Stress Management in the Perspective of Library Environment: An Overview

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Present study reveals different approaches and types of stresses evolved among library staffs. Encompasses stress symptoms and extreme products of stress among the staffs in the library as an organization. Also enumerates the relation between stress and job performance. Finally comprises the ways of managing and coping the stresses.

Keywords

Organizational stress; Stress management; Stress strategy; Stress symptoms; Role stress.

Introduction

The present information society rather knowledge society is highly mechanized and very complex in nature from all respects. It is better to call, the present society as an 'age of stress'. The concept of stress has been borrowed from the natural sciences. During the 18th and 19th century, stress was equated with "force, pressure or strain" exerted up on a material object or person which resists these forces and attempts to maintain its original state. In 1970 the American journalist and sociologist Alvin Toffler predicted that the rate of change in modern civilization would accelerate to such a degree that enormous numbers of people would experience shattering stress and disorientation. Toffler described this condition as Future Shock. Our present study deals with the stresses on human being in general and as library personnel in particular. The stress in the present context is an environmental force, either real or imagined that acts on an individual's tolerance to have a motivational or stimulatory effect. All individual including library professional are victims of stress: being constantly exposed to life events that are threatening. Again it is also true that everyone needs a certain amount of stress in order to function well.

Approaches of stress

There are four approaches of stress from different angles:

i) Stimulus approach:

It is also called external force approach. It acts on the circumstances which people experience as stressful. Here stress is treated as an independent variable, more or less beyond the control of the individual. According to weitz the stressful stimuli are:

1. Speed-up information processing
2. Adverse environmental stimuli
3. Perceived threat
4. Interrupted psychological function
5. Isolation and confinement
6. Blocking
7. Exertion of group pressure
8. Frustration
9. Inferiority complex

ii) Response approach:

It is also called psychological approach. Stress is fundamentally a psychological phenomenon with immediate and direct physiological manifestations as well as an experience of discomfort. According to 'General Adaptation Syndrome' theory, general physiological response occurs in three stages when an organism is confronted with a threat (Fig-1).
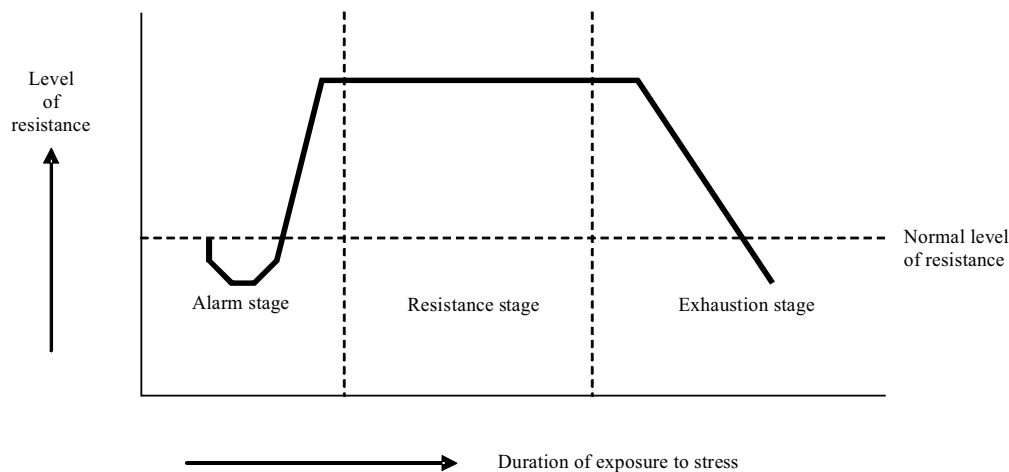
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Fig-1: General Adaptation Syndrome

1 Alarm stage: In alarm stage, there are two distinct phases. First one is 'shock phase' in which resistance is lowered, and 'counter-shock phase' in which defensive mechanisms become active.

2 Resistance stage: Maximum adaptation occurs during this stage. The resistance increase to levels more above the normal and in constant rate.

3 Exhaustion stage: The resistance level is continuously declining due to exhaustion of adaptation energy.

iii) Interactive approach:

The stress is a product of two interactive phenomena i.e. external demand and internal resources available.

iv) Comprehensive approach:

Actually stress according to this approach is the combination of above factors. Better it is called as the situational outcome.

2 Types of stress

In the perspective of library the stress can be grouped into two categories namely 'on the job stress' and 'off the job stress'. Every library personnel always experience some amount of stress, when he/she is in library or in society. We are now shifting from traditional library to digital library and hence new type of 'on the job stress' is arises i.e. techno-stress. Different types of stresses experienced by traditional and digital library staffs are discussed below.

2.1 On the job stress

On the job stress is also called organizational stress. The concept of this stress first evolved in the classic work of Kahn et al. Different types of on the job stresses in the library perspective are enumerated below.

1) Role Ambiguity: It refers to the lack of clarity about the expectations of role, which may arise out of lack of information or understanding. It may exist in relation to library activities, responsibilities, personal styles, and norms. It may operate at three stages:

a. When the librarian holds his/her expectations about the role

b. When he sends it, and

c. When the occupant receives those expectations.

2) Inter-role Distance Stress: This type of stress is emerged due to the interaction between library and non-library roles (i.e. Library personnel role Vs husband/wife role).

3) Role stagnation: Library staffs perceive that there is no such opportunity in the new role career progression. Actually it is the feeling of being struck in the same role.

4) Role Expectation Conflict: This stress is generated by the different expectations from different angles of the same role of library personnel.

5) Role Erosion: The role occupant feels that the functions within his purview are goes to/or performed by others. When a library staff engaged in classification work properly classifies the complex subject of a document and the credit goes to other, then arises this type of stress.

6) Role Overload: When a library personnel feels that his role is very much overloaded qualitatively (too difficult to do) and quantitatively (too much to do), he experiences role overload. Suppose a library staff in cataloguing department required to catalogue (according to AACR 2) the documents having uniform titles, which are very much difficult as there are no such sufficient relevant reference books and simultaneously asked him to do too much documents be catalogued; in this situation he may experiences role overload.

7) Role Isolation: This type of role stress refers to psychological distance between role of a library staff and other roles in the same role set. It is characterized by the feelings that others do not reach out easily, indicative of the absence of strong linkages of one's with other roles.

8) Personal Inadequacy: This type of stress exists when a library personnel feels that he has no necessary skills or knowledge/training to perform effectively in the changing context of digital library environment.

9) Self-Role Distance: This stress arises from mismatch of right people in the right library work.

10) Resource Inadequacy: When a library staff feels that he is not provided with adequate resources (such as Subject Heading List) for performing the functions (finding out keywords/descriptors of a document) expected from his role.

11) Time pressure: Library hours are different in different libraries. In case of extended hours (beyond normal working hours) some staffs feel pressure or stress to do duty for his/her personal or family problems.

12) Changes of any type: Library is a complex adaptive open system and always accommodates every change in the environment. Therefore needs structural, technological and functional changes to meet the user demands. Library staffs have a tendency to resist any change and feel stress.

13) Spatial crowding: Sufficient space are required to perform any type of library work. Library staffs may feels stresses arising out from spatial crowding.

14) Job hazards: Stress could be considered the leading cause of VDT-related ailments. The list of causes which perpetuate this complaint is numerous and long. It emphasizes environmental conditions relating to space, lighting, noise, and temperature control; and poor workstation design including unfriendly software, job design, working procedures. Different types of muscular-skeletal and ocular stresses arise during prolonged work in inappropriate ergonomic work environment in front of computer screen in the digital library environment.

15) Job insecurity: Stress may arise if any library staff always feels that the authority may terminate his/her job.

16) Others: Many other types of stresses created in library: having to deal with theft, mutilation and destruction of library materials etc.

2.2 Off the job stress

Off the job stress comprises two types of stresses namely psychological stressors and societal stressors. These both type of stresses are originated from the sources out side the library.

a. Psychological stress: It is solely of psychological origin. This is again are of three types, enumerated as follows:

i) Cataclysmic phenomena: It is arising out from sudden, unique and powerful single event or clusters of related events affecting large number of people (e.g. flood, draught etc).

ii) Individual crises: Same as cataclysmic but affect fewer people (e.g. death of dear one).

iii) Daily hassles: This type of stress arises from daily life such as neighborhood problems,

loss of jobs due to automation etc.

b. Societal stress: Sometime the society, in which the library personnel live, also creates stress. Every societal culture has it's own ways to define stress. For example, the death of an infant make tremendous stress to Indian couple but may not so for an Australian aborigine because still believe that the infant's soul will be born in better time. Again in a society, government raises taxes and people feel stress.

This also includes political and economical uncertainties.

3 Symptoms of stress

Stress is like electric power. It can make a bulb light up and provide brilliant illumination. However, if the voltage is higher than what the bulb takes, it can burn out the bulb. Therefore we need to know in advance, the symptoms of stressful library personnel. Typical symptoms of stress are shown with the help of diagram (Fig-2).
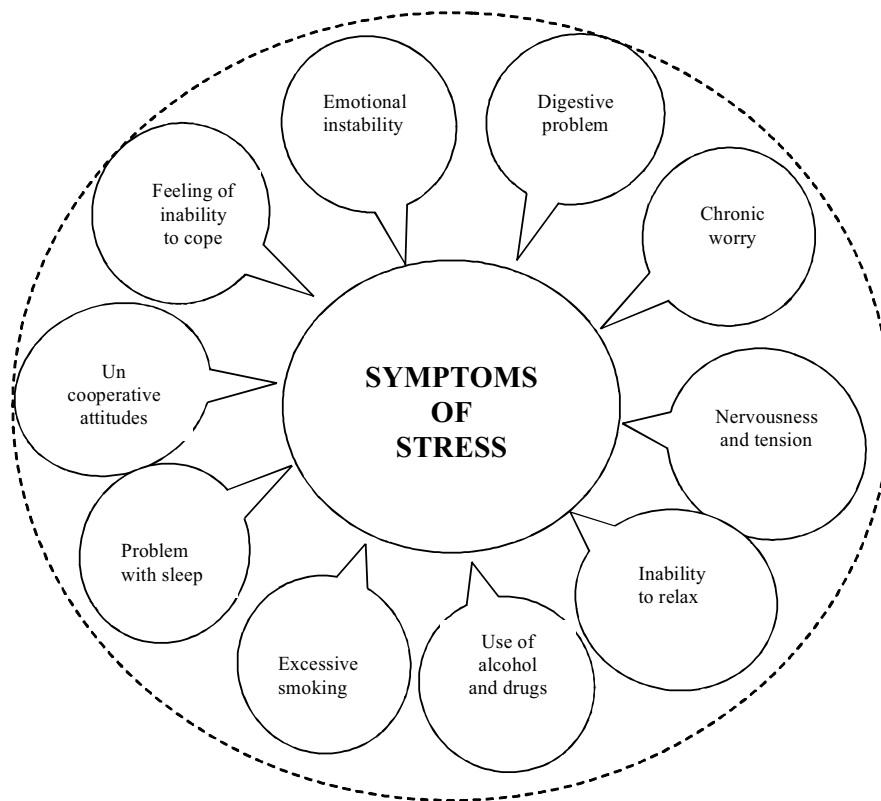
Fig-2: Typical symptoms of stress

4 Extreme products of stress

Prolonged and excessive stress can produced two situations in library staffs: Burnout and Trauma. These two situations are called extreme products of stress.

A. Burnout: High intensity stress continues for a extended duration cause library staffs become physically and psychologically weakened. This situation is called Burnout. There are five stages in Burnout process:

a. Honeymoon stage: In the new job library

staff feel excitement, enthusiasm, pride and challenges

b. Fuel shortage stage: Employee realizes shortage of energy in order to deal with job related crisis. Future difficulties are signaled at this stage.

c. Chronic symptom stage: The psychological symptoms (anger, depression etc.) become more pronounced and demand attention and help at this stage.

d. Crisis stage: Due to the prolonged

persistence of physical (peptic ulcer, high blood pressure, headache etc.) and psychological symptoms the individual enters the stage of crisis.

e. Hitting the wall stage: This stage is so devastating that it can completely knock a person out. With all the adaptation energy depleted, one may lose control over one's life, it may be the end of a professional career.

The main symptoms associated with burnout are:

1. Chronic fatigue.

2. Anger at those making demands on you.

3. Self-criticism for putting up with the demands.

4. Cynicism, negativism and irritability.

5. A sense of being besieged.

6. Hair-trigger display of emotions.

B. Trauma: It occurs following a major threat to one's security (e.g. natural disaster, crisis in libraries, personal job loss due to automation etc.). There are three types of trauma as follows:

a. Work place trauma: It can arise from harassment at work, wrongful termination, discrimination etc.

b. Lay off survivor's sickness: It may happen due to sudden job loss in the big library in a large scale.

c. Work place violence: It is the result of post-traumatic stress disorder.

5 Stress and job performance

Stress thresholds

Stress and job performance are closely related to each other. The stress-job performance relation is shown in the Fig-3. When there is no stress, job challenges are absent and performance.
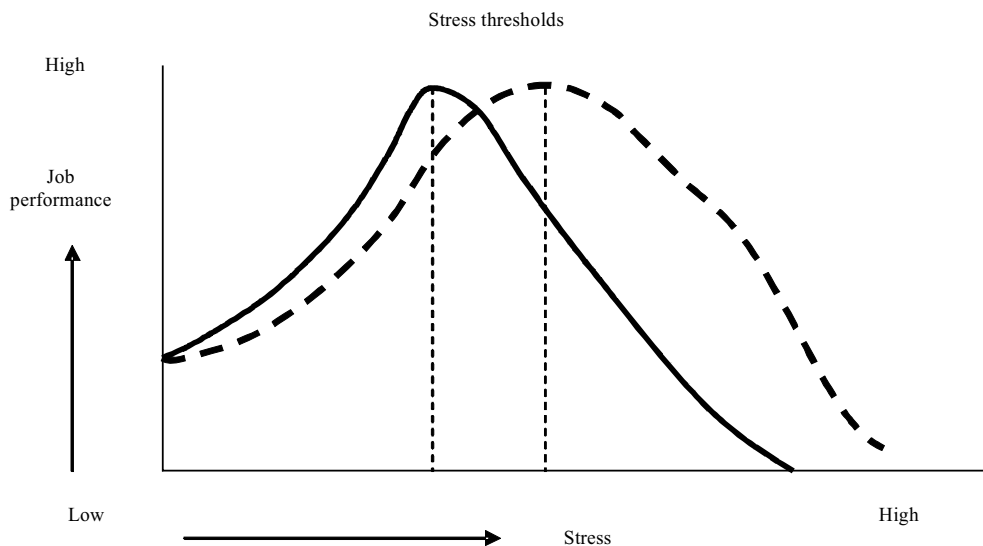

Fig-3: Stress-performance model

Tends to be low. As stress increases, performance tends to increase, because stress helps a person to perform the job efficiently, effectively and quickly. Some people have a low threshold, and the stress of even relatively small changes or disruptions in their work routines causes a reduction in performance (line A). Other have a higher threshold staying cool calm and productive longer under the same condition.

6 Approaches to stress management

61 Types of approaches

There are mainly three approaches of stress management in library and information centers:

1. Prevent approach (Prevent or control it): Organization can seek to improve managerial communication skills, empower library staffs through participation, redesign jobs to be more fulfilling or implement

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organizational development programs. The library authority can provide good working conditions in relation to physical aspects like lighting, heat, and ventilation etc. and ergonomic aspects like layout of working space, proper library furniture design, standards measurements of man-machine interface etc. These are aimed at reducing or eliminating stressors for library staff.

2. Escape approach (Escape from it): Some library staffs can escape stress by requesting job transfers, finding alternative employment, taking early retirement, or acquiring assertiveness to skills that allow them to confront the stressors.

3. Cope approach (Learn to adapt to it): Coping traits refer to a disposition to respond in a specific way in situations that are stressful. Each individual needs a moderate amount of stress to be alert and capable of functioning. Normally coping is defined as an adaptive response to stress.

6.2 Managing stress in library

Stress management in library is the process of managing stress evolved among library staffs. There are basically two ways of managing stress in library:

1 Role of library

2 Role of library staff as an individual

3 Role of library staff as an member of a group

6.2.1 Role of library

Library's role in managing stress is very much important. Library as an organization can take following steps to cope with the stress.

a) Undertake stress audit: Stress audit refers to the attempt libraries make to study, explore, and control the various types of stresses, which the individual library personnel experience as a member of the library. The stress audit actually is the process of collection of data with the aid of questionnaires, clinical diagnostic interviews and if possible physical examination and its arrangement in three broad categories:

iv) Casual stress variables: The stressors in the library

v) Mediating variables: The effect of personality, culture, and contemporary non-work environment

vi) End result variables: The stress reactions

b) Use scientific inputs: Spreading of information about how to face stressors evolved in the library and outside. The library staffs may derive immense benefits from knowing about the nature of stress and different techniques to combat it.

c) Check with the doctors: Regular check up have to be done by the doctors of mother concern in which the library belongs to.

d) Staff counseling: Regular counseling is required for the staffs of the library to avoid stress. The counseling involves advice, reassurance, communication, and release of emotional tension, clarified thinking and reorientation. Different types of counseling are necessary for library staffs on the basis of amount of directions that counselors provide. (Fig-4).
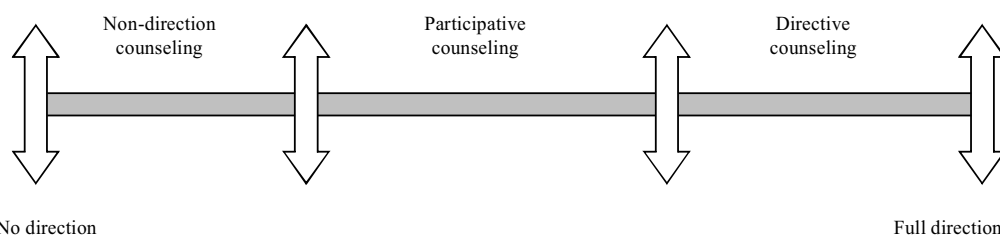

Fig-4: Types of counseling according to the amount of directions that counselors provide

i) Directive: It includes mainly advice but it also may reassure, communicate, give emotional release, and to a minor extent clarity thinking. Reorientation is seldom achieved in directive counseling.

ii) Non-Directive: There is no such pre-determined direction in counseling. It is solely client oriented. Non-directive counselors follow

an "Iceberg Model of Counseling" in which they recognize that sometimes more feelings are hidden under the surface of a counselee's communication than are revealed (Fig-5). So they constantly encourage the counselee to open up and reveal deeper feelings that may help to solve the employee's problems.

Revealing feeling

Communication level

Hidden feeling
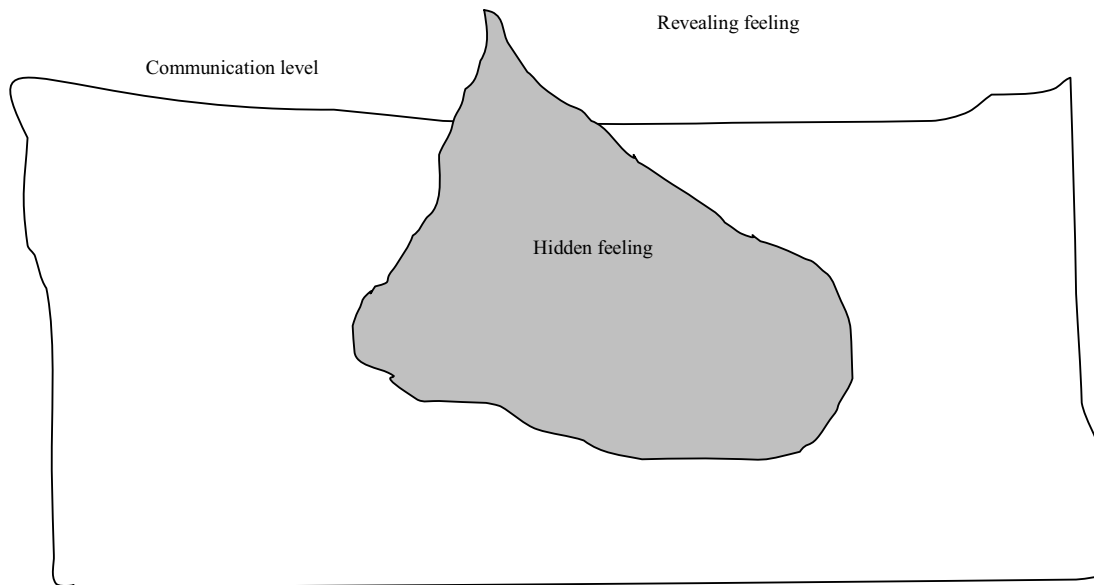
Fig-5: Iceberg model of counseling

iii)   Participative counseling: This is a mixture of both directive and non-directive counseling.

e)   Spread the message: Well dispersion of messages regarding regular habits of work, leisure, proper diet, exercise and meditation should be confirmed.

6.2.2 Role of library staff as an individual

When individual experience stress, they adopt ways of dealing with it. Gmelch suggested following strategies to overcome stress by an individual:

Take a hard look at yourself: Identify stresses originate in your life. Critically examine your own contribution to stresses experienced by others around you, be they in the library or outside it.

Stay alert: Do things, other than your job, which give you a sense of meaning and satisfaction.

Take Risks: Performance in library services need moderate amount of risks.

Avoid isolation: Keep good relations and communications with relatives, friends, family and colleagues to avoid isolation.

Stretch for success: Make an effort with the hope to achieve your goals.

Overcome obsolescence: Frequently update your knowledge to cope with the changing context of digital library environment.

In addition to the above strategies, some safety valves also to be recommended for dealing with stresses.

1   Shifting from library work to something else.

2   Cutback on excessive hours.

3   Do proper physical exercise.

4   Pamper yourself by breaking the daily routine.

5   Get involved in the challenges.

6   Warm up slowly in your work.

7   Release pressure on the job by rearranging job schedule.

8   Practice relaxation techniques.

9   Use effective time management

10 Positive self-talk

11 Good nutrition

7 Conclusions

Stress is an environmental force, either real or imagined, that acts on an individual's tolerance to have a motivational or stimulatory effect. Today it is virtually impossible to avoid stress. All library staffs are victims of stress. Library and its staffs cannot remain in a continuous state of tension. Many try but find that the avoidance strategies frequently generate more stress rather than reducing it. Still there must have some strategies to with the stressful situation to ensure smooth library functioning.

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