



STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

M.U. Babajanov – Lecturer at Ma'mun University

I.R. Amongaldiyeva – Student at Ma'mun University

Abstract: *This article examines the level of stress, its psychological factors, and consequences among students in higher education. Literature analysis shows that academic pressure, lack of time, insufficient social support, and personal life challenges significantly affect students' mental health. The study analyzes the effectiveness of various stress-reduction approaches, including psychological counseling, mindfulness, and anti-stress training programs. Based on the results, the necessity of developing stress management strategies within higher education institutions is substantiated.*

Keywords: *stress, student psychology, higher education, emotional strain, mindfulness, psychological support, psychological resilience*

Introduction. Stress is a complex of biological, psychological, and social changes that arise in response to any external or internal influence on the organism. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines stress as the response to job demands and pressures that do not match a person's knowledge and abilities, thereby testing their ability to cope and remain attentive and resilient [9]. According to the definition of psychologist A.V. Petrovsky, stress is a specific state of experience that closely resembles an effective emotional condition. Haydarov and Khalilova describe stress as a tension process that arises due to excessive strain on the human body [1]. When short-term, stress can aid adaptation, increase alertness, and mobilize problem-solving efforts. However, if stress becomes prolonged, its negative effects on mental and physical health intensify.

Stress can originate from various factors. For instance, the modern work environment is rich in stress-inducing elements: tight deadlines, high demands, multitasking, strained relationships with colleagues or supervisors, and unclear task



distribution. These factors lead many employees to experience constant psychological pressure. According to British statistics, in 2019–2020, more than half of all occupational health problems in the United Kingdom were associated with stress, anxiety, or depression [6], [8]. These figures demonstrate how widespread workplace stress is and how serious its consequences can be.

The psychological impact of stress typically manifests in an individual's emotions, thinking processes, and behavior. In the short term, stress may increase motivation and push individuals to solve problems. However, chronic stress often leads to negative consequences. Research indicates that prolonged stress can disrupt mood, cognitive functioning, and behavior. For example, repeated exposure to intense stress reduces attention and working memory, making decision-making more difficult. Physiologically, persistently high levels of stress hormones can damage the brain, weakening concentration and learning capacity [2]. At the same time, many researchers have noted that stress is also a risk factor for physical health. According to a meta-analysis by Niedhammer et al. (2021), the link between psychosocial stressors at work and various mental and physical illnesses has been reliably confirmed across large-scale studies: in particular, chronic stress resulting from high job demands may lead to mental disorders such as depression and cardiovascular diseases, with the mental health effects being even more pronounced [4]. Therefore, stress is not merely a subjective experience; its associated risk factors have been scientifically established through empirical research.

Literature Review. Stress and its consequences have been extensively studied in academic literature. While Hans Selye defined stress as the body's nonspecific response to any demand, modern psychology—particularly the cognitive appraisal theory proposed by Lazarus and Folkman—emphasizes that stress levels largely depend on how an individual interprets a situation. Studies on the biological mechanisms of stress show that when a person encounters a difficult situation, the sympathetic nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis are activated, releasing stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. As a result, heart rate increases, blood pressure rises, and breathing becomes more



rapid—initiating the body’s “fight-or-flight” response. This reaction is helpful in the short term as it prepares the body to respond quickly to emergencies.

However, under chronic stress, these physiological responses can become harmful. For instance, persistently elevated cortisol levels weaken the immune system, damage brain cells, and lead to other systemic disorders. According to the AhaSlides source, chronic stress not only causes psychological problems such as anxiety and depression but also poses serious risks to physical health—long-term stress increases the likelihood of developing hypertension, heart disease, and even diabetes [7], [9]. Numerous studies confirm this dual impact of stress on mental and physical health. For example, WHO experts have noted that stress-related psychological disorders (especially depression and anxiety) often co-occur with physical conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes, both of which may be triggered by stress [9]. The literature also thoroughly explores workplace stressors. An employee’s working conditions and job demands have a direct influence on stress levels. Research in work psychology identifies the following factors as key contributors to workplace stress:

- Excessive workload – A high number of tasks and responsibilities creates constant pressure and emotional fatigue in employees.
- Lack of control – Limited control over one’s work process or lack of decision-making autonomy leads to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability, which reduces motivation.
- Unclear roles and expectations – When job duties and performance criteria are not clearly defined, employees experience uncertainty, which increases anxiety levels.
- Workplace conflicts – Negative relationships and disagreements with colleagues or supervisors create a hostile environment and become a constant source of stress.
- Lack of support – The absence of emotional and organizational support from colleagues and management makes employees feel isolated. As a result, social isolation and loss of motivation may occur [8]. Each of the above factors increases



the employee's stress level and negatively impacts their psychological state. For example, scientific studies have observed higher rates of depression and anxiety among employees with low role clarity and control. Workplace stress affects not only emotional well-being but also job performance and efficiency. Many scientific studies have focused on the relationship between stress and cognitive functioning. In an experiment with healthy individuals, Luethi et al. (2009) found that short-term intense stress (e.g., public speaking) significantly reduced working memory and executive thinking ability. Similarly, Girotti et al. (2018) showed that chronic stress weakens attention, impulse control, and problem-solving skills [2]. These findings confirm the serious impact of stress on brain functioning. Under chronic workplace stress, an employee suffers not only emotionally but also cognitively: attention and memory decline, and decision-making quality deteriorates, directly affecting work productivity.

Another important aspect is the collective and organizational impact of stress. Stressed employees may not actively participate at work and may show low integration in team activities. Stress can lead to reduced task engagement and increased absenteeism (e.g., taking sick leave). For instance, the aforementioned UK report recorded that over 11 million workdays were lost annually due to stress-related illnesses [2]. This negatively affects both the organization and the economy. Thus, the literature review shows that the causes of workplace stress are diverse, and its consequences range from individual psychological well-being to the overall productivity of the team.

Results. Based on the above theoretical and empirical data, the specific psychological and physical effects of workplace stress can be categorized into several areas. The main findings derived from research and observations are summarized as follows:

- Impact on mental state: Prolonged work-related stress is associated with increased symptoms of anxiety and depression. For example, the meta-analysis by Niedhammer et al. (2021) shows that high job demands combined with low control increase the likelihood of depression [4]. Stressful work conditions also lead to



emotional instability such as irritability and a tendency toward anger. Affected employees often show mood swings and reduced motivation. Group studies have shown that individuals under constant work stress have a high level of emotional exhaustion (burnout). For instance, studies among healthcare workers revealed that during the pandemic, burnout levels reached up to 44% [3], indicating that nearly half of the workforce experienced emotional and physical exhaustion under collective stress.

- **Impact on cognitive functioning:** Workplace stress reduces employees' cognitive abilities such as attention, memory, and decision-making. Numerous experimental studies confirm that stress impairs focus, reduces working memory capacity, and leads to impulsive or indecisive choices [2]. In our own observations, employees with high stress levels struggled to absorb and process new information, showing difficulty concentrating on tasks. These findings suggest that stress has a direct negative effect on cognitive processes.

- **Changes in behavior:** Stress can trigger two behavioral tendencies—aggression or social withdrawal. Some employees may express their stress through aggression, including rudeness toward colleagues or intolerance in teamwork. Others may avoid interaction, withdraw from group activities, and prefer to work alone within their assigned duties. Both cases lead to weakened team morale, disrupted communication, and ultimately reduce organizational effectiveness.

- **Impact on physical health:** Work-related stress affects not only the psyche but also the body. Individuals under constant stress often experience psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, sleep disturbances, and gastrointestinal problems. Psychological sources note that chronic stress weakens the immune system [8], making individuals more susceptible to infectious diseases due to reduced bodily defenses. From a cardiovascular perspective, increased heart rate and blood pressure during stress can, over time, contribute to hypertension, arrhythmias, and ischemic heart conditions. According to Niedhammer et al. (2021), long work hours and high psychological demands significantly increase the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke [4].



These results indicate that workplace stress is a multifaceted issue that simultaneously affects an employee's mental, cognitive, social, and physical condition. Such negative effects eventually lead to reduced work performance and harm the overall productivity of the organization. Therefore, modern companies and academic circles are paying growing attention to the issue of stress management.

Discussion.

High levels of stress in the workplace negatively affect not only individual employees but also entire organizations. The analysis of the findings above shows that stress reduces employees' psychological well-being, worsens physical health, increases absenteeism, and ultimately harms the organization's economic performance. Therefore, effective stress management is one of the most important tasks today. In this section, we examine evidence-based approaches from the literature and practical experience aimed at preventing and mitigating the effects of stress. First, it is essential to identify and reduce the sources of stress. Management and HR departments should assess workloads and job roles to optimize processes that create excessive pressure. Measures such as fair task distribution, setting realistic deadlines, and limiting overtime can be effective. International experience shows that granting employees more autonomy and control over their work (e.g., allowing them to partially determine their own schedules) significantly reduces stress, as the feeling of control lightens the psychological burden [9]. The second critical area is building a system of psychological support. Maintaining regular communication with employees, listening to their concerns, and providing appropriate assistance are crucial. Creating a supportive environment and open communication within the team is essential; leaders play a vital role in setting realistic expectations and recognizing achievements. Extracurricular activities, team-building events, and relaxation days also strengthen social connections and help alleviate stress. If an employee cannot cope with stress, referring them to a qualified specialist such as a psychologist or psychotherapist may be beneficial. According to recommendations from the Psixologim.uz platform, if stress levels become unmanageable, it is necessary to seek professional help without delay; a



psychologist can develop strategies tailored to the individual's personality to help them cope [8]. Many corporate organizations now implement Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that provide confidential counseling, work-life balance training, and other support services. The third direction is to develop individual stress management skills. Every employee can adopt methods to reduce stress, and organizations should encourage this.

By applying these measures, the negative impact of workplace stress can be reduced. However, implementing a stress management policy requires a scientifically grounded approach. In a systematic review conducted by Strudwick et al. (2023), screening practices (using surveys to monitor employee mental health) in organizations were evaluated. An important finding was that screening alone did not significantly improve mental health if no follow-up actions were taken based on the results [6]. However, identifying high-risk employees through screening and directing them to professional support or treatment showed some positive outcomes.

Thus, an integrated approach is needed to combat stress in the workplace:

- eliminate stressors through organizational measures,
- enhance employees' individual resilience (training, health promotion),
- and, when necessary, provide professional psychological services.

In a meta-analysis by Petrie et al. (2025) conducted among healthcare workers, targeted individual interventions—such as skill-building workshops and stress management seminars in small groups—were found to significantly reduce psychological symptoms. The authors also emphasized that structural organizational changes are essential to effectively reduce workplace stress [5]. These findings confirm our conclusions: combating stress requires coordinated efforts at the individual, team, and organizational levels.

Conclusion. In conclusion, the issue of workplace stress and its psychological impact has become highly relevant today. Prolonged stress destabilizes employees' emotional states, intensifies symptoms of depression and anxiety, impairs cognitive functions, and leads to negative behavioral changes. As a result, work performance declines, decision-making processes slow down, and it



becomes more difficult to concentrate and maintain focus. These factors, in turn, undermine team morale and negatively affect the overall performance of the organization. Effective stress management not only improves employees' psychological well-being but also enhances their motivation and productivity. When the measures outlined above are implemented, employees feel valued and supported—this, in turn, reduces the influence of stressors. Scientific literature and practical experience show that teams with a healthy psychological environment achieve better results in terms of innovation, efficiency, and sustainable growth. Thus, organizational success and employee well-being are closely linked, and managing stress is a key factor in strengthening that connection.

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