

JOB STRESS AND ITS IMPACT ON WORKFORCE: A REVIEW

Author's Name: ¹Simrah Ahmed ²Renuka Prasad

Affiliation: ¹Assistant Professor, Hansraj College, University of Delhi, India

²Assistant Professor, Hansraj College, University of Delhi, India

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Abstract

Stress has been one of the popular fields of study among researchers around the world and voluminous literature is available in this domain. Previous studies have indicated that job-related stress can have major implications on physical and psychological health, which can ultimately result in depression, anxiety, and other health-related problems. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), low productivity in the workplace resulting from anxiety and depression costs up to \$1 trillion each year. So, to provide a healthy work environment it is most crucial to work on strategies that help in achieving employee well-being, and detailed study in this domain, taking into account all of the factors affecting employees, is required. Therefore, this review paper explores the existing literature on job stress, its antecedents, and consequences. The seminal work is reviewed to understand the construct, its relationship with other work-related outcomes, and find out the research gap in the existing literature as well as the area of consistency and inconsistency.

Keywords: Job Stress, Performance, Well-Being, Organizational Commitment, Productivity, Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

Employees are considered to be one of the most vital resources for any organization and it is crucial to provide them with an environment in which they can work at their full potential without any stress and hindrances. Stress in particular has been a major concern for organizations because it affects the mental and physical health of employees and in the long run, it can negatively impact the well-being of the workforce which can also result in a decrease in productivity and an increase in absenteeism. Stress has also been labeled as the *Health Epidemic of the 21st century* by the World Health Organization. According to WHO low productivity in the workplace resulting from anxiety and depression costs up to \$1 trillion each year (WHO, n.d.). In India more specifically, stress is a major cause of concern for organizations as it has been identified as the main source of depression and anxiety in the workforce (Business Insider India, 2019). Thus, providing a stress-free environment should be the top priority of any organization, and for that evaluation of existing policies, work culture, and other factors is required so that employees can meet the demands of the job without depleting their resources. Job-related Stress has been an important topic of research in the field of human resource management and organizational behavior. Numerous research studies have tried to identify and analyze the factors that can trigger stress among employees and its impact on various job outcomes, health, and well-being of employees. Conceptualization of Stress in the field of natural science had been done by Hans Selye in the 1970s in which the effects of stress on human health and well-being are explained in detail, since then voluminous research studies have been carried out that aided in explaining the construct. Till now, various theories of stress and models (Cummings & Cooper, 1979; Harrison, 1978; Karasak, 1979; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Warr, 1987) have been conceptualized that helped researchers and organizations in understanding job-related stress, its predictors, and outcomes. In the present scenario, when the situation is completely different than it

was a decade ago due to rapid technological advancement and promptly changing working environment, and most importantly with the recent outburst of Covid, employees too often find themselves under stress, and hence it is most pertinent to maintain continuity in the research focusing on job-related stress and its overall impact on individual, organization, and society as well.

Thus, the main objectives of this study are as follows:

- To systematically synthesize the available literature on job stress.
- To explore the impact of Job stress or various work-related outcomes such as work performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, etc.; and
- To identify research gaps and possible research directions in this field.

This paper tries to review and synthesize the existing literature analyzing factors that induce stress, its impact on job-related outcomes like performance (Batur & Nart, 2014; Siu, 2003), job satisfaction (Jamal & Baba, 2000), turnover (Lou et. al., 2007), organizational commitment (Bhagat & Chassie, 1981; Horta, 2019; Jamal & Baba, 2000) and explore the research studies related to these constructs.

JOB-RELATED STRESS

Hans Selye (1976) in his book "Stress in Health and Disease" defined stress in the field of natural science by explaining it as an individual's response to the demanding situation which can result in either a negative or a positive reaction. Whereas Jamal (1990) explained stress, particularly job stress as an individual reaction to the demanding work environment that is perceived to be threatening and affects the psychological and physiological health of individuals. According to Deng et. al. (2019), Job stress is an individual's response to external stimuli in the environment. Ahmad et. al. (2018) stated that stress occurs when demands exceed the abilities of an individual (called the Person-Environment Fit Model by Harrison, 1978). In all the above-mentioned definitions, stress has broadly been defined as the response/reaction of stressors that distorts the balance between the demands of the job and employee's resources, causing the misfit between environmental demands and an individual's resources. Such misfit will then produce negative psychological, physiological, and behavioral outcomes, which are also termed as *Strain* (French et. al., 1982). This explanation is consistent with the Demand Resource Control model of stress by Karasek (1979) in which stress is most high when demands are high and control is low, and the outcomes of such situations are called Strain. In simpler terms, any negative physiological, like coronary heart disease and higher blood pressure (Schnall, et. al., 1994) and psychological, like anxiety and depressive symptoms (Tsuno et. al., 2019) effects of stress result in strain. Similarly, sources of stress are called *Stressors* (Ahmad et. al. 2018) According to Kahn and Byosiere (1992), stressors are the conditions that induce strain. Therefore, it may be concluded that while stressors are the predictors, a strain is the consequence of stress.

Sonntag and Frese (2013) in their systematic review explained that several types of stressors can be grouped into several different categories, some of them are as follows:

- **Physical Stressors:** Poor working conditions, such as excessive noise, high temperature
- **Task-related Job Stressors:** High workload, long working hours,
- **Role Stressors:** Role ambiguity, Role conflict,
- **Social Stressors:** Poor interpersonal relations with superiors, subordinates, and colleagues.

Ahmad et. al. (2018) in their study explained that organizational stressors and interpersonal /social

stressors had a significant negative effect on the quality of life and employees experiencing such stressors were less satisfied with their job. Role stressors are a particular source of stress among sales employees (Jaramillo et. al., 2006) and role stress negatively impact employee's behavioral outcome such as commitment and satisfaction with the job (Dale & Fox, 2008; Jaramillo et. al., 2006). Goyal and Kashyap (2010), examined various stressors that are the sources of stress among employees working in the insurance industry and found that the major sources of stress were role inadequacy, role stagnation, and role overload while stressors like self-role distance, role expectation conflict, role ambiguity were less likely to be the source of stress among the same group of interest. Another differentiation exists among the stressors called the Challenge and Hindrance stressors (Cavanaugh et. al., 2000) which emphasize that while some stressors (known as hindrance stressors) negatively affect the work outcomes while others (known as challenge stressors) can have a positive impact on those outcomes. "*The literature on stress features a variety of approaches to its conceptualization, its antecedents, and its effects*" (Hunter & Thatcher, 2007, p. 954). Bliese et. al. (2017) analyzed the stress-related research published in the journal of applied psychology in a decade (1917-2017) and explained the factors/variables that have been studied till now to analyze the pattern of stress and its effects on individuals, authors stated that in the early 1900s the research was mainly theoretical, which emphasized mainly on physical stressors like excessive noise and accident as it was an era where mass production was the main focus of industries and employees were more prone to stress arising due to physical stressors. While in the 1960s to the 1990s, with the advancement in statistical tools to analyze the behavioral constructs, empirical research took more space in stress-related research in that period and as a result of this, factors like performance, health, and satisfaction were analyzed with work stress and this was the period in which all major theories of stress were developed. With the expanded theoretical base, the researcher's focus shifted to analyzing the various interrelationships between stress and its antecedents and outcomes. Now the studies are focused upon stress arising from work-family conflict due to the recent technological advancement that merged the work and non-work life of employees and studies examining the burnout and exhaustion arising due to stress have also increased rapidly, authors also argued that the majority of recent studies related to stress and well-being is focused on western countries specifically the white-collar employees such as professional and service sector employees.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review methodology has been adopted in this paper to assess and analyze articles about Job stress and its impact on work-related outcomes. Fig. 1 depicts a diagrammatic illustration of this methodology. The research methodology has been adapted from Kumar and Goyal (2015).

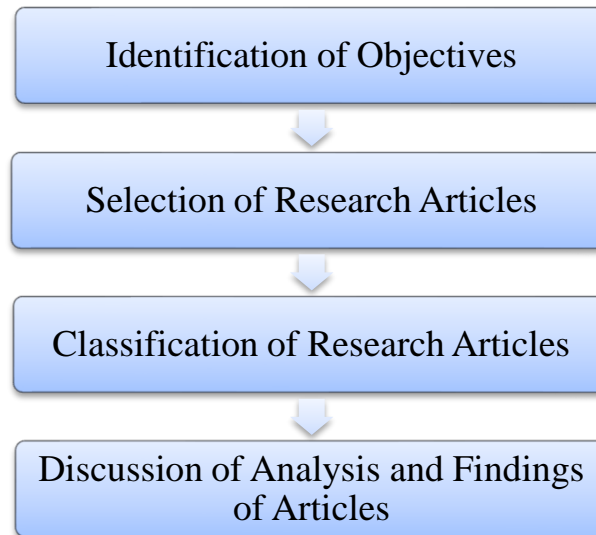


Fig 1: Methodology of Systematic Literature Review
Source: Kumar and Goyal (2015)

LITERATURE SEARCH CRITERIA

For establishing the search criteria for the systematic literature review, the scope of the study was confined to examine only those articles which directly analyzed job stress and its impact on behavioral, attitudinal, and work-related outcomes. The suitable research articles were identified by using the relevant keywords, time frame, and various databases. Databases such as Google Scholar, Jstor, and Wiley online library have been used for the literature search. For Keywords, characters such as “~” and “*” have been used for efficient search results (For example, searching “~Job stress” or “Job Stress*” helps in getting results with similar words like “Occupational Stress”, “Work Stress” in addition to “Job stress”). The keywords searched were job stress, performance, individual differences, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. This study covers a period of around three and a half decades (1984 - 2022). The year 1984 was considered the initial year for the search because the classical theory called the transactional theory of stress was developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) during this time, which was the first theoretical foundation of models of job stress and further models, and empirical studies are built upon that. The inclusion criteria for the study are based on the following conditions:

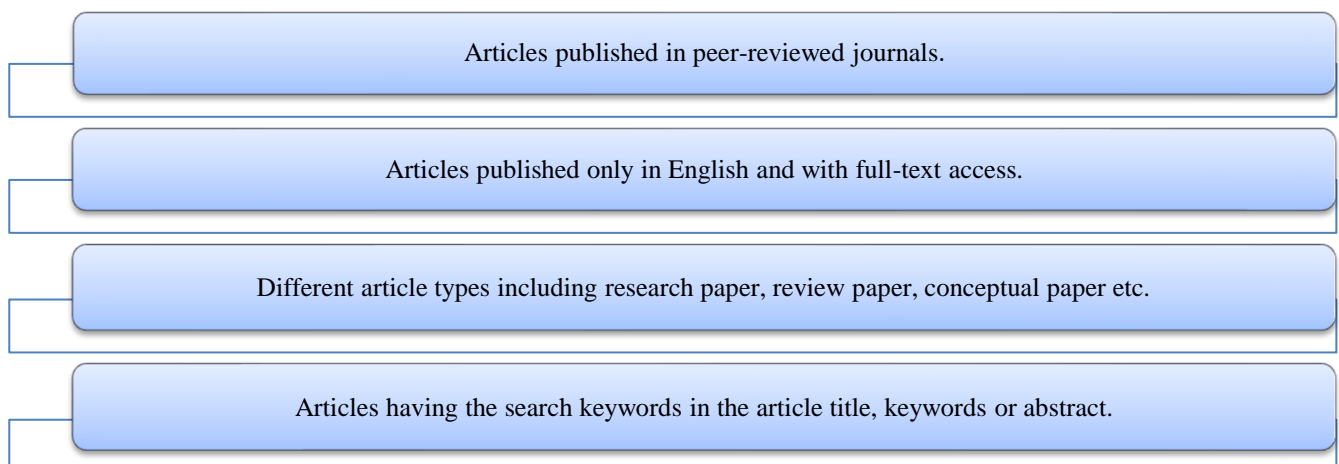


Fig. 2: Inclusion Criteria

Source: Kumar and Goyal (2015)

A database search was done in March 2022 which yielded all of the articles that met the above-mentioned search parameters. Based on our search parameters, several articles were finalized and included in the study.

CLASSIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH ARTICLES

In this section, a systematic classification of the selected research studies based on the core theme of the papers such as personality traits, demographic characteristics, work-related outcomes, and studies based on various models of stress is done. This helped in assessing how these abovementioned factors are related to the occupational stress research domain. This classification also helped in comprehending the literature available on Job-related stress and its impact on individuals. The review based on the pre-defined classification of the available literature has been done in the following section.

Stress and Personality Traits

According to the transactional theory of stress, individuals appraise the situation either as taxing or as improving their resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and individuals with distinct personalities, perceive the environment around them differently. One differentiation is based on locus of control, Spector and O'Connell, (1994) explained *External locus of control*, as those who believe that external forces that are not in their control and luck dominate the reinforcements whereas individuals with *Internal locus of control*, believe that they can change the situation around them. Siu and Cooper, (1998) in their study examine the relationship between stressors and strain, moderated with a locus of control, and found out that employees with an external locus of control are unable to maintain a relationship with others and find it as a potential source of stress, therefore, they think of quitting their job more often. They concluded that employees with an external locus of control are more likely to be affected by stress which can result in the strain as compared to employees with an internal locus of control who are less likely to get affected by stressors. Some researchers have found that people with type A personality (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974) are more prone to stress than people with type B personality (Jamal, 1999), similarly, employees with high *Neuroticism* are more likely to experience depressive and anxiety symptoms (Tsuno et. al., 2019) since emotional instability, anxiety-prone behavior, self-consciousness and overthinking are few characteristics of neuroticism (Jylhä & Isometsä, 2006). So, when individuals are exposed to stress, employees with high neuroticism are more prone to the adverse effects of stress. Whereas *Conscientiousness* as a trait is considered to be negatively associated with stressors as highly conscientious individuals are extremely motivated, disciplined, and committed towards the goals and strive to achieve more, and with these characteristics, conscientiousness can buffer the negative impact of stressors, through problem-solving coping against those stressors, that helps them to perform better even when they are encountered with stressful situations (Abbas & Raja, 2019). Most of the studies examining the stress level among different personality types were based on cross-sectional research with a limited sample size due to which generalizability is not possible. In addition to this, researchers have mainly focused on the employee's assessment of the environment, based on their personality without considering other factors that might also contribute to stress.

Demographic/Socioeconomic Characteristics and Stress

Researchers have demonstrated that demographic and socioeconomic characteristics also tend to influence the stress of individuals in the organization. Goyal and Kashyap (2010) stated that demographic variables such as age and work experience influence the level of stress among employees. Tsuno et. al. (2019), in their study examining the depressive symptoms among those working for long hours, argued that women, younger employees, and lower-level employees (non-managers) are more likely to develop depressive symptoms when they experience heavy workload than men, older employees, upper-level employees (managers), whereas, employees with low socioeconomic status tend to have high depressive symptoms regardless of their workload, because of the low job control and less autonomy in work they have. Working hours are also found to be positively related to stress (Kongcharoen et. al., 2019). Lou et. al. (2007) argued that male nurses experience more role stress than their female counterparts because of the gender stereotypes they experience in their job and found out that patients, colleagues, and society were the main sources of role stress among male nurses. On the contrary, Jamal and Baba (2000) stated that the impact of high stress is more significant on female nurses than males as the female nurses who experienced more stress in their job experienced more health problems as well. Therefore, where some studies argued that gender has an impact on the stress tolerance of employees (Jamal & Baba, 2000; Lou et. al. 2007, Taris et. al., 2001; Tsuno, 2019), Jamal (1999) in his cross-cultural research observed that gender did not moderate the job stress and well-being relationship and similarly Kongcharoen et. al. (2019), also argued that gender, age, monthly income, and work experience had no significant relationship with stress but on the other hand the study explained a significant relationship between stress and marital status, stating that married individuals experience higher stress than the unmarried employees.

Job stress is considered to be one of the predictors of various job-related outcomes such as job performance and turnover intentions among the employees (Chen et. al., 2011). Yerkes-Dodson law (1908) defined the relationship between Job stress and Performance as inverted U, which suggests that at a very low level of stress an employee may not be performing at their full potential and some challenges are always required so that productivity can be increased but if such challenges and demands keep on increasing then employee's performance can be negatively affected. So, for optimal performance, a moderate level of stress is considered ideal as per the Yerkes-Dodson law. Later researchers argued that a negative linear relationship is considered more appropriate, provided that stress is operationalized as per the perception of stress (Jamal, 1984). The performance of employees in an organization is one of the most important factors in the success and growth of the organization. According to Chen et. al. (2011), Job stress plays an important role in influencing various job outcomes such as the performance of an employee and his/her intention to quit the job and various studies have been conducted that defined the relationship between job stress and job performance. Some researchers suggested a direct relationship (Ahmad et. al., 2018; Deng et. al., 2019) while others suggested that there is an indirect relationship between job stress and job performance (Liu & Chiu, 2020). A negative relationship between job stress and performance reported by the researchers explains that when stress increase, the performance of an employee decreases. Afida et. al., (2012) also argued that stress is negatively related to the performance of professionals working in jobs that require a high level of creativity (e.g., Architects and Interior designers). One of the negative outcomes of stress is considered to be the increase in the intention to leave the organization. Barnes et. al. (1998) examined the relationship between job-related stress and

intention to leave among academics and found out that stressors like work overload, time demands, and low sense of community in the institution were important factors that predicted the faculty's intention to leave the organization. Similarly, Taris et. al. (2001) observed that employees having more control over their job, experienced less stress and exhibited little withdrawal behavior such as the intention to leave the organization. Liu and Chiu (2020) also argued an indirect relationship between job stress and intention to leave the organization by stating that there might be other reasons as well in addition to job stress that significantly affects the employee turnover intentions. Thus, it may be concluded that high job stress results in an increase in turnover intention. In addition to this stress also increases all three dimensions of burnout (i.e., Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of accomplishment) whereas job stress was found to be positively related to job involvement in a sample of Canadian employees, suggesting that some employees are more involved in their job despite the level of stress they may experience (Jamal, 1999). Kongcharoen et. al. (2019), in their research, argued that stress is significantly related to motivation to work, and explained that teachers having a high level of stress also have high motivation to work whereas, Sanchez et. al. (2017) stated that long term implication of stress could result in depression. Voluminous research has already been done that tried to analyze the relationship between stress and commitment. Bhagat and Chassie (1981) in their study determined the antecedents of organizational commitment using the Steers (1977) and Stevens et al. (1978) theoretical model and explained Job Satisfaction, more specifically the satisfaction with promotional opportunities and role stress are considered to be the important determinant of organizational commitment, where job satisfaction positively and role stress negatively impact the organizational commitment of employees. Role stress is indicated as one of the antecedents of organizational commitment (Mowday et. al., 1982) such that role stress decreases the commitment of the employees, however ethical climate of the organization moderates the relationship between the role stress and organizational commitment of employees, making the relationship less negative but the organizations. Jamal (1984) in the empirical study stated that Organizational commitment partially moderates the relationship between Job stress and performance and withdrawal behavior, stating that employees with high organizational commitment can handle the stressful situation in a better way than those with low commitment and therefore may result in better performance, lower absenteeism, and lower turnover intention.

Studies based on various models of stress

Researchers have developed various theories of stress that have helped immensely in the conceptualization of the stressors-strain relationship. Models like P-E Fit Model (Jamal & Baba, 2000; Harrison, 1978) define stress as a misfit between the individual's characteristics and the environment's demands which leads to negative psychological, physiological, and behavioral strains, (French et al., 1982); Job Demand and Resource Model (Bakker et. al, 2003; Demerouti et. al., 2001; De Jonge & Dormann, 2006; Karasek, 1979) in which jobs are defined on the basis of the level of demand and control employees possess and those having very high demands and comparatively lesser control tend to experience stress; Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Liu & Chiu, 2020; Taris et. al, 2001) which is a relatively newer concept in stress literature explains stress occurs when individual's key resources are potentially lost, and they are not able to regain those resources simultaneously despite enough efforts. The Transactional Stress Model of stress by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) focuses upon the stress process and defines stress as a relationship between the environment and individual, explaining the process of appraisal of the environment either as taxing

or enhancing the individual's resources and therefore threaten their well-being. This model differentiates between the primary and secondary appraisal. Where, during the primary appraisal, individuals assess the situation either as a challenge or threat. And in the secondary appraisal, they evaluate what can be done to deal with the situation. This model focuses upon the intraindividual analysis of the stress phenomenon (studying the same person over a while, under different situations.). Lastly, the Challenge-Hindrance Model by Cavanaugh et. al. (2000) is also based on similar lines where the authors have differentiated stressors into two categories namely, challenges (those which may have a positive effect on the work performance like time pressure, job overload, high job demands, and high responsibilities) and hindrances (one that negatively affects the work performance like role ambiguity, role conflict, organizational politics, red tape, and job insecurity). In addition to such stress appraisal models, numerous studies have identified and analyzed some specific stressors (Ahmad et. al, 2018; Afida et. al., 2012; Leong et. al., 1996; Siu, 2003) that may seem most prevalent for the given group of interest like role stress (Agarwal, 1993; Goyal & Kashyap, 2010; Lou et. al, 2007) including role ambiguity and role conflict (Dale & Fox, 2008; Jaramillo et. al., 2006), workplace isolation (Mulki et. al., 2008), work-family conflict (Batur & Nart, 2014; Siu & Cooper, 1998) Long Working Hours (Tsuno et. al., 2019; Yoon et. al., 2018) and then test the relationship with different predictors and outcomes of stress. Therefore, the research in this domain is very vast and is not confined to the predefined model of stress which leaves a huge scope for future research where existing models can be generalized and further explored by considering relatively newer concepts.

AREAS OF CONSISTENCY AND INCONSISTENCY

The review of literature unfolds several definitions of stress. While all the models represent a unique perspective on stress, some outcomes show homogenous results, for example, according to past research studies, stress results in negative physiological and psychological outcomes. In simpler terms, one of the most consistent findings in stress-related research is that stress results in Strains. For example, in a study using the COR Model (Hobfoll, 1989,2001) by Taris et. al. (2001), the authors found out that when academic staff had high demands and less control over their job, they tend to experience a high level of stress and stress was found to be prominently associated with strain. Similarly, in a study by Abbas and Raja (2019) the authors analyzed the CHS Model (Cavanaugh et. al., 2000) have found out that both types of stressors were found to be positively associated with strains, even the challenge stressors were positively associated with strains. Another consistency, in this field of research, is that high-level stress negatively affects work-related outcomes such as job performance (Batur & Nart, 2014; Deng et. al., 2019; Jamal, 1984), satisfaction, and commitment of employees (Abdelmoteleb, 2019; Jamal, 2000). But the recent study analyzing the relationship between stress and commitment of university teachers in China by Horta, (2019) found out that even though the teachers were under a lot of stress they also exhibited a high level of institutional commitment.

One of the Inconsistencies in stress research is analyzing the impact of stress among various demographics, for example, age, gender, and marital status to name a few. Kongcharoen et. al. (2019), also argued that gender, age, monthly income, and work experience had no significant relationship with stress, whereas Tsuno et. al. (2019), found out that women, younger employees, lower-level employees (non-managers) are more likely to develop depressive symptoms when they experience heavy workload than men, older employees, upper-level employees (managers). The majority of models/theories of stress are based on identifying the reasons for stress among employees and talk

a little about the coping strategy to be adopted by individuals to combat such stress, except for the transactional stress model by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) which differentiates between primary and secondary appraisal. On the other hand, few inconsistencies are present in the Challenge-Hindrance stress model (Boswell et. al. 2004; Cavanaugh et. al, 2000; LePine et. al., 2005; Podsakoff et. al., 2007) that bifurcate different stressors into two distinct categories, as challenges and Hindrances in which challenge stressors helps employees as those stressors can be overcome whereas hindrance stressors tend to be harmful to employees. But in a systematic review by Mazzola and Disselhorst (2019) the authors argued that even though the challenge and hindrance stressors show a different impact on other variables but in most of the research hindrance stressors explained a little negative correlation to performance whereas, whereas the challenge stressors in most of the cases showed a nonsignificant relationship and therefore, the authors argued that based on the inadequate shreds of evidence of past researches of this model, it is not appropriate to conclude that increase in challenge stressors increases performance but this vague assumption can also turn out to be quite harmful to employees. So, this leaves a lot of scope for further studies in this area as well.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This review highlights some of the inconsistencies in the existing literature, where previous studies have examined job-related stress and its impact on various outcomes among different kinds of samples, but the cause-and-effect relationship is not established due to the cross-sectional nature of most of the existing research. For that longitudinal and experimental research can take place in the future. In addition to this, the researchers may focus on the impact of Covid-19 on the stress and well-being of the workforce and the impact on stress due to recent workplace changes like the increase of work from home culture, technological changes, and so on. New ways of working and stress can be studied and their impact on productivity and performance can also be analyzed because companies are already shifting towards the new ways of working. Therefore, the stress and anxiety arising from changing working culture need to be analyzed so that practitioners and managers can help employees to reduce the stress and its impact.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, this paper tried to analyze the relationship between job stress and various work-related outcomes such as performance, job satisfaction, the commitment of employees, and its impact on individuals based on their personality, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, as already established in previous research studies. Stress can be extremely harmful to the individual and if it is experienced for over a longer time it can have severe physiological and psychological effects on individuals. As the WHO also defined job-related stress as the Health Epidemic of the 21st century, it becomes relevant for organizations to provide them the kind of work environment where the stress hindering the growth and development of employees can be minimized. Research in this domain is much more prevalent in developing countries such as India because it is considered as one of the overworked countries in the world (Business Insider India, 2019) and in addition to this, only a very few studies have been done in developing countries which leaves an unexplored existing research gap that can be studied in depth so that it helps in solving the modern-day organizational problem resulting in stress, anxiety and affecting the health and well-being of the employees. Organizations emphasize on productivity and performance of employees similarly employees also expect a supportive work environment that helps them to grow and one of the ways to do this is by investing in resources that help in maintaining the well-being of the employees as well as increase

the performance. Therefore, keeping the interest of both the organization and its employees, a balance is required where both the workforce's personal as well as organizational objectives can be achieved. In this review, it has been found that stress impacts individuals differently and therefore the results are also heterogeneous and since we are witnessing drastic workplace changes where on one hand organizations are digitally transforming, the level of stress, anxiety, and fatigue is also increasing. On the other hand, which can potentially impact the productivity and well-being of employees. Therefore, further research needs to be done to empirically assess the level of stress among employees and its impact on changing scenarios and find solutions to deal with those problems.

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