



MARITAL STATUS AND STRESS - A STUDY OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

The Present Study attempts to assess the influence of marital status on occupational stress among employees of Information Technology companies. A total of 600 (205 married and 395 unmarried) respondents completed the Occupational Stress Index questionnaire (Srivastava & Singh, 1984). One-way ANOVA was employed to find out the significance of differences between them on subscales of occupational stress and total occupational stress. Results revealed that a significant difference was found among married and unmarried I.T employees on the subscales- unreasonable group and political pressure, responsibility for persons, under participation and powerlessness. However significant difference was not found on other subscales and total occupational stress. It was also observed that married employees had comparatively more stress on the subscales- 'unreasonable group and political pressure' and 'responsibility for persons' and unmarried employees had comparatively more scores on subscales- 'under participation' and 'powerlessness'.

KEYWORDS: *Stress, Marital Status, Information Technology.*

INTRODUCTION

When all the psychological processes of an individual like attention, perception, remembering, thinking, reasoning and creativity etc, function in a normal way, the person is able to adjust and cope with his environment. He meets the various demands of life on his own quite successfully, and is said to be of sound mental health. Such a person experiences

reasonably less tension, anxiety, worry, conflict and stress. He is able to solve the problems of life successfully. But a person who, on the contrary fails to do so is said to have unsound mental health and is affected frequently by *stress*. When the demand on a person from the environment is more and his capability to meet such demands is less, then this incapability might lead to anxiety and stress.

Stress according to D'Arcy (2007) is the body's way of rising to a challenge and preparing to meet tough situation with focus, strength, stamina and heightened alertness. Ofoegbu and Nwadiani (2006) see it as a process in which environmental events or forces threaten the well being of the individuals in the society. To Adeyemo and Ogunyemi (2010), it is an unavoidable characteristic of life and work. Thus, in relationship to occupation, it is the physical, mental and emotional wear and tear brought about by incongruence between the requirements of the job and capabilities, resources and needs of the employee to cope with job demands according to Akinboye, Akinboye and Adeyemo (2002). D'Arcy (2007) emphasizes that everyone experiences stress a little differently, it can be a good thing, but overload of it is a different story. He explains that stress overload is caused by the overreaction or failure of the stress response to turn off and reset itself properly.

Stress in organization can be defined as a misfit between a person's skills and abilities and demands of his/her job, and as a misfit in terms of a person's needs not being fulfilled by his/her job environment (French *et al.* 1974). There are various causes for stress like, factors intrinsic to the job, role in the organization, relationships at work, career uncertainty, organizational structures, organizational climate, home/ work interface etc. Stress can also be the result of personality and social support.

Information Technology industry being an ever growing employment generating sector, there is a cause of concern by the organizations and government to look into the physical, mental and social health of its employees. The EQ (emotional quotient) of the IT employees seems to be in trouble and needs to be addressed immediately. In

spite of plum salaries, there have been several cases where there have been incidents like killing, drug abuse, alcoholism, frustration leading to family problems.

Since there have been many incidents, where stress has lead to destructive consequences, especially among the information technology employees, it has been found necessary to carry out this study. This study aims at throwing light on the reasons for stress and how it can be effectively managed. Hence managing stress has become a subject of prime importance. Better management of stress leads to a happy and efficient work force.

OBJECTIVE

The present study is aimed at assessing the Occupational Stress among married and unmarried Information Technology (IT) employees in and around Mysore and Bangalore city. Studies related to Information Technology employees are scanty and since IT, BT, Call Centres and MNC's are quite a recent phenomenon, there has been need to study stress and the effect of marital status of employees on stress among them.

HYPOTHESIS

It is hypothesized that married and unmarried IT employees differed significantly on their stress scores.

SAMPLE

Stratified Random Sampling was adopted to gather data; a total of 600 (205 married and 395 unmarried) respondents working in Information Technology companies in and around cities of Mysore and Bangalore participated in the study.

INSTRUMENT OCCUPATIONAL STRESS INDEX

Occupational Stress Index (OSI) by Srivastava and Singh (1984) was administered to assess the level of stress among the three groups. The scale consists of 46 items, each to rated on a five-point scale. Out of 46 items, 28 are 'true' keyed and the rest 18 are 'false' keyed. Two different patterns of scoring have to be adopted for two types of items. For true items, strongly disagree-1, disagree-2, undecided-3, agree-4, strongly agree-5 and for false keyed items, the reverse of the true keyed items are used. The items related to almost all relevant components of the job life, which cause in one way or the other, such as role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, group and political pressure, responsibility for persons, under participation, powerlessness, poor peer relations, intrinsic impoverishment, low status, strenuous working conditions and unprofitability. The reliability index ascertained by split half (odd-even) method and Cronbach's alpha co-efficient for the scale as a whole were found to be .94 and .90 respectively. Srivastava and Singh (1984) determined these indices exclusively on Indian population exclusively on 700 employees of different cadres operating in various producing and non-producing organizations. The validity of the OSI was determined by computing co-efficient of correlation between the scores on OSI and various measures of job attitudes and behavior and they were found to sufficiently high.

PROCEDURE

The questionnaire was given to each participant, who was requested to fill up and to return the same in four days. They were also briefed about the purpose of the study and their informed consent was

obtained. It was made sure that they would read each question carefully and answer later, rather than stereotyped answering. Later, the answers were scrutinized, and incomplete questionnaires were rejected. Scoring was done according to the manual provided.

SCORING AND ANALYSIS

One way ANOVA has been employed using SPSS for Windows (version 16.0) to test significance of the difference between means of subscales of occupational stress among married and unmarried employees of IT companies.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents mean scores on different subscales and total occupational stress of married and unmarried employees of I.T companies and results of One Way ANOVA.

Table-1 here

ROLE OVERLOAD

Software employees belonging to different marital status did not differ significantly in this subscale as the obtained 't' value of -.046 was found to be non-significant ($P=.964$). The mean 'role overload' scores obtained by married and unmarried employees are 19.37 and 19.39 respectively, which are all same statistically.

Role Ambiguity: The difference observed between software employees belonging to different marital status was non-significant as the obtained 't' value of 1.023 was found to be non-significant ($P=.307$). The mean 'role ambiguity' scores obtained by married and unmarried software employees are 10.87 and 10.64 respectively, which are all same statistically.

ROLE CONFLICT

Marital status did not influence software employees significantly on subscale 'role conflict' as the obtained 't' value of 1.019 was found to be non-significant ($P=.308$). The mean 'role conflict' scores obtained by married and unmarried software employees are 13.80 and 13.58 respectively, which are all same statistically.

UNREASONABLE GROUP AND POLITICAL PRESSURE

The difference observed between married and unmarried software employees is significant in this subscale as the obtained 't' value of 2.264 was found to be significant ($P=.024$). The mean 'unreasonable group and political pressure' scores obtained by married and unmarried software employees are 12.15 and 11.66 respectively. This indicates that the influence of marital status on stress in the subscale 'unreasonable group and political pressure' is significantly more among married and less among unmarried.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR PERSONS

Marital status influenced software employees on this subscale as the obtained 't' value of 5.096 was found to be significant ($P=.000$). The mean 'responsibility for persons' scores obtained by married and unmarried software employees are 10.22 and 9.31 respectively. This indicates that the influence of marital status on stress in the subscale 'responsibility for persons' is significantly more among married and less among unmarried.

UNDER PARTICIPATION

The influence of marital status on software employees in this subscale was significant

as the obtained 't' value of -2.366 was found to be significant ($P=.018$). The mean 'under participation' scores obtained by married and unmarried software employees are 11.53 and 11.98 respectively. This indicates that the influence of marital status on stress in the subscale 'under participation' is significantly more among unmarried and less among married.

POWERLESSNESS

A significant difference was observed between software employees belonging to different marital status as the obtained 't' value of -2.346 was found to be significant ($P=.019$). The mean 'powerlessness' scores obtained by software employees of different marital status are 8.36 and 8.76 respectively. This indicates that the influence of marital status on stress in the subscale 'powerlessness' is significantly more among unmarried and less among married.

POOR PEER RELATIONS

The difference observed among software employees belonging to different marital status was non-significant as the obtained 't' value of 1.553 was found to be non-significant ($P=.121$). The mean 'poor peer relations' scores obtained by married and unmarried software employees are 10.68 and 10.37 respectively, which are all same statistically.

INTRINSIC IMPOVERISHMENT

IT employees belonging to different marital status did not differ significantly as the obtained 't' value of -.215 was found to be non-significant ($P=.830$). The mean 'intrinsic impoverishment' scores obtained by married and unmarried IT employees are 2.55 and 2.40 respectively, which are same statically.

LOW STATUS

A non-significant difference was observed between software employees belonging to different marital status as the obtained 't' value of .529 was found to be non-significant ($P=.597$). The mean 'low status' scores obtained by married and unmarried software employees are 7.53 and 7.44 respectively, which are all same statistically.

STRENUOUS WORKING CONDITION

The difference was non-significant between software employees belonging to different marital status as the obtained 't' value of .663 was found to be non-significant ($P=.507$). The mean 'strenuous working condition' scores obtained by married and unmarried software employees are 11.81 and 11.65 respectively, which are all same statistically.

UNPROFITABILITY

Software employees belonging to different marital status did not differ on this subscale as the obtained 't' value of -1.456 was found to be non-significant ($P=.146$). The mean 'unprofitability' scores obtained by married and unmarried software employees are 6.16 and 6.36 respectively, which are all same statistically.

TOTAL

A non-significant difference was observed between IT employees belonging to different marital status as the obtained 't' value of .873 was found to be non-significant ($P=.383$). The mean 'total' scores obtained by married and unmarried software are 133.20 and 131.91 respectively, which are all same statistically.

DISCUSSION

1. In the total Occupational Stress married and unmarried Information Technology employees did not differ significantly.
2. On subscales 'unreasonable group and political pressure' and 'responsibility for persons', unmarried employees had higher levels of stress than married ones.
3. On subscales 'under-participation' and 'powerlessness' married employees had higher levels of stress than unmarried employees.

In this present study married IT employees' were found to have more stress on subscales like, 'unreasonable group and political pressure' and 'responsibility for persons'. It was also observed that unmarried people had more scores on the subscales like, under participation and powerlessness. Mohsin Aziz, (2004) in a study "Role stress among women in the Indian information technology sector", finds differences in the level of stress between married and unmarried employees on several role stressors. Zaki Rashidi (2009) found that a higher degree of stress is found in unmarried people as compared to married people on the average. Also fear of obsolescence and workload are two strong stressors among unmarried people, whereas fear of obsolescence and client interaction are greater sources of stress among married people as compared to other factors. One of the reasons of this phenomena is quite possible: married people may belong to higher age group and are working on both technical and managerial positions, hence, client interaction is a major factor contributing to their stress;

while unmarried people are working for stretched hours, hence, feeling stressed due to workload. The lowest factors contributing in stress in both the cases are found to be family support and work culture.

However some studies have found, a happy marriage reduces stress levels in women but not in men (Nic Fleming, 2008). Researchers found that women enjoying wedded bliss have lower levels of a stress hormone than those who are dissatisfied in their relationships. For men, the state of their marriage was much less important to their stress levels than how busy they were at work.

According to a report in the Journal of Gerontology, caring spouses often encourage each other to eat right, exercise, take vacations, and choose a healthy lifestyle. Close and supportive companionship also acts as a buffer against stress and all of its physical and emotional consequences. At the same time, women have the most to lose when the marriage is unhappy. Starting at about age 40, women tend to feel more marital stress than men.

In this present study married IT employees' were found to have more stress on subscales of stress like, 'unreasonable group and political pressure' and 'responsibility for persons'. This is because generally people, who are married, are older employees and are in the higher levels of managerial hierarchy where responsibility for persons will be more than lower level employees. They also face pressures from various groups inside and outside the organization. It was also observed that unmarried people had more scores on the subscales, '*under participation*' and '*powerlessness*'. Unmarried employees are generally entry level employees, who are very

enthusiastic, want to participate in all matters and exercise power. They are not happy when they do not get what they desire and as a result may feel stressed.

CONCLUSION

It was observed that there have been very few studies where marital status has been taken as the independent variable to assess the levels of stress. However looking at the recent developments where in most of the IT employees who are married seems to have a situation where both the spouses are working and there is the need to assess the stress levels among them. Recently there is spurt in rate of divorce and family disputes, where there is an urgent need to look into such serious issues. It is suggested that sound mental health and conducive psycho-social environment may improve work performance.

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TABLE 1 MEAN SCORES OF SOFTWARE EMPLOYEES OF DIFFERENT MARITAL STATUS ON DIFFERENT SUBSCALES OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND RESULTS OF ONE-WAY ANOVA

Sub Scale		Mean	SD	't' value	P value
Role over load	Married	19.37	4.10	-.046	.964
	Unmarried	19.39	6.11		
Role ambiguity	Married	10.87	2.71	1.023	.307
	Unmarried	10.64	2.57		
Role Conflict	Married	13.80	2.50	1.019	.308
	Unmarried	13.58	2.47		
Un-reasonable Group & Political Pressure	Married	12.15	2.61	2.264	.024
	Unmarried	11.66	2.43		
Responsibility for persons	Married	10.22	2.07	5.096	.000
	Unmarried	9.31	2.09		
Under-participation	Married	11.53	2.29	-2.366	.018
	Unmarried	11.98	2.19		
Powerlessness	Married	8.36	2.09	-2.346	.019
	Unmarried	8.76	1.93		
Poor peer relations	Married	10.68	2.33	1.553	.121
	Unmarried	10.37	2.30		
Intrinsic Impoverishment	Married	10.73	2.55	-.215	.830
	Unmarried	10.77	2.40		
Low status	Married	7.53	2.00	.529	.597
	Unmarried	7.44	2.09		
Strenuous Working Condition	Married	11.81	2.82	.663	.507
	Unmarried	11.65	2.84		
Unprofitability	Married	6.16	1.52	-1.456	.146
	Unmarried	6.36	1.65		
Total	Married	133.20	18.22	.873	.383
	Unmarried	131.91	16.57		