A fast search was performed on name, time in organization, age, marital status, among others. Then, following a schedule of questions prepared, the answers were noted individually.

Some employees wondered if there was a need to tell their cases within the workplace, worried that this would entail something for their stay in the company. It was explained about the confidentiality of personal information, so this article will have only the first name.

To build this research, 10 people were interviewed, with the following positions:

Andréia (34 years old) –Visual Merchandising; Paola (22 years old) –Commercial Attendant ; Adriana (29 years old) –Commercial Supervisor; Genilson (23 years old) – Commercial Attendant; Alessandro (27 years old) –Supervisor of Leak Prevention; Mauro (25 years old) –Cashier; Lorena (20 years old) – Cashier; Paulo (37 years old) – Financial Assistant; Emanuella (27 years old) –Manager; Carla (31 years old) –Cashier.

The interviewees are divided into 60% female and 40% male. 4 out of 10 interviewees have less than 7 months experience within the organization, thus 40%. With 1 to 2 years of company we found 40%. Over than 8 years, only 20% of interviewees. 2 of the 10 employees interviewed perform informal activities to complete family income. Of the interviewees, 70% are in higher education, 10% have completed higher education and 20% have completed high school.

RESULTS

For Chiavenato (1999), stress is the set of physical, chemical and mental reactions that an individual suffers from stimuli or stressors in the workplace, therefore, it is characterized by an individual's confrontation with opportunity, restriction or demand. Consequently, it is understood that stress is linked to the confrontation with the desired, that is, the unreached goal. Thus, one of the causes of the employee exhaustion within the work environment turns out to be linked when he can't reach the goals that are intended for him.

Within the trade where interviews were conducted for this article, 50% pointed out the goals as a stressor. Lorena says: "Goals are usually unrealistic, it's not a matter of not being able to do it, it's nobody, nobody reaches" and ends up proposing an alternative to alleviate the situation: "Ending the goals by pressure would alleviate this excessive burden It makes everything worse."

Other negative point of stress stated by the employees were the multiple functions, that is, not only perform the tasks of the position in which they were hired, and the workload that exceeds 8 hours per day. Lorena, when asked about her position, says "I'm a handyman, I don't have just one job." Alessandro reinforces: "It's not just coming and doing what your job requires, it's free time and you're already in another role."

Regarding the workload, 50% of employees reported that they always exceed, that is, they work overtime and, for some, this is a highly negative point because there is no time left for their social life. Genilson says "there's no time left" and "I don't have a quiet day to day with it." Paulo says that his marriage ended because of his work; he was in constant stress, and when he got home it brought constant fights with

his ex-wife, he said: "My wife said we were going to split up. One day I arrived and [...] she said I couldn't take all that stress from work anymore. We got divorced".

Andréia points out about working hours: "It's 8 hours a day, but always goes beyond". Paulo reports that the negative points in the job are all: "It doesn't have a definite, it's a little bit of each one and it becomes ... an exhausting snowball."

Being a trade, the relationship with the public turns the stress routine. Mauro did not mention stress points: "It's not the company, here I know how to abstract everything they throw at me. My stress is with the public and this has no end without closing the store, right? " Alessandro reported, "For me, if I wanted to reduce stress, the solution was to close everything."

Previously, we mentioned the issue of health problems caused by stress, and in this case, Paulo says: "I got high blood pressure by stress. I was hospitalized for 5 days". At this point, 7 out of 10 respondents said they had health problems. Adriana says she developed anxiety due to mental fatigue from stress. It also caused her to end her marriage. Paola is pregnant and says she has heart problems, pressure due to constant stress. Andréia and Alessandro had a similar case, both were in such an exhausting/negative charge that they fainted inside the workplace and medical help was requested.

Among so many stressful points, it was unanimous the coexistence with the co-workers as a positive point. Adriana says: "The work here has increased my worldview. Even though it may increase to realize that some things here are bad, this view was something from here ... it's positive."

Finally, in the scenario of excessive stress, employees look for an escape, something that can relax. At this point, 20% of respondents adhered to alcoholism and smoking as an escape from stress. And the remaining majority (80%) cited activities such as dance, yoga, volleyball and watching TV as an effective way out of the routine stress load.

DISCUSSION

In this field research, the employees presented constant factors of the main reasons for stress in the work environment, namely, the delivery of results in a time stipulated by the organization, psychological pressure, sales goals to be met, demands from their superiors. and the issue of having to deal with the public every day. Another major factor to note is the excessive daily working time that exceeded the workload of 8 hours per day.

According to 90% of interviewees, the most cited complaints were related to health problems, duly caused by excessive stress in the workplace. These include heart problems, high blood pressure, physical and mental tiredness and anxiety crisis.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), stress is not officially considered a disease. However, they have already warned of a possible global epidemic, as 90% of the world's population suffers from stress. Currently, the medical community characterizes stress as a set of emotional and physical symptoms, which can cause several other pathologies.

In the opinion of physician and acupuncturist Ruy Tanigawa, small levels of the stress-stimulating substance in the body, adrenaline and cortisol, have always played a part in the lives of humans, facing a dangerous situation as in defense for the caveman. Such mechanisms stimulate the strengthening of muscles allowing the possibility of fight or flight for the individual.

The problem, however, focuses on constant stress situations in the physiological process of the human organism. The higher increase in cortisol levels may cause some disorders. The psychologist Fatima Bitencourt says: "In the world we live in, we relax less and less and stress more and more," thus requiring means of relaxation after a stressful situation.

Heart Problems: Due to hormonal influences, chronic stress can cause vasoconstriction (or closure) of the main arteries and veins of the heart. This causes reduced blood flow, which increases the heart rate and raises blood pressure. This irregularity in the functioning of the circulatory system may lead to the complication of other equally important organs.

This condition can also cause hardening of the arteries, contribute to the formation of clots, compromise circulation and progress to serious diseases such as stroke and infarction.

High Blood Pressure: Stress increases heart rate, speeds up breathing, releases adrenaline, noradrenaline, and cortisol, putting the body in a state of alertness that to some extent is normal and beneficial to the body, which is ready for action. An overload of these hormones, however, is extremely harmful to health.

Headaches: Many studies have found that stress can contribute to headaches, a condition characterized by pain in the head or neck region. A study of 267 people with chronic headache found that a stressful event preceded the development of chronic headache in about 45% of cases. A larger study showed that increased stress intensity was associated with an increase in the number of headache days experienced per month.

Another study surveyed 150 military service members at a headache clinic, finding that 67% reported that their headaches were triggered by stress, making it the second most common trigger for headache. Daily worries are one of the causes of stress. There is a big difference between thinking and worrying. When we think, we seek to solve problems, but when we worry, we become paralyzed in the same pattern of thinking and this leads to tiredness of your mind and produces headaches.

Stress is a major cause of altered sleep patterns leading to both acute and chronic insomnia. It can be caused by work pressures, family obligations, health problems, depression, anxiety, among other things. A study of 2,483 people found that fatigue was strongly associated with increased stress levels. Another small study found that higher levels of work-related stress were associated with increased sleepiness and restlessness at bedtime. Insomnia is a potentially serious condition that robs your body of the rest, it needs to recover physically, mentally and emotionally. Other factors that may play a role in lowering energy levels include dehydration, low blood sugar, a poor diet, or a hypoactive thyroid (hypothyroidism).

In this survey we had reports of 80% of employees about the harm in their personal lives caused by stress. In addition to all the health problems discussed, cases of fainting in the company that occurred due to all the factors that caused excessive stress and two divorce cases were reported in the interviews.

Bringing work problems home can have a very strong impact on family relationships that, over time, have been happening to many Brazilians, causing many problems in their personal lives. Rush, overwork, extensive workload, charges, deadlines. These are some words that describe the causes for stress symptoms in the workplace. Not to mention the chores, responsibilities with children and other daily activities that add to the concerns of workers and further increase work stress.

The ability to manage stress can not only improve physical and emotional health but can also make the difference between success or failure at work. Some of the employees in this study responded that there were no ways to alleviate this kind of problem, as trade will always be stressful to deal with, while others pointed to positive measures that have been proven by them and that can work. One of the examples most cited by respondents was leisure activities in their free time, such as sports, travel, dance classes, listening to music, hiking, etc. Others only commented on the importance of knowing how to separate personal life from work, and that this would already be the key to alleviate stressors.

With this, we see that all factors related to stress in the workplace, acts in different ways in the life of each individual and that is an individual perspective the way that each one deals with the difficulties that arise in everyday life.

CONCLUSION

Considering the results obtained in this research, it could be noted that there were several similarities regarding the harms that stress has been causing in their lives, and how they were being negatively affected both in the workplace as in their personal lives.

The fact is that stress has always been a root factor in organizations, especially when it comes to trades that, according to our research, have caused health and personal problems, besides the psychological burden of working under pressure and demands from their superiors to achieve set goals and perform well in the company.

Whereas more than 90% of the employees who participated in this survey had questions to complain about numerous issues that covered the theme "Stress in the workplace", we conclude that due to the pursuit of business growth, one ends up forgetting the relationship of the human being with the organization. This way, we can observe a company that is unconcerned with its employees, delimiting them so that they are overwhelmed.

However, through this research it was possible to reflect that some employees listed negative points such as the high daily workload, the exorbitant accomplishment of goals, besides having to fulfill multiple functions. It can be seen then that most workers have the symptoms of a stressful work environment, which is increasingly harming their lives.

Therefore, stress is seen as a problem, as it has detrimental consequences and may hinder employee productivity and personal life. It is critical that companies can support their employees by ensuring that they can put their points of view and measures to reduce stress, as this is a factor that can reach the entire organization and have negative consequences on people lives.

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