Workplace stress and its management in Norwegian Refugee Council, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NCR) is an independent, humanitarian, non-profit, NGO which is established to provide assistance, protection, and durable solutions to refugees and internally displaced persons, worldwide. The organization is currently operating in Ethiopia, particularly in Somali, Tigray, Benishangul Gumuz and Gambela Regions. It was assumed that most of the Organization's employees are exposed to stress, since they are stationed in remote areas far away from the central Office, where they cannot easily get adequate support and prompt response to their inquiries. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to assess the magnitude of work place stress of the NRC project staff and examine the way it is managed by both the Organization and the employees themselves. Accordingly, relevant data for the study were collected from 180 respondents selected from the total population using purposive sampling technique, through the distribution of questionnaire. Interview sessions were also conducted to collect supplementary data from the management team. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical method. The findings indicate that the most serious workplace stress problem in the organization is workload. The respondents claim that they are overloaded. The findings also indicate that no serious stress symptoms are observed among the employees. The employees also seem to be aware about the commonly used individual stress coping mechanisms. The information obtained from both the employees and the management team members on the other hand indicates that there is no well thought stress prevention and management system designed by the Organization. The organization is, therefore, advised to consider the limitations identified, and take the required corrective measures.

Key words**:** Workplace stress, stressors, stress symptoms, stress management/ prevention, effect of stress.

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Introduction

Pressure at workplace especially in humanitarian organization is unavoidable but when it becomes excessive or unmanageable it leads to stress. Work stress is the relationship between stressors on the job and how the worker physically and emotionally reacts. Stress and strain have long been associated with the work people do. It's not just the idea of physical labor, but also the wear and tear of work on people's mental health. Stress on the job, in fact, is something that almost every working person experiences. Is it the boss who breathes down your neck, the overtime hours, the noise levels, or meeting deadlines? It's all many other issues *(Hiriyappa, 2014).*

Hiriyappa (2014), further underscores that when work stress is prolonged and severe, the risk of experiencing burnout increases. There are periods when work can become over-whelming and prevent a normal life. When this happens, we call it burnout. Thus, burnout is the condition where unrelieved stress creates a psychologically crippling state for the worker. Hiriyappa notes that this dangerous condition can be overcome if its stages are recognized and addressed early. He also stresses that many factors contribute to work stress in which some factors are more important than others; though each can be influential. These factors include: nature of the job, work relationships, organization role, career development, organizational structure and atmosphere, or non-work factors.

On the other hand, Lakhwider and Raghbir (2006), stress that among the major dangers caused by workplace stress are poor physical and mental health; leads to psychological problem; difficult to maintain a healthy

balance between work and non-work life; engage in unhealthy activities like smoking, drinking and abusing drug. They add, it may even result in serious health problems such as coronary heart disease, hypertension, diabetics, gastrointestinal disorders; peptic ulcer, asthma, migraine, etc.

From the above discussions, we can realize that workplace stress can significantly affect the health of employees. Obviously, unhealthy employees will not be productive, and this will in turn negatively affect the performance of the organization.

Many studies confirm that job life is one of the important part of our daily lives which cause a great deal of stress. A study conducted on health workers in private hospitals in India of indicates that occupational stress can come from working conditions themselves, such as overload, poor interpersonal relations and physical working conditions, as well as job-related factors like discrimination, lack of opportunity for advancement, and boredom. According to this study, both men and women face many of these stressors. The study further specifies that the following eight individual factors influence the stress more: overload (workload), depression, work under considerable tension, scolding of boss for minor mistakes, abusive comments, less salary, lack of proper career ladder, and night shifts (Muthu, 2012).

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is an independent organization, humanitarian, non-profit, NGO which is established to provide assistance, protection and durable solutions to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide. It promotes and protects the rights of people who have been forced to flee their countries, or their homes within their countries. The organization operates in more than twenty countries in Africa, Asia,

America and Europe. Initially, NCR was established under the name Aid to Europe in 1946, to assist refugees in Europe after the Second World War. Today, it is organized as an independent private foundation.

NCR is currently operating in Ethiopia in close cooperation with UNHCR and the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) to support the refugees and vulnerable host communities. Due to the pressing humanitarian needs of the refugees in Ethiopia, NCR has decided to establish a program presence in the country with a coordination office in Addis Ababa. The Council is currently operating in Dolo Ado – Somali Region; Shire – Tigray Region; Assosa – Benishangul Gumuth Region; and Gambela. NCR is committed to continue and expand its programs in line with the emerging needs of refugees and host communities. However, to successfully meet its mission, it needs to give due attention to the security and safety of its staff in general, and its field staff in particular. Most of the organization's staff members are exposed to stress since they often find themselves in remote field locations dealing with people who are in a desperate and hopeless situation. They may not also get adequate support and prompt response to their inquiries from the central management due to the remoteness of the field sites locations. In general, they are exposed to a stressful work and living environment. They need the support of their immediate supervisors to effectively and efficiently execute their duties and responsibilities. So far, no study that addresses the workplace stress magnitude in the organization has been conducted. But there are some indications that inculcate the need of investigating the situation. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to assess the magnitude of workplace stress of NRC staff, and examine the way it is managed. In other words the study intends to check whether it is the right track in its workplace stress

practices.

Statement of the problem

The safety and welfare of NRC staff are of great importance. In order to maintain safety, a good working environment and productivity at work, a reasonable balance between work and private life is essential. Managers are expected to encourage staff to get sufficient time to rest, take physical exercise and to recuperate. Some staff (often less experienced) in NRC often find themselves in remote field locations, frequently without the benefit of team support close by. The vulnerability of such staff to stress and insecurity can place them in difficult positions. Supervisors are expected to be aware of these pressures and more experienced staff need to be involved in providing them adequate guidance and support.

There are some practices of giving advice and guidance regarding stress handling, debriefs and follow up after critical incidents. But most of the sources used for this purpose are not NRC specific. Most of the documents used are references to HR networks, INGOs and UN organizations. Therefore, as work stress is thought to affect individuals' psychological and physical health as well as organization's effectiveness in an adverse manner, not having own detailed guiding document for NRC to deal with work stress seems to have its own problem.

It is frequently reflected during formal and informal discussions that there are significant stress problems that need the attention of the organization. It is commonly heard that among the factors that contribute to employees' stress are: working extra hours, that is over stretch; no compensation for extra hours; the remoteness of working areas and very hot weather without proper ventilation system in the office and accommodation places; threat of

security because offices are located in boarder areas; no stress management and prevention mechanism used by the organization; conflict among staff for various reasons; organizational structure problem; unclear responsibility; and leadership style of some managers and office politics. Thus, there are stress symptoms. This study therefore, intends to investigate how the above factors are serious in aggravating the stress of the employees working for the organization and prove or disprove the assumptions.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to assess to what extent the staff of NRC are stressed and examine the general stress management system of the organization.

More specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. to identify the most frequent reason/s of work stress in the organization and determine their seriousness;

2. to identify the frequently observed   stress symptoms;

3. to find out the most effective ways used by the organization to prevent appearing stress and to fight with it; and

4. to find out the ability of the staff to cope up with stress.

Literature review

The concept of stress

Stress is emotional strain caused by different stressors. As per the WHO's health series document, workers who are stressed are also more likely to be

unhealthy, poorly motivated, less productive and less safe at work. Their organizations are less likely to be successful in a competitive market. Stress can be brought about by pressures at home and at work. Employers can not usually protect workers from stress arising outside of work but they can protect them from stress that arises through work.

Stress at work can be a real problem to the organization as well as for its workers. Good management and good work organization are the best forms of stress prevention. If employees are already stressed, their managers should be aware of it and know how to help (WHO, 2004).

The goals of best practice objectives with regard to stress management are to prevent stress happening or where employees are already experiencing stress, to prevent it from causing serious damage to their health or to the healthiness of their organization (WHO, 2004).

Work related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope. Stress occurs in a wide range of work circumstances but it often made worse when employees feel they have little support from supervisors and colleagues and where they have little control over work or how they can cope with its demands and pressures (WHO, 2004).

Stress is common in the workplace. It is noticed in all employees who are working in an organization. It is pressure to complete work within stipulated time. Employees are unable to either complete or delay in a project. Stress is increasing for everyone who is working with a particular project. This type of stress is known as work stress. It is stress or pressure to everyone who are

responding it due to busy schedule, organizational commitment to complete the project proposal. Work stress happens due to pressure from job and its responsibilities. Work stress can lead to major problems of physical and mental health. It adversely affects work performance of the employee in terms of unhealthy, poorly motivated, less productive and less safe at work. These things result to arise to stress (Hiriyappa, 2014).

Causes of stress

There is often confusion between pressure or challenge and stress and sometimes it is used to excuse bad management practice. Pressure at the workplace is unavoidable due to the demands of contemporary work environment. Pressure perceived as acceptable by an individual, may even keep workers alert, motivated, able to work and learn, depending on the available resources and personal characteristics. However, when that pressure becomes excessive or otherwise unmanageable, it leads to stress. Then, it can damage the workers' health and business performance (WHO, 2004).

Poor work organization that is the way we design jobs and work, and the way we manage them, can cause work stress. Because these aspects of work have the potential for causing harm, they are called 'Stress-related hazards' (WHO, 2004). As further asserted by WHO, excessive and otherwise unmanageable demands and pressures can be caused by poor work design, poor management and unsatisfactory working conditions. Similarly, these things can result in workers not receiving sufficient support from others or not having enough control over their work and its pressures.

Research findings show that the most stressful type of work is that which

values excessive demands and pressures that are not matched to workers' knowledge and abilities, where there is little opportunity to exercise any choice or control, and where there is little support from others.

Stress may also result from poor work conditions, particularly lack of control, poor social relations and lack of social support, lack of rewards, work overload (particularly too many administrative tasks), or routinization (Nina, 2005).

The following are the commonly known reasons for stress to happen:

1. *Employees' roles undefined clearly- If* the employee is not aware about the nature of his work and his role in the organization he/she will be certainly exposed to stress. An organization must define the role of all employees at the time of employment, in order to reduce the stress level of employees at different levels.

2. *Improper responsibility*-Stress is accumulated due to improper responsibilities, which are assigned to the job incumbent. It leads to stress to employees and employers.

3. *Conflicting workplace*-Conflict leads to generate stress to all workers who are in different positions and work in several problems.

4. *Self interest*-It is the goal of an individual employee and employer of an enterprise. It leads to conflicts, quarrels, and politics to get positions, management and administration. It affects to an organization's performance.

5. *Lack of knowledge*-It led to delays in project, failure of the project and unable to complete the project. It leads huge stress to owners and workers as the owner may be losing clients, and workers will lose their

job. It creates stress, depression, anxiety and anger.

6. ***Lack of power and position-*** It is very prominent at the monitor, implement and control the particular task of the workplace. Influencing power and position at work place will create stress on the position holder.

7. ***Noncooperation-*** Noncooperation leads to negative stress depression, anger, anxiety in the workplace.

8. ***Autocratic leadership***-Boss makes policy and takes decisions autocratically leads to negative stress to all workers in an organization.

9. ***Poor communication-*** not understanding instructions and guidance from superiors will lead to stress and unable to complete work at the workplace.

10. ***Workload***-Stress arises due to unmanageable heavy workload.

11. ***Bad management practice-*** Management that negligent to the welfare of the workers leads to stress, depression, anger, anxiety and phobias, etc.

12. ***Organizational change policies***-It may lead to positive or negative stress depending on the impact on staff survival in the organization.

13. ***Office politics***-The result of office politics either ruins or continued with progress in an organization. Office politics are required for development; welfare of activities towards a worker is welcoming. Office politics is not good for creating problems in office, lockout, and strike.

14. ***Worker amenities***-workers expect remuneration for their work. The worker will not get the right compensation for their work, promotions, incentives and punishment lead to stress and affect the welfare of

workers at the workplace.

15. *Unrealistic demand*-Workers put unrealistic demands of management and it causes of stress, anger, anxiety and depression to manage people.

Symptoms of stress

Stress is not always damaging or bad. A mild stress may lead to an improvement in an employee's job performance. But a higher level of stress and stress experienced over a long period of time may adversely affect the performance and well-being of an employee. There are different signs and symptoms that indicate that the person is under stress. Sixty-two stress symptoms were identified after a thorough review of literature available on the subject (Beehr and Newman, 1978; Schler, 1980; Palmer, 1994). The symptoms which were reported more frequently by the respondents include: 'being angry', 'thinking about finding an alternative job', 'difficulty in getting up early in the morning', 'nervousness, uneasiness or tension', 'feeling hurt', 'bothered by low job performance', 'getting irritated, 'difficulty in making right judgments', 'headaches', 'preoccupied with self focused thoughts', 'getting bored with almost everything', 'just want to be left alone', 'bothered by an uncertainty about whom to trust', 'difficulty in concentrating', 'forgetfulness', 'upset stomach', 'getting tired easily', and 'feeling dissatisfied in general' *(Kang & Singh, 2006).*

The following are some of the most common symptoms of work stress:

Mental symptoms (anxiety, depression, restlessness, worry, poor judgment, racing thoughts, irritability, sadness, anger, feelings of insecurity, inability to concentrate, memory losing, persistent sad or empty feeling, guilty feeling, helplessness, hopelessness or worthlessness, unable to concentrate, mental sluggishness, thoughts of death or suicide and mental shock, etc.);

Physical symptoms (back pain, chest pain, headaches, high heart beat, high blood pressure, frequent illness, decrease immunity, digestive problem, chronic depression, sleep problems, loss of energy, etc) and

Behavioral symptoms (overeating, under eating, drug and alcohol abuse, smoking, loss of appetite, feeling of insecurity and inadequacy, weakened immune system, diminished coping ability, depression, chronic fatigue, etc) *(Hiriyappa, 2014).*

Effects of work stress on individuals

The experience of work stress can cause unusual and dysfunctional behavior at work and contribute to poor physical and mental health; leads to psychological problem; difficult to maintain a healthy balance between work and non work life; engage in unhealthy activities like smoking, drinking and abusing drug; and may also affect the immune system.

The various stress related problems like coronary heart disease (CHD), hypertension, diabetics, gastrointestinal disorders, peptic ulcer, asthma, migraine, alcoholism, drug addiction, depression and suicide, etc. are accountable for poor employee health *(Lakhwinder & Raghbir, 2006).*

Effects of work stress on organizations

If key staff or a large number of workers are affected, work stress may challenge the healthiness and performance of the organization; this may eventually affect the survival of the organization.

Work stress problems are further affecting organizational performance adversely by contributing to poor employee productivity, high employee turnover and absenteeism, poor organizational climate, low employee

morale, and higher degree of job dissatisfaction *(Lakhwinder & Raghbir, 2006).*

Managing stress at workplace

Stress arises in the workplace whether with reason or without reason. It is possible to convert work stress load into beneficial actions. It leads to favorable achievement of goals and reach work target. Management is responsible for effective work management at workplace and assigns the roles and responsibilities of each worker at the workplace. Management allocates function, duties, and work control of all employees in an organization; it must be clearly defined, prescribe authority and responsibility. Decent management or excellent leaders in the workplace are the best level prevention of stress at the workplace. They are found and evaluate the worker stress signs at the workplace;

A Manager of a particular workplace is required to find out the existence of stress and identify the reasons and try to help the stressed person how to prevent it.

Managing stress at work place leads to productivity at work, increase the efficiency of work, reduced absenteeism, healthy cooperation and amicable relationship with all the colleagues, achievement of mission and vision. Employers must develop positive stress at the workplace and try to avoid negative stress. The employer provides an opportunity for workers to participate in decision making, meeting, policy making etc. Employers consulted and make plans of action and work schedule and changes in work schedule with employees. Offer incentives and promotion benefits to workers and share official information to workers. Some of the stress management mechanisms to be used by the organization includes: work

redesign (by changing the demands of work, develop knowledge of employees; improve employees control over work and increase amount and quality of support received by employees); stress management training; improve ergonomics and environmental design; develop managers in dealing with stress; and organizational development to implement better work and management system.

Workers must know also how to manage stress at workplace. Some of stress management to be used by workers includes:- being courageous to face stress; being self confident; fight to win stressful situations; identify causes of stress and think how to overcome the situation; exercise different sports; set time table, to do list and work priorities (learn task management skills); practice healthy diet system; avoid pitfalls and mistakes; take responsibility and complete accordingly; learn better communication skill; get enough sleep; use emotional intelligence to solve problems; go to anger management counseling; avoid negative thinking/behavior; reduce toxin intake; relaxation; take care everyone either at home or workplace; and ask professional help *(Hiriyappa, 2014)*.

Workplace counseling services are becoming increasingly common *(Hill, 2000),* and it has been suggested that the main rationale for providing these services is to deal with work related stress *(Brinier, 1997)* even though counseling may not directly tackle hazards such as work overload or lack of control *(Kristina & Stephen, 2005)*.

Coaching has become acceptable to organizations to manage stress, improve performance and achieve goals. Likewise, *(Hearn, 2001)* suggests that coaching can be useful in tackling stress as it can help individuals to identify stressors, find permanent solutions and maintain changes *(Kristina &*

Stephen, 2005).

Steps of stress management

Stress management is to identify the sources of stress and this is not easy to find. The true sources of stress are not always clear. It is good to think about how to cope with the stress in life. Even though there are many ways to solve problems that create stress, there is no scientific method that works for everyone and every situation. Therefore, it is required to experiment different techniques and strategies.

Coping can occur in anticipation of stressful encounter or in reaction to a present or past situation and coping responses aim at eliminating/reducing the sources of discomfort, altering one's appraisal of the Stressor, and managing /reducing the feeling of discomfort within the individual. These coping responses are possible at the individual, group, and at the organization levels *(Kang & Singh, 2004).*

It has been acknowledged that individual well-being is influenced not only by the amount of stress an individual experiences but also how an individual copes with stress *(Lakhwinder & Raghbir, 2004).*

Stress management is the ability to maintain control over oneself when situation, people and events make excessive demands. Being in control of your life is largely a matter of attitude. The difference between being in control or out of control calls for investing some time in planning. Planning leads to anticipation of problems in advance and taking proactive and corrective actions *(Daisy, 2005).*

When deciding which option to choose, it is helpful to think of the following

four stress management strategies: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept. In addition, there are two strategies-making time for fun and adopt healthy life style. Each has a unique response to stress; there is no solution for managing "one size fits all." No one method works for everyone or every situation, so experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

Methodology

Sampling techniques used

The total population of NRC Ethiopia employees is 326. These employees are located in different field offices and the central office found in Addis Ababa. Accordingly, the sample size of the study was determined using sample size determination formula set by Glenn (2013), as indicated below:

N = N ÷ (1+ N (e)2)

Where:

N = Population=326

e = Precision=0.05

$n = N/(1+N*e^2) = 326/(1 + 326*(0.05)^2) = 326/1.815 = 180$

All offices are considered based on the proportion of staff available and with the sample size determined with a risk level of 5%. Thus, 180 sample employee respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique proportionally from all the sites of the organization. Purposive, because more emphasis was given to focus on the junior staff, assuming that they are more vulnerable to stress and can provide reliable information that shows the real situation. On the other hand, census was used to select the

management team members involved in the interview sessions. Thus, all were considered since their number is manageable.

Data collection tools used

Questionnaire was employed to collect data from the 180 sample respondents drawn from the organization's offices located in Addis Ababa, Assosa, Dolo Ado, Gambela and Shire. On the other hand, structured interview was used to collect data from the management team. The administration of this tool was intended to cross check whether differences exist between the perceptions of the employees and the management and determine the concern of the management.

The questionnaire designed consists of four parts which include: background information of respondents; information about organizational stressors; stress symptoms encountered by respondents; and stress coping mechanisms used by both the staff and the organization.

The interview checklist included ten structured questions focusing on workplace stressors, the effect of stress on staff and organization, and stress management system used. Accordingly, interview was conducted with the country management team of NRC. Relevant documents were also consulted to complement the data obtained from the completed questionnaires and the structured interview.

Data analysis methods employed

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data collected. Thus, the data collected through questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively using frequency count and percentage. The data collected through the organization

of interview sessions were on the other hand organized as per the questions designed, and analyzed qualitatively. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were used to organize the results of the study.

Results and discussions

This section discusses the findings obtained from the self-administered questionnaires distributed and the interview sessions conducted. As stated earlier, the study intends to determine the magnitude of workplace stress in NRC; find out its causes and effects, and   examine the effectiveness of the coping mechanisms used by individual staff members and the organization. All the 180 questionnaires distributed were personally collected. But, because of reasons beyond their control, some of the management team members were not able to appear for the interview sessions. As a result, the interview sessions organized were conducted with 5 management team members who were available, including the Country Director of NRC Ethiopia. The findings are organized and presented in the tables that follow:

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate their gender, age, length of service at NRC, and their educational background. Accordingly, the data pertaining to the demographic background of the respondents are presented in the table below.

Table 1: General background of respondents

S/N	Variables	Frequency	
1	**Gender**	**Number**	**Percentage**
	Female	44	24
	Male	136	76
	Total	**180**	**100**
2	**Age**		
	20-30	104	58
	31-40	55	30
	41-50	14	8
	51-60	7	4
	Total	**180**	**100**
3	**Length of service**		
	1 year	67	37
	1 - 2 years	95	53
	2 years	18	10
	Total	**180**	**100**
4	**Educational Background**		
	Primary	5	3
	Secondary	16	8
	Diploma	62	35
	Degree and above	97	54
	Total	**180**	**100**

Source: Survey data

As can be seen from table 1 above, the number of female respondents is 44(24%) and the remaining 136 (76%) of the respondents are male. Thus, the organization is male dominated. This could be due to the nature of the work. Most of the sites are located in remote areas bordering with the refugees' home countries. Regarding their age distribution, 104 (58%) belong to the age group ranging from 20 - 30 years. On the other hand, 55 (30%) lie in the age group of 31 – 40 years. The rest of the respondents, that is, 21 (12%) are above the age of 41. Thus, most of the organization's employees are in the

young age category. They may be physically strong enough to face hardship situations. On the other hand, the age composition is likely to indicate that they may lack the required maturity and experience to cope with work stress; and thus they may need close follow-up and support.

Concerning their length of service, 95(53%) of the respondents have served from 1-2 years. On the other hand, 67(37%) of the respondents have served for less than 1 year. The number of those who served for more than one year is 18 (10%). As can be seen from the demographic data, most of the employees are junior. The reason is that this study tried to focus on the junior employees since they are the most vulnerable to stress. In fact majority of employees are junior because this organization has opened new field offices within the past 1-2 years and started implementing new programs.

As regards the educational background of the respondents, 62 (35%) possess diploma, and 97 (54%) have obtained at least their first degree. Thus, the organization is staffed with reasonably educated workforce. This is likely to enable the organization easily manage and/or handle workplace stress. The employees can easily understand the sources of stress and try to cope up with the stressors.

Analysis of data pertaining to the study

Common stressors in the organization

Based on the data obtained, the major organizational stressors are discussed in the table below.

Table 2: Common stressors in the organization and their occurrence rate

	Organizational stressors	Occurrence of organizational stressors				
		Always	Frequently	Rarely	Never	Total
1	Role ambiguity	16(9%)	32(18%)	65(36%)	67(37%)	180(100%)
2	Improper responsibility	25(14%)	24(13%)	76(42%)	55(31%)	180(100%)
3	Conflict in workplace	2(1%)	16(9%)	76(42%)	85(47%)	180(100%)
4	Self interest	28(15%)	16(9%)	62(35%)	74(41%)	180(100%)
5	Lack of knowledge	9(5%)	7(4%)	60(33%)	104(58%)	180(100%)
6	Lack of power and position	14(8%)	14(8%)	39(21%)	113(63%)	180(100%)
7	Noncooperation	14(8%)	23(13%)	35(19%)	108(60%)	180(100%)
8	Autocratic leadership	12(6%)	28(15%)	44(24%)	96(54%)	180(100%)
9	Poor communication	14(8%)	12(6%)	78(44%)	76(42%)	180(100%)
10	Workload	42(23%)	72(40%)	41(23%)	25(14%)	180(100%)
11	Bad management practice	16(9%)	9(5%)	72(40%)	83(46%)	180(100%)
12	Organizational change policies	5(3%)	14(8%)	74(41%)	87(49%)	180(100%)
13	Office politics	9(5%)	12(6%)	57(32%)	102(56%)	180(100%)
14	Worker amenities	23(13%)	21(12%)	58(32%)	78(44%)	180(100%)
15	Unrealistic demand	7(4%)	30(17%)	48(27%)	95(53%)	180(100%)

Source: Survey data

Table two above summarizes the responses of the sample representatives on the occurrence rate of the commonly known stressors, namely, role ambiguity, improper responsibility, conflict in workplace, self interest, lack of knowledge, lack of power and position, lack of cooperation, autocratic leadership, poor communication, bad management practice, organizational change policies, office politics, worker amenities, workload and unrealistic demand. However, as can be seen from the data, the occurrence rate of almost all of these stressors is not that significant. This may evidence the concern of NRC in avoiding the causes of work stress. Thus, work stress doesn't seem to be that serious in the organization. This indicates that the management of the organization given due attention to the importance of work place stress management. Proper work place stress management

usually leads to increased employees efficiency, healthy cooperation and amicable relationship with colleagues, reduced absenteeism, and achievement of the organization's mission and vision. On the other hand, it seems that the employees are worried about their workloads. Majority of the respondents, that is, 114 (63%) confirmed that the occurrence of workload as a stressor is high. Therefore, the organization is required to study the workload of each position and take the necessary corrective measures. Workload stress usually arises due to unmanageable heavy workload. If their workloads are unmanageable, employees may fail to meet deadlines and end up in stress.

Type of stress symptoms

Stress symptoms are categorized as mental, physical and behavioral. The respondents were asked about the occurrence of these stress symptoms while executing their duties and responsibilities. Their responses are presented in Table three below.

Table 3: Common stress symptoms faced by NRC staff

Common stress symptoms		Rate for the symptoms occurrence				
Mental		Always %	Frequently %	Rarely %	Never %	Total %
1	Anxiety	5(3%)	30(17%)	76(42%)	69(38%)	180(100%)
2	Depression	7(4%)	23(13%)	85(47%)	65(36%)	180(100%)
3	Restlessness	14(8%)	23(13%)	78(44%)	65(36%)	180(100%)
4	Worry	14(8%)	25(14%)	65(36%)	76(42%)	180(100%)
5	Poor Judgment	12(6%)	14(8%)	67(37%)	88(49%)	180(100%)
6	Sadness	5(3%)	9(5%)	62(35%)	104(58%)	180(100%)
7	Anger	0(0%)	7(4%)	76(42%)	97(54%)	180(100%)
8	Feelings of insecurity	5(3%)	12(6%)	72(40%)	92(51%)	180(100%)
9	Inability to concentrate	2(1%)	21(12%)	42(23%)	115(64%)	180(100%)
10	Memory losing	2(1%)	12(6%)	48(27%)	118(65%)	180(100%)

Physical						
1	Back pain	5(3%)	32(18%)	32(18%)	111(62%)	180(100%)
2	Chest pain	0(0%)	12(6%)	39(22%)	129(72%)	180(100%)
3	Headaches	2(1%)	23(13%)	53(29%)	102(56%)	180(100%)
4	High heart beat	0(0%)	7(4%)	37(21%)	136(76%)	180(100%)
5	High blood pressure	0(0%)	0(0%)	32(18%)	148(82%)	180(100%)
6	Digestive problem	2(1%)	7(4%)	32(18%)	138(77%)	180(100%)
7	Sleep problem	5(3%)	21(12%)	32(18%)	122(68%)	180(100%)
8	Loss of energy	9(5%)	9(5%)	55(31%)	106(59%)	180(100%)
Behavioral symptoms						
1	Over eating	0(0%)	2(1%)	25(14%)	152(85%)	180(100%)
2	Under eating	2(1%)	7(4%)	5 1(28%)	120(67%)	180(100%)
3	Drug abuse	0(0%)	0(0%)	32(18%)	148(82%)	180(100%)
4	Alcohol abuse	0(0%)	2(1%)	14(8%)	164(91%)	180(100%)
5	Smoking	0(0%)	0(0%)	18(10%)	162(90%)	180(100%)
6	Chronic fatigue	0(0%)	0(0%)	16(9%)	164(91%)	180(100%)

Source: Survey data

As can be inferred from the data presented in Table three above, the occurrence rate of the mental stress symptoms is not that serious. On the average, majority of the respondents, that is, 156 (86%) reported that the occurrence rate of mental stress symptoms is either rare or nil. This indicates that big majority of the staff is mentally stable. Regarding the occurrence of physical stress symptoms, 39 (22%) said that it is rare. On the other hand, 124 (69%) of the respondents confirmed that it never occurs. Altogether, 160 (89%) of the respondents are in the agreement that physical stress symptoms are either rare or non-existent. Concerning behavioral stress symptom, big majority of the respondents indicated that it is not existent as a problem. The rest 26 (15%), confirmed that its occurrence is rare. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that behavioral stress is not a serious problem in the organization.

Stress coping mechanism exercised by respondents

Employees are expected to be aware of the commonly practiced stress coping mechanisms, in order to protect themselves from the negative effects of stress. Accordingly, the respondents were asked to rate the frequency of the stress coping mechanisms they usually exercise, as shown in Table four below.

Table 4: Respondents stress coping mechanisms

	Coping Mechanisms	**Rate of coping mechanisms used**				
		Always	Frequently	Rarely	Never	Total
1	being courageous to face stress	74(41%)	60(33%)	16(9%)	30(17%)	180(100%)
2	being self confident	118(65%)	53(29%)	2(1%)	7(4%)	180(100%)
3	fight to win stressful situations	106(59%)	35(19%)	30(17%)	9(5%)	180(100%)
4	identify causes of stress and think how to overcome the situation	102(56%)	44(24%)	23(13%)	12(6%)	180(100%)
5	set time table, to do list and work priorities (learn task management skills)	111(62%)	39(22%)	23(13%)	7(4%)	180(100%)
6	exercise different sports	69(38%)	32(18%)	44(24%)	35(19%)	180(100%)
7	practice healthy diet system	42(22%)	46(26%)	46(26%)	46(26%)	180(100%)
8	avoid pitfalls and mistakes	76(42%)	46(26%)	46(26%)	46(26%)	180(100%)
9	take responsibility and complete accordingly	76(42%)	72(40%)	23(13%)	9(5%)	180(100%)
10	learn better communication skill	127(71%)	42(23%)	9(5%)	2(1%)	180(100%)
11	get enough sleep	111(62%)	32(18%)	28(15%)	9(5%)	180(100%)
12	use emotional intelligence to solve problems	90(50%)	39(22%)	23(13%)	28(15%)	180(100%)
13	go to anger management counseling	16(9%)	28(15%)	25(14%)	111(62%)	180(100%)
14	avoid negative thinking/behavior	97(54%)	62(35%)	5(3%)	16(9%)	180(100%)
15	reduce toxin intake	113(63%)	21(12%)	14(8%)	32(18%)	180(100%)

16	Have time for relaxation	60(33%)	55(31%)	42(23%)	23(13%)	180(100%)
17	take care everyone either at home/workplace	106(59%)	35(19%)	23(13%)	16(9%)	180(100%)
18	ask professional help	81(45%)	30(17%)	21(12%)	48(27%)	180(100%)

Source: Survey data

There is no single mechanism to cope up with stress at workplace. And using different coping strategies and/or mechanisms is very important in order to reduce the negative effect of stress at workplace. Table four above, presents 18 stress coping mechanisms. As can be realized from the responses, the NRC staffs seem to be aware of the stress coping mechanisms they need to use when confronted with stressful situations. Most of them do exercise the coping mechanisms listed, as can realized from the responses. On the other hand, it is noticed from the responses that there are three coping mechanisms that are not frequently used by the staff. As depicted by 102 (56%), 88(46%) and 79 (43%) of the respondents, practice healthy diet system, go to anger management counseling and exercise sports, are not frequently used by the staff as coping mechanisms, respectively. Thus they need to be aware of these coping mechanisms. They may not even have access to these stress coping mechanisms. Generally speaking, it can be concluded that the NRC staff members are aware of the most commonly used stress coping mechanisms.

Stress management, prevention and intervention used by the organization

The stress management mechanisms that the organization is ought to exercise include: removing hazard or reducing employees' exposure to it or its impact on them; improving the organization's ability to recognize and

deal with stress related problems as they occur; and helping employees to cope with and recover from work related problems. The respondents were asked to reflect how often these stress management mechanisms are used by the organization. The results are presented in Table five below.

Table 5: Respondents' views on the stress management, prevention/intervention strategies used by the organization

Primary: Remove hazard or reduce employees' exposure to it or its impact on them	Rate of prevention/intervention used by NRC				
	Always	Frequently	Rarely	Never	Total
1 risk assessment	8(4%)	12(7%)	19(11%)	141(78%)	180(100%)
2 stress audits	5(3%)	10(6%)	8(4%)	157(87%)	180(100%)
3 job redesign	2(1%)	14(8%)	18(10%)	146(81%)	180(100%)
4 restructuring	2(1%)	19(11%)	21(12%)	138(77%)	180(100%)
5 improved communications	11(6%)	18(10%)	17(9%)	134(74%)	180(100%)
Secondary: Improve the organization's ability to recognize and deal with stress related problems as they occur					
1 health promotion policies	9(5%)	12(7%)	19(11%)	141(78%)	180(100%)
2 Training stress/ time/ assertion	6(3%)	8(4%)	13(7%)	153(85%)	180(100%)
3 coaching	3(2%)	13(7%)	23(13%)	141(78%)	180(100%)
4 reward orientated management style	2(1%)	15(8%)	22(12%)	141(78%)	180(100%)
5 healthy lifestyle	12(7%)	20(11%)	13(7%)	135(75%)	180(100%)
Tertiary: Help employees cope with and recover from work related problems					
1 stress counseling	4(2%)	4(2%)	13(7%)	159(88%)	180(100%)
2 medication	8(4%)	13(7%)	15(8%)	144(80%)	180(100%)
3 surgery	1(1%)	3(2%)	8(4%)	168(93%)	180(100%)
4 Outplacement counseling	0(0%)	9(5%)	10(6%)	161(89%)	180(100%)
5 Employee assistance programmes	2(1%)	21(12%)	11(6%)	146(81%)	180(100%)

Source: Survey Data

As the data in Table five above indicate, the involvement of the organization in managing and preventing stress seems to be low. According to159 (88%) of the respondents, the involvement of the organization in removing hazard or reducing employees' exposure to it, or its impact on them, is rated as

rarely and never. Likewise, 160 (89%) of the respondents rated the involvement of the organization in improving its ability to recognize and deal with stress related problems, as rare and nil. Moreover, as confirmed by 169 (93%) of the respondents, the effort made by the organization in helping employees to cope with and recover from work related problem is not to the level of their expectation. They rated it as rarely and never.

On average, about 90% of the respondents said that no prevention and/or intervention strategy is put in place by the organization to manage or reduce the risk of workplace stress encountered by its staff. But this opinion is in contradict with the respondents' views discussed under Tables two and three above. The question is, if no stress management strategies are put in place, how could the staff be free from pressure of the commonly known stressors as well as stress symptoms? This seems to be an issue that require further investigation.

Analysis of data obtained through the administration of interview

A total of 10 structured interview questions were developed and five willing NRC management team members were interviewed. The assumption is that triangulation of the qualitative data with the results of the quantitative study would yield better in elaborating the case. The questions posed focus on the level of stress in the organization, the organization's policy on stress management, the effect of stress on the performance of the organization, and the stress risks detection, prevention and intervention activities implemented by the organization. Their responses are summarized as follows:

1. Workplace stress is indispensable. But experience of stress in the organization is not that serious. It depends on the nature of the program implemented and the personality and capacity of

individuals to cope up with stress.

2. Some of the major causes of stress are related to workload (unplanned and urgent tasks, frustration to deliver on time, understaffing, etc.)

3. No well planned and organized stress management mechanism. But orientation is given during recruitment. Efforts are also made to get the employees relived from stress through the arrangement of motivation schemes, healthy relationship, and frequent field visits by Managers.

4. Line Managers and HR experts are expected to follow up and support employees cope up with stress.

5. No risk assessment carried out so far by the organization.

6. The management is aware that employees are overloaded. And recruitment of additional staff will take place, as confirmed by the interviewed management team members.

Concluding remarks

Based on the findings of the study, the following concluding remarks are drawn:

1. The most serious workplace stress problem reported by majority of the respondents is workload. Overloaded employees are likely to easily frustrate when they fail to meet deadlines and standards set. So NRC is required to conduct job analysis and ensure balanced allocation of tasks to its employees, based on their capability.

2. The commonly known symptoms of stress are mental, physical, and behavioral. Accordingly, the respondents were asked to reflect about how

frequently these symptoms observed. Surprisingly, more than 80% of the respondents reported that none of these symptoms is frequently observed. This may indicate that most of the organization's employees are mentally and behaviorally stable and physically fit. This will in turn enhance the performance of the organization.

3. The results of the study indicate that most of the NRC staff members are aware of the commonly used individual stress coping mechanisms. Thus, they are applying most of the stress coping mechanisms recommended by professionals in the area. However, it is found out that some employees do not use diet system, anger management counseling and physical exercise as stress coping mechanisms. In fact, they may not have access to exploit such opportunities. Thus, efforts should be made to raise the awareness of the employees about the importance of these stress coping mechanisms and be made accessible to them.

4. The information obtained from both the respondent employees and the Management team members indicate that there is no as such well thought stress prevention and management system designed by the organization. Thus, more than 90% of the respondents reported that no stress prevention and/or intervention strategies are put in place by the organization. On the other hand, it is confirmed that orientation on how to cope up with stress is given to employees during recruitment. Efforts are also made by the Management to get employees relieved from their stress, by arranging different motivation schemes, creating healthy employee management relationships, and paying frequent field visits by Managers. This is a commendable practice. However, it is advisable that the organization designs and implements a sound stress management system.

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