

# Managing Workplace Stress and Burnouts

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**Abstract :** *The write up below is inspired by brief survey of ancient Indian writings, a few Indian executives and survey of literature related to stress and time management. Stress is the body's natural response to pressures or stressful situations we find ourselves in and which we are not certain we can cope with effectively. Situations that are unfamiliar, or challenge or threaten us increase our level of stress. Burn out has become very frequent incident in corporate world. Why only corporate world? It is fast becoming common even with housewives, politicians and young students (High School).*

*The Business environment has become extremely complex with rising demands from customers, need for adapting to fast technological changes, information superhighways driving business at break neck speeds, stringent social and government laws, work place conflicts, globalization of trade, grueling competition and ever increasing demands from various stake holders on businesses. Add to this changing complexion of home life with high divorce rates, working couples, women Lib. and nuclear families. Crime graphs are shooting up around the globe due to growing awareness and discontent of have-nots and their grudge against the proverbial 'Successful'.*

**Key Words :** Stress, burnout, breakdown, productivity, leadership, workplace.

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## 1. Introduction :

High stress and a sense of loss of control over one's life and business contribute to a stress syndrome known as burnout. What are the symptoms? Emotional and physical exhaustion, insomnia, gastrointestinal problems, sadness and depression, negativity, increased cynicism, decreased creativity, quickness to anger, defensiveness, edginess and quickness to blame others, detachment (especially from clients and staff) and loss of satisfaction or sense of accomplishment.

Dr. Pfifferling says, "Rarely are business executives granted their right to be human, by society, the media, their clients, and even their own colleagues. The nature of business itself advocates the suppression of emotions and physical needs while promoting competitiveness."

"Finding sources of emotional nourishment and replenishment takes a back seat to being a success in business," explains Dr. Gendel. "Pursuing high-level business success forces you out of a track where you can develop people skills, relationship skills, and the emotional tools to be an effective intimate partner, parent, or friend."

## 2. Why we get into stress, which may lead to burnout?

- Conflict with Ethics and our Value system
- Ambitions-unfulfilled
- Threat to job or life
- Unable to manage time
- Unable to cope with demand of work
- Too high or unachievable/unrealistic targets- at Workplace/ for Self
- Physical discomforts/insecurity and pollution {noise pollution included}
- Unstable and poor family environment
- Poor dietary habits
- Poor self-development focus including prayers and health care
- Poor professional development of self-making you unfit in race.
- Work place jealousy and lack of team spirit
- Perception of losing control over your personal life or Job
- Your inability/lack of training, to schedule tasks (Time Management)

- Your Boss
- Your inflated or uncontrolled ego
- Your personality Type

## 2.1. Types of Stress

### 2.1.1 Acute Stress

Acute stress is the most common form of stress among humans worldwide. Acute stress deals with the pressures of the near future or dealing with the very recent past. This type of stress is often misinterpreted for being a negative connotation. While this is the case in some circumstances, it is also a good thing to have some acute stress in life. Running or any other form of exercise is considered an acute stressor. Some exciting or exhilarating experiences such as riding a roller coaster is an acute stress but is usually very fun. Acute stress is a short term stress and in result, does not have enough time to do the damage that long term stress causes.

### 2.1.2. Chronic Stress

Chronic stress is the exact opposite of acute stress. It has a wearing effect on people that can become a very serious health risk if it continues over a long period of time. Chronic stress can lead to memory loss, damage special recognition and produce a decreased drive of eating. The severity varies from person to person and also sex difference can be an underlying factor. Women are able to take longer durations of stress than men without showing the same maladaptive changes. Men can deal with shorter stress duration better than women can but once males hit a certain threshold, the chances of them developing mental issues increases drastically.

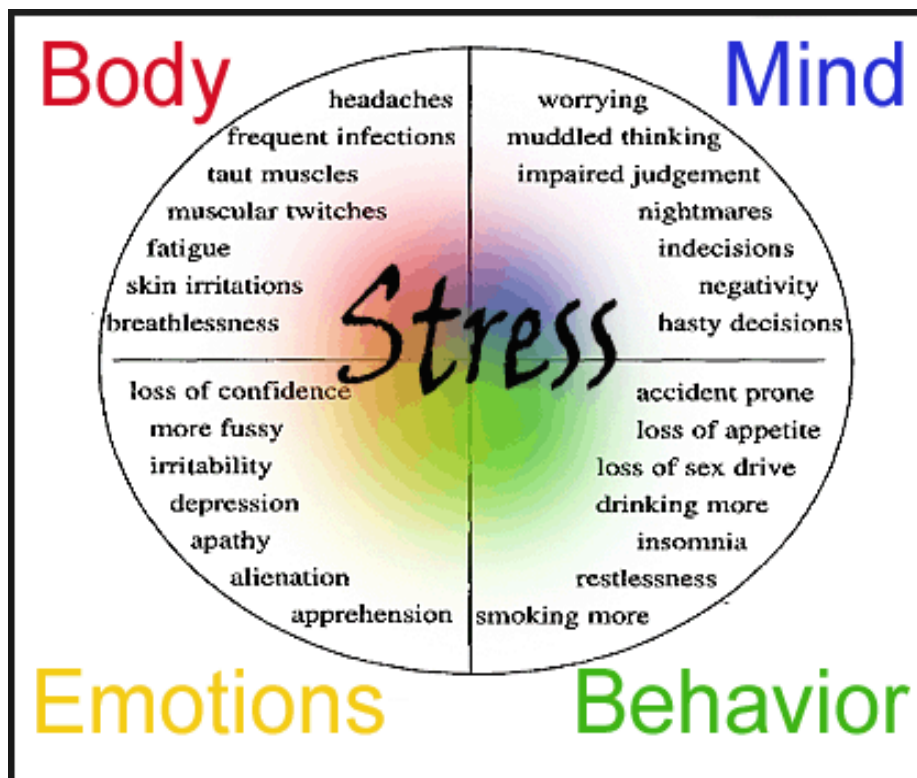


Fig -1 : Effect Of Stress On Human Behavior

### **3. The Basic Five Fears That Drive a Person Towards Performance And May Also Lead To Serious Breakdown:**

- Fear of death;
- Fear of old age;
- Fear of rejection;
- Fear of poverty and,
- Fear of loneliness

### **4. Another scholar talks about At-least five fears that are universal and may reduce productivity:**

- Fear of Criticism
- Fear of Rejection
- Fear of Failure
- Fear of Not Getting What You Want
- Fear of Losing What You Have

### **5. Yet another set of fears related to leadership role are:**

- 5.1. Fear of death - and the resulting need for security.
- 5.2. Fear of the outsider – and the resulting need for community.
- 5.3. Fear of the future – and the resulting need for clarity
- 5.4. Fear of chaos – and the resulting need for authority.
- 5.5. Fear of insignificance – and the resulting need for respect.

When we are not able to control one or more of these fears, anxiety takes place, which makes us work harder but may also lead to high stress level and burn out.

It is often seen in work place that stress and resultant burnout is result of a combination of several factors and not because of only just one factor.

It is surprising but true that Your Boss is one important factor in burn out. A good leader in your boss's chair may do wonders to keep stress level in organization low and improve productivity. He has to thus understand these basic fears and help in diminishing these and also help in achieving the resulting needs from particular fears as mentioned above.

People with Type-A Personality are more prone to high stress level and finally burn out. This type can be modified through concerted efforts by meditation, philosophical inputs and moderating one's ambitions and self-esteem levels. Although a little amount of stress level has been found, in many research studies to be favorable for remaining younger, healthier and achieving high performance levels.

### **6. How Do You Know If Stress Is A Hazard In Your Workplace?**

Stress is found at all workplaces, and can have both good and bad effect on individuals- their work performance and their health and well being. Efforts to control or manage stress levels when it is causing problems in the workplace should focus on changing the work environment or providing affected employees with help to reduce high levels of stress.

There are a range of physical, psychological and behavioral symptoms you can experience if you are faced with high levels of stress. Some of these indicators of stress problems are listed below:

#### **6.1. Physical effects include:**

- Increased blood pressure;
- Increased heart rate {Tachycardia};
- Increased muscle tension;
- Headaches

## 6.2. Psychological effects include:

- Increased anxiety;
- Depression;
- Aggression;
- Confusion.

## 6.3. Behavioral effects include:

- Increased smoking;
- Increased drinking;
- Irritability;
- Obsessive concern with trivial issues;
- Poor work performance.

Individuals and work groups can both show they are experiencing unmanageable levels of stress through a range of symptoms. Work group indicators of stress problems can include absenteeism, high or increased accident rates, poor or reduced work output and poor interpersonal relations in the workplace.

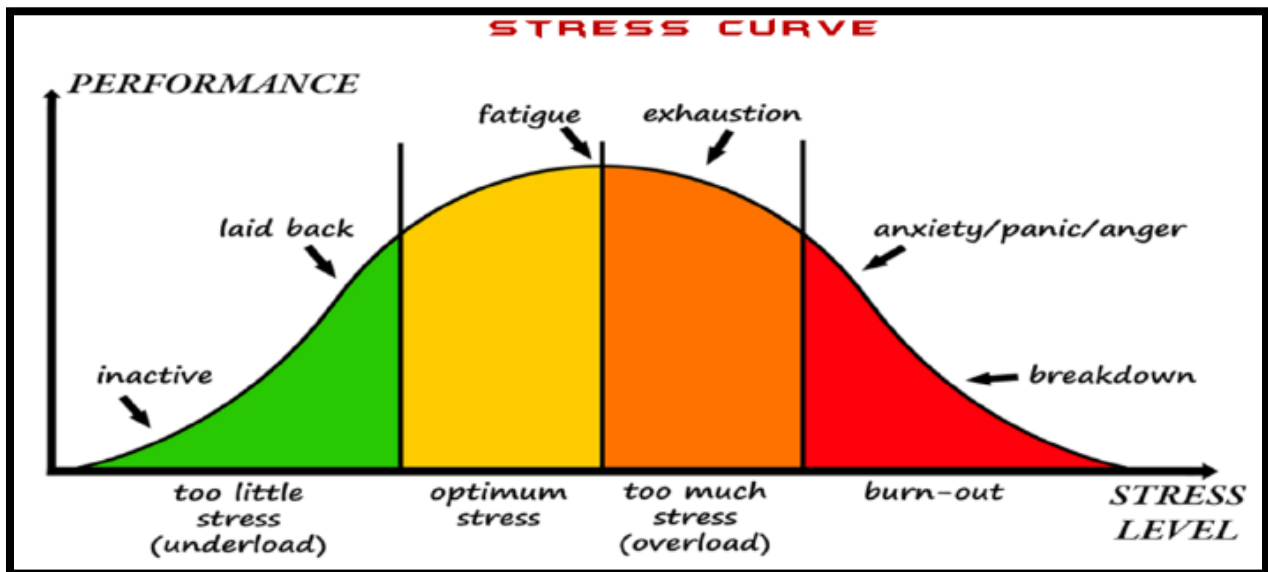


Fig : 2 – Effect of Stress on Work Performance

## 7. Get Balanced:

### 7.1. Be Powerful

- Make decisions that are best for you.
- Take action to make your desires come true.

### 7.2. Be Realistic.

- Do not expect unachievable things of yourself.
- Modify aggressive timelines and reduce a heavy workload.

### 7.3. Be aware.

- What is your body telling you?
- Are you doing what you need to make yourself happy?

**7.4. Be grateful.**

- Give thanks every day for what you have (health, friends, great personality, work).
- Know that you are a wonderful and unique person.

**7.5. Be Loving.**

- Practice daily acts of kindness for others.
- Tell your family and friends how much you love them.

**7.6. Be supportive.**

- Encourage others in their efforts and mentor someone who wants your help.
- Support yourself by making choices that are good for you.

**7.7. Use a Coach.**

- Ask for assistance to resolve the problems that are roadblocks for you.
- Get perspective on your situation, options, and best choices.

**7.8. Let it Go!**

- Release things that trap you into feeling bad.
- Write down the issue, burn up the paper and free yourself from it.

**8. How to Avoid Stress and Burn Out?**

- Quit High-voltage job you can't cope with, though it may be highly paying.
- Sit down with your boss/subordinate to draw realistic and achievable targets
- Plan your time for work and self.
- Don't kill time-use it.
- Plan your short term and long term goals-Professional and Personal.
- If you are married, love your spouse actually and share your thoughts.
- Sex drive is effective anti-stress tool. An active sex life therefore is important.
- Tone down your targets or extend the time horizon
- Socialize
- Focus on good non-vegetarian and nourishing light food, 30 minutes aerobic exercise and avoid altogether all toxic materials. Although a low quantity of liquor may actually help to unwind.
- Prayers and being thankful to God for what you get today is important de-stressing tool.
- Improve communication skills
- Use modern gadgets and software to improve communication, monitoring and scheduling capability.
- Be good listener and react slowly.
- Keep smiling and better join a laughter club, if close by.
- Shed all mortal fears
- Believe in yourself
- Upgrade yourself regularly
- Develop a good network
- Do *Paranayama* or deep breathing exercise for a few minutes, even in office.
- Delegate responsibility to your subordinates, spouse and friends wherever possible.
- Feel contentment and look around at your not so fortunate brethren
- Stick to Ethics,
- and finally, cut down your ambitions to workable and achievable limits.

*Geeta*<sup>1</sup> mentions about futility of mortal fears and engaging oneself in Nishkaam Karma (setting out for work without expectation of reward).

Looking at cosmic purity of unadulterated rays of sun and the dewdrops on green leaves at dawn, point to need for understanding higher self besides the materialistic achievements.

According to Sahru S Ragnekar <sup>2</sup>, in future, a person will have to go through at least 2 different careers in lifetime. The person should therefore, divide time for three purposes-current occupation related work, family and self-development investment for future.

So take it easy and manage your time holistically without joining rat race of today. Invest in your tomorrow.

## **Conclusion**

- It may take several years before the symptoms of this syndrome to fully manifest themselves.
- It is often correlated with the process of grief, as a work-life dream is lost.
- Leadership requirements can also exact a price, because it often necessitates a re-shuffling of personal priorities. Often, the unwitting victim is one's personal life.
- People suffering from burnout seem to progressively feel a lack of personal accomplishment in their work.
- Burnout has been identified as a prime factor in turnover, absenteeism, reduced morale and various kinds of personal dysfunction.

The cause of executive burnout may be traced to perfectionism (trying to do too much because they expect it of themselves), business hero complex (feel that others expect it) or poor communication (failure to clearly define their limits to clients, co-workers, employees and others). It is necessary to determine the legitimate, realistic and feasible expectations of what you can do, at what pace and rhythm, for how long and what creative or rest breaks will be needed. If you do not clarify, and then communicate, your plan and needs to others, there is a danger that the expectations that others have about your time and attention may be too great.

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