

Job Anxiety and Occupational Stress among Employees of IT Sector: Impact on their Attitude towards Management

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ABSTRACT

Information technology is the fastest growing sector in the country and the highest employer in the private sector. The fast-paced technological changes, the need to keep up with it and the huge workload puts enormous demands on the employees. They experience anxiety and stress at the workplace which affects, positively and negatively, their attitude towards their job and management. Hence, the study investigated the relationship between anxiety and stress experienced by the employees at the workplace and how each factor affects their attitude towards their management respectively. Since the study covered both male and female employees, hence similar nature of relationship between the variables was also examined separately for each gender

For this ex-post facto research, a convenience sample of 200 respondents through stratified sampling technique was chosen in 2019 from various IT firms in Hyderabad. The age of the respondents was between 24-36 years. The data for analysis was collected through 3 scales/ index viz. 1) *Job Anxiety Scale* by Dr. A. K. Srivastava 2) *Occupational Stress Index* by A K Srivastav and A P Singh 3) *Attitude Scale for Measuring Employee Attitude Towards Management Attitude Scale for Measuring Employee Attitude Towards Management* by Dr. K D Kapoor and a personal information sheet. Statistical tools of Pearson was applied to analyse the data.

The results of the study confirmed that occupational stress significantly and negatively predicted attitude towards management of the employees. But, on the contrary for job anxiety the relationship with employee attitude was found to be insignificant. The attitude towards management of female employees was found to be more significantly and negatively related to job anxiety and occupational stress respectively as compared to their male counterparts. This result belied the expectations. However, no interaction effect was observed between job anxiety and occupational stress while predicting attitude towards management. It is recommended that IT companies must design general and gender based intervention strategies to reduce job anxiety and occupational stress among employees.

Keywords-- Job Anxiety, Occupational Stress, Attitude towards Management

I. INTRODUCTION

Information Technology (IT) sector in India today has innumerable achievements and milestones to its credit. It is the biggest employer in the private sector providing direct employment to over 40 lac and indirect livelihoods to approximately 1 crore people. This includes both the IT services and BPO (Business Process Outsourcing). The country is 2nd only to USA in terms manpower employed and in the coming years, looking at the outlook of 60 lac people required for cybersecurity by 2022 as per NASSCOMM (National Association of Software and Services Companies), India will be no 1 country in terms of manpower employed. The industry is currently the highest employer in the private sector with four companies in the top ten in terms of the manpower employed.

It is the single most preferred sector for employment among the fresh engineering graduates. The sector witnesses' huge recruitments every year but layoffs also. The rapid technology changes, disruption at times, the increasing level of customization, long working hours, serving clients in different time zones and tight deadlines have brought in churning within the industry. The sector definitely has seen huge successes as today, through its services and products, it touches all aspects of our lives. The fast growth and expectations does not come without its cost for the employees: anxiety and stress at the workplace.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Anxiety

Workplace, as in personal life, gives continuous stimuli for anxiety which provides the daily impetus to employees to do their work for the day. On a continuous basis, we keep on adapting and overcoming the anxiety with each small or big assignment maintaining our normal behavior. But it becomes a matter of concern when the worrying and apprehension due to work pressure is persistent. The changes in our interaction with the people we work with is not noticeable to us but visible to all else:

over analysis, irritation, micro management, non-delegation, mistrust, usage of harsh words are some of the behaviours which indicate anxiety. Besides adversely impacting the performance of the employee, the interpersonal relationships within the work environment also get strained. Quite frequently, the displayed behavior exhibits a dread and emotional tension, arising out of the person's imaginary involvement in his or her situational contexts. In psychological parlance, this is known as job anxiety (Srivastava & Sen, 1995).

The understanding of anxiety as a trait is comparatively recent one. Each of us are affected by the condition in our day to day work. It is not as if the construct is detrimental to us. It has its positive impact also as it propels us to do our work. The Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908) states that physiological or mental arousal pushes up the performance only up to a certain point. When the level of stress becomes too high, performance decreases (Gino, 2016).

The Yerkes-Dodson Law
How anxiety affects performance.

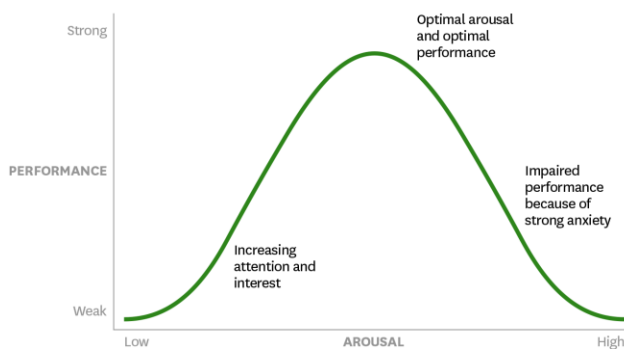


Figure I: Impact of Anxiety on Performance
(@HBR.ORG)

In their research, based on the British Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) data of 2004-2011, the relationship between job anxiety, psychological illness, and work related performance Jones, Latreille, & Sloane (2011) have discussed the strong relationship between these three aspects. As per the researchers, while this association maybe causal, the employers do need to look at the costs involved in reducing job anxiety at the workplace. There is a threshold of anxiety to which an employee can be subjected to without having adverse impact on the individual or the organisation as a whole. The negative impact of strong anxiety at the workplace may result in various physiological and psychological problems for an employee. While anxiety is seen to affect job performance and productivity, there is the possibility of the reverse also happening. The researchers conclude with further stress upon the positive correlation of job anxiety with bigger job role, increasing responsibilities and tenure of an employee.

The younger generation of employees today is not only more aware but also more concerned about working conditions and how it impacts their lifestyle. The kind of commitment and loyalty to an organization displayed by older workers can no longer be expected from this new crop of employees. The world is full of immense opportunities and options these days. The new generation including the millennials do not tolerate for long what they find lacking in the workplace. They are mobile and harbour no wrong impressions of life-long commitment. Syed & Tappin (2019) have concluded in their research on 279 IT professionals in USA that new age workers show a markedly low tolerance for job insecurity and consequently for organizational commitment as compared to the older workers

On the positive side anxiety may heighten the cognitive abilities, improve focus and attention, enhance motivation & sharpen decision making and analytical ability (Strack et al., 2017). On the negative side it can adversely impact the physical and mental health of the individual. A WHO report (2017) pegs the cost of depression and anxiety burden on the world economy at 1 Trillion USD in form of lost productivity.

Occupational Stress

An emotion is a response to an external stimuli impacting one's physical state through bio chemical reactions (Sourkes, 1962). Emotions lead to mental experiences known as feelings. Stress is a state of mind, a feeling, and is generally associated, in Psychology, with one of the core emotions of fear. In our day to day life, the word "stress" is used generally to indicate the effect of work, mental or physical or both on an individual indicating towards adverse impact on the body resulting in health issues. Stress does result in the health issues as has also been reported by the UN in its report in 1992 calling it the "The 20th Century Disease" and subsequently by the WHO which has termed it as a "World Wide Epidemic."

Sabbarwal et al. (2017) in their study have defined occupational stress as a strain which develops due to the conflict between the employee and his/her environment. Due to the work pattern and increasing complexity at the job, it is not possible for an employee in the IT sector to avoid stress. As per the study, within the job role of an employee, there are various factors, with varying degree of impact, which have been identified as the root cause of job stress. This has also resulted in various other physical ailments for the employees which could affect the work productivity. The authors have observed that in almost all the selected IT organizations management has come forward with several employee engagement programmes for tackling the issue. The authors have concluded by observing that since job stress is a phenomenon which cannot be completely eradicated, hence organisations must continuously work towards ensuring that the impact is

minimized through various initiatives including mentoring, coaching and learning programmes. One big fallout of high stress has been found out to be job satisfaction (George & Zakaria, 2015) which impacts the attrition rate in the industry (Purohit, 2016).

Laptop/computer usage is common these days with employees across sectors. Unlike the IT professional, they require it off and on. For IT employees, the major source of output is the computer/laptop on which they need to work the maximum hours on the job. The continuous usage with specific and limited movement of limbs leads to complications like back pain (Sabbarwal et al., 2017). Such problems interfere with the regular work, leading to further build-up of stress resulting in more complications both physical and psychological. In such a mental and physical state, the employee may develop a certain attitude towards his/her supervisors, seniors and overall towards the organization (McKenzie 2015).

Attitude towards Management

A huge body of knowledge and insights have been amassed over the years related to attitude, still the definitions of the concept offered by various experts reveal an amazing diversity of understanding of what the term denotes (Strauss, 1945).

As per Allport (1935) attitude is “a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual’s response to all objects and situations with which it is related”.

Yanjuan Zhang (2016) studying employee turnover has explored the various facets of the work viz job satisfaction, job stress, and commitment. These are comprised of many sub factors and get impacted by the attitude of the employee which contribute significantly to the decision of the employee to stay committed to the organization or leave it as and when there is an opportunity.

Goswami (2015) underlines the impact of stress on the thinking and working of employees in any organization. Besides the physical impact, the mental wellbeing may also get impacted. Stress largely increases the level of fear, anger, and nervousness. Simultaneously it reduces the level of satisfaction and confidence among employees which causes behavioural and physiological consequences. There should be adequate counselling and role alignment for the employee to get adjusted to the demands of the work. The author concludes that to get the best out of the employees it imperative to take certain employee centric initiatives which give them support, provide direction & guidance, and empower them enough to perform their job roles effectively.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The corporate world is often described as a VUCA ecosystem where volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity rule. For employees, managers, and even the top brass operating in such an atmosphere, stress can quickly turn to distress and lead to anxiety and depression (Nair, 2016). IT industry is no different from the others when it comes to issues related to job stress. A survey covering 3,000 employees from sectors such as IT, manufacturing, financial sector and startups has found that 1 out of 5 employees suffers from depression (ET, 2019).

The anxiety of the outcomes and stress of the working schedule impacts the employee attitude towards his/her work and shows in the work output. Keeping the above in perspective, the present study is a humble attempt to gauge how anxiety and stress of employees in IT industry affects their attitude towards their management. This study also looks at the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables for both male and female employees plus investigates the interaction between the two independent variables. The study is significant as it gives insight on the level and direction of the employees’ attitude towards management vis-à-vis job anxiety and occupational stress respectively. The concerned stakeholders can use the findings to formulate new methods and develop competencies to better handle anxiety and stress at the workplace.

IV. HYPOTHESIS

1. There is a significant negative correlation between job anxiety among employees and their attitude towards management.
2. There is a significant negative correlation between occupational stress among employees and their attitude towards management.
3. Job anxiety among female employees impacts their attitude towards management more than that of their male counterparts.
4. Occupational stress will manifest a greater influence the attitude towards management of women worker vs the male employees.

IV. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the influence of job anxiety and occupational stress respectively among employees on their attitude towards management.
2. To investigate the difference in the impact of job anxiety and occupational stress on the attitude towards management of male and female employees.

V. METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This is an Ex-post facto study wherein the impact of the IVs is already existing

Sampling Technique: Purposive-strata sampling technique is used.

Sample Size: Data was collected through the above mentioned 3 scales / index and personal information sheet for a total of 200 IT professionals from various IT firms based at Hyderabad. Out of this 144 respondents are male and 56 are female. All employees are in the age group of 24-36 years and have worked in the current organization for at least a year.

Variables: Independent variables – job anxiety and occupational stress; Dependent variable – attitude towards management

Tools Used

- The Job Anxiety Scale constructed by Dr. A K Srivastava (1979)
- Occupation Stress index of Dr. A. K. Srivastav and Dr. A P Singh (1984)
- Attitude Scale towards Pro and Anti Management (1979) of Dr. K.D. Kapoor has been administered to measure and determine the Attitude towards Management.
- Personal Information sheet by the researcher

Statistical Tests: Pearson’s Coefficient of Correlation.

V. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Correlation coefficients were calculated to indicate the correlations between the independent variables and the dependent variable respectively for overall number of respondents, low and high groups (each consisting 100 respondents), and separately for gender. The significance value at a 95% confidence interval level ($p \leq 0.05$) was The breakup of the respondents for gender is as below:

Table I
Total no of Respondents

CAT	NOS
MALE	144
FEMALE	56
TOT	200

A. The Pearson Correlation coefficient for the scores of the total sample on factors Job Anxiety and Attitude towards Management is **-0.14** ($df\ 198, p < .05$) which is found to be – ve and not significant as it is equal to the r_{crit} (.14). **Hence hypothesis 1 is rejected.**

The scatter plot (**Figure 2**) gives an overall view of the relationship between the two variables. The X axis

represents the score of 200 employees for Job Anxiety while the Y axis denotes the score on obtained through the Attitude scale.



Figure 2: Negative correlation between JA and ATM for 200 Employees

B. Correlation coefficient between the scores of the total sample on Occupational Stress and Attitude towards Management is **-0.47**. It’s found to be negatively significant as it higher than the r_{crit} (.14). and **proves hypothesis 2.**

The scatter plot in **Figure 3** gives an overall view of the relationship between the two variables. The X axis represents the score of 200 employees for Occupational Stress while the Y axis denotes the score on obtained through the Attitude scale.

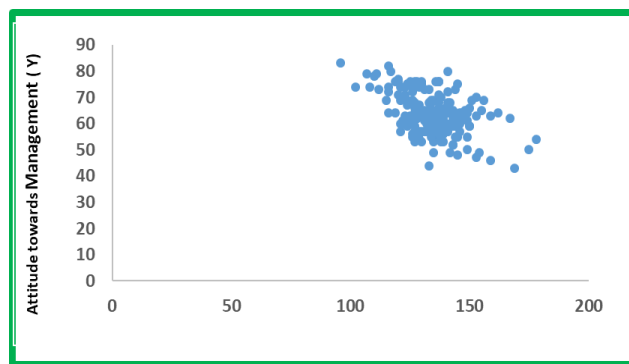


Figure 3: Negative correlation between OS and ATM for 200 Employees

C. Correlation coefficient for low and high groups:
1. The respondents were segregated into 2 categories, low and high group, based on their scores on Job Anxiety Scale (JA). Correlation value for each group on the Attitude Scale was calculated separately as given in **Table II.**

Table II

Correlation vales of Employees in Low & High JA Group

Group	No of employees	$r_{observed}$	r_{crit}	Interpretation
LOW	97	-.24	.19	negative & moderately significant
HIGH	103	.06	.19	Insignificant
TOT	200	-.14	.14	Insignificant

2. The respondents were also segregated into 2 categories, low and high, based on their scores on Occupational Stress scale. Correlation value for the scores on the Attitude Scale of each group was calculated separately as given in **Table III**:

Table III

Correlation vales of Employees in Low & High OS Group

Group	No of employees	$r_{observed}$	r_{crit}	Interpretation
LOW	94	-.57	.19	negative & significant
HIGH	106	-.24	.19	negative & moderately significant
TOT	200	-.47	.14	negative & significant

D. The respondents were segregated into gender groups on their scores on job anxiety as shown below:

Table IV

“r” values for Male & Female Employees on Job Anxiety & Attitude Scale

Gender	No of employees	$r_{observed}$	r_{crit}	Interpretation
Male	144	-.40	.15	negative & significant
Female	56	-.62	.25	negative & strongly significant

The “r” value for female employees is moderately significant while the same for male employees is insignificant. Hence the third hypothesis is accepted.

E. The respondents were segregated into gender groups on their scores on occupational stress as below:

Table V

“r” values for Male & Female Employees on Occupational Stress & Attitude Scale

Gender	No of employees	$r_{observed}$	r_{crit}	Interpretation
Male	144	-.40	.15	negative & significant
Female	56	-.62	.25	negative & strongly significant

The “r” value for female employees show a stronger and more significant relationship between the variable than for the male employees. Hence the fourth hypothesis is accepted.

V. DISCUSSION

Pro, neutral or anti (positive or negative) attitude shapes the engagement level, job satisfaction and commitment for the organization (Jagdish,1987; Dasari & Subrahmanyam,2019). For the organization this has implications on the product quality, productivity, conducive environment for growth and team bonding. While for the employee, the impact is seen on job performance and attrition rate (Kumar & Kavitha, 2018). In a worst case scenario, dis-satisfaction and disillusionment may also lead to dangerous and destructive behavior by the employees (Spector, 1997).

The current study covering 200 respondents from the IT sector has highlighted the impact of job anxiety and occupational stress of employees on their thinking about their management. The study has investigated the strength and direction of the relationships between the considered factors at the gender level also. Additionally, for each independent variable the respondents were divided into low and high groups of 100 respondents each to see the difference in the correlation with the dependent variable and try to get some more insights for better understanding.

The scatter plot in **Figure II** shows that job anxiety experienced by the respondents is negatively correlated with their attitude towards their management. But the scatter plot also reveals that the relationship is insignificant ($r=-.14$, $p<.05$; $r_{crit} =.14$). The inference derived from this is that anxiety after at the workplace after a certain level does not influence the respondents’ perception about their managers or organization. Even though the influence is negatively correlated, it being insignificant, any increase or decrease in job anxiety will have a minimal impact on their attitude at the job. This finding is not in line with studies done earlier on the impact of job anxiety on job satisfaction or employee engagement or productivity or attrition or commitment. But as per Jones et al., (2011) there is a threshold of anxiety to which an employee can be subjected to without having adverse impact on the individual or the organisation as a whole. The increasing level of anxiety is also an indicator of the level of engagement of an employee (Srivastava & Sen ,1995). There could be many reasons for result obtained in the study, like the level of job security, role clarity, delegation, and leadership. This could be a subject for further research. But, as will be discussed further, there is a marked difference in the level of interaction (correlation between the two factors) among the two genders.

The scatter plot in **Figure III** shows that the occupational stress experienced by the respondents is negatively correlated with their attitude towards their management. It also depicts that the relationship between the variables is significant ($r=-.47, p<.05; r_{crit}=.14$). Workplace stress does strongly influence the perception of the employees about their management and shape their on-job attitude. One big fallout of high stress has been found to be job satisfaction (George & Zakaria, 2015). The relationship being negatively correlated and significant, any increase or decrease in occupational stress will have an inverse impact on the attitude at job of the employees. This finding is supported by studies done earlier on occupational stress. Stress has been a very popular topic for research worldwide especially in the field of sociology, management and psychology. The factor has also been of interest as it is something which touches upon all aspects of life be it personal or professional (Greenglass, 2002) And the one big reason is that a better understanding of the causes and results of occupational stress have been known to lead to improved job satisfaction and employee health, for both young and old ones (Essays, UK, 2018). When we take into consideration gender, we observe a difference in how occupational stress is handled by male and female employees. This is discussed subsequently.

Though the sample size of women employees taken for the study is almost 1/3 that of male employees, it is still pertinent enough to note the difference in the correlation values for both the genders. In case of job anxiety, while the “ r ” value for men is insignificant ($r=-.04, p<.05$) the same for female employees is moderately significant ($r=-.36, p<.05$) as shown in **Table IV**. At the beginning of the study, we had hypothesized that female respondents would be much more affected by anxiety than the male workers. The results support the same. The results are in consonance with the findings of earlier researches. Kinrys & Wygant (2005) and Warnke (2018) have also discussed women in their respective studies, the higher prevalence of anxiety among. The findings agree with Chen et al. (2017) and Srinivas et al., (2015) that workplace anxiety impacts an employee’s thinking and perception towards his/her job. As per Malhotra & Shah (2015), gender is a critical determinant of mental health and illness in India. The patterns of psychological distress and psychiatric disorder afflicting women are different from the ones seen among men. Women have a higher mean level of internalizing disorders while men show a higher mean level of externalizing disorders. Predominance of women can be observed majorly for the rates of common mental disorders.

For occupational stress, just as has been seen for job anxiety, “ r ” value for female employees is much higher ($r=-.62, p<.05$) than the male workers ($r=-.40, p<.05$) as shown in **Table IV**. Though stress at the workplace is definitely a function of the attitude towards the organization

for both the genders it is much more so for the female employees. The results are support the findings of earlier researches. As per Narayanan et al., (1999) interpersonal conflict has been reported as the biggest source of stress for women at work as compared to men. Gyllensten & Palmer (2005) in their search to identify studies investigating gender and workplace stress found that much of the literature they scanned indicated women having reported higher levels of stress as compared to men.

As an additional analysis the respondents were divided into two groups (low and high) based on their scores on job anxiety scale and occupational stress index. The scores for each group was treated for correlation with the scores on attitude scale. As given in **Table II**, there is a moderately significant negative correlation for low job anxiety group ($r=-.24, p<.05; r_{crit}=.19$) while the same for high anxiety group is insignificant ($r=.06, p<.05; r_{crit}=.19$). The findings are in line with the studies mentioned in the paper. A threshold level of anxiety is necessary to see us through in our day to day work. For the low anxiety group, as the anxiety increases the employees’ outlook towards management becomes more negative. The anxiety in respondents in the high group seem to have reached a certain level where any further escalation of anxiety in their job will have no impact on their attitude towards management.

Table III shows the “ r ” values of the low and high group of occupational stress. The group with low stress has shown a significant but negative correlation ($r=-.56, p<.05; r_{crit}=.19$). Employees in this group show a strong response to changes in stress levels at the workplace. The attitude towards management becomes positive or negative accordingly. This finding is in line with the various earlier studies (WHO, 2019; Michie, 2002; Narban et al., 2016). The stress experienced by the respondents in the high group is having a moderately negative relationship with their attitude at the workplace ($r=-.24, p<.05; r_{crit}=.19$). But the strength of the correlation is far lower as compared to the low stress group. The employees in the high group are less affected by changes in the stress levels at the workplace as compared to the respondents in the low group.

V. CONCLUSION

The current study has attempted to look at how job anxiety and occupational stress influence the employee attitude towards their management in IT sector. Increasing demand and intervention of information technology across industries has led to high growth in the sector and has consequently put enormous pressure on the employees to deliver against tight schedules. Consistent stress and anxiety arising from various factors of the job dimensions tends to have a negative influence on the employees’ attitude and their favourable disposition towards the

management (Jagdish, 1987). This has been noted in many other studies done on job satisfaction and employee engagement (Andrew, 2017; Hewitt Associates, 2010; Reisel et. al, 2010; Coetzee, 2005).

The attitude of the respondents is not getting influenced by job anxiety in the current research as there is insignificant correlation between the two factors. This could also mean that the level of anxiety among the respondents is already too high for any further increase to impact their attitude. This may need to be probed further which is beyond the scope of the current study. On the other hand, occupational stress is seen to be significantly correlated with the respondents' attitude towards their job.

Female workers more than the male employees have been found to be affected by anxiety and stress at the workplace. IT sector of late has been attracting a lot of women to its workforce (Bharathi & Gupta, 2017), hence organisations need to identify the factors and issues at the workplace which specifically impact the female employees. These could be, among others, work timings, gender discrimination, role clarity, responsibility, work-life balance, and interpersonal issues. They could also look at various gender specific measures and interventions to bolster the confidence and trust of the female workers.

Though not a part of the main study, the influence of anxiety and stress on respondents' in the low and high group for both the factors was also calculated. The results for the factors support the already discussed findings that employees having low job anxiety or occupational stress show a more positive attitude than those in the high group.

The attitude of an employee is indicative of his/her degree of engagement which is the state of emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization (Hewitt Associates, 2010). Every year thousands of young engineers join the growing IT workforce in the country. There is an ever growing demand for IT services across the globe, and India is in the forefront today as a major supplier of manpower and content. Information technology firms need to not only retain talent but nurture them so that quality output is ensured. Employees need to be generally in a positive frame of mind to continuously remain engaged and be productive. Anxiety and stress at work cannot be wished away and are a permanent feature of an employee's daily work. Both the organization as well the workers need to deal with it effectively. Anxiety and stress may lead to fatigue and burnout and could also increase the possibility of attrition (Arnold, 2016; Gupta 2013). Suitable interventions must be designed and implemented by organisations to continuously mitigate the negative influence of anxiety and stress at the workplace.

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