

Genesis, Effect and Solutions to stress due to Job-insecurity

A Brief Psychological Review

Introduction

In this brief review we address one of the most vital psychological threats that we face in our day-to-day social as well as professional life. We are exposed to various kinds of stresses, which prove to be detrimental to our mental as well as physical health. Numerous surveys and studies confirm that occupational pressures and fears are far and away the leading source of stress and that these have steadily increased over the past few decades. In the developing nations like India, besides other social perils, we are confronted with the ever-increasing threats of losing one's job mostly in their mid-life, which is technically known as the job-insecurity. And quite obviously, this feeling of insecurity accounts for losses related to economy as well human resources. In fact, research shows that, up to 75 percent of all time lost in the workplace are stress-related (Covey, 1999).

What is job-insecurity?

One should not confuse between joblessness and job-insecurity related stresses. The former thrives in the absence of job, while the later shapes out, in the presence of one. Job-insecurity can be defined as the 'phobia' (or fear) of losing one's job. In India, a major part of the population belongs to middle-class section where usually the senior-most male member is the only bread earner for the family. So, the rest of the family is dependent on him. For some or other reason if he loses his job, the family succumbs to the utter financial crisis. Hence, the responsible male member always needs to carry the pressure of this kind of 'potential joblessness'. Not only the person concerned, is under stress, but it also has its telling effect on the other members of the family. The reason is evident, because financial stability ensures the prospect and well-being of the family.

Causes behind job-insecurity

The prime causes behind the job-insecurity are the following.

Firstly, there are economic reasons behind the creation this 'corporate vacuum'. After the decline of 200 dot com companies by the end of 2001 followed by the terrorist attack on World Trade Center on 11 September, 2001, had struck the global economy in a drastic way. Many people lost their jobs at the onset of this global depression. Those who managed to survive underwent a thorough mental anxiety. Many Indians who left their motherland for fulfilling their 'American Dream' had to return back under sheer financial pressure due to unavailability of jobs.

Secondly, in Indian context, many of the government organizations decided to opt for privatization. Now, it is a common belief among the government servants, that, private institutions emphasize more on their own profits and turn-over compared to the well-being of their employees, which even include the shedding of unwanted work-force, for however trivial reasons. So efficiency and accountability become the only criteria of survival!

Thirdly, in last few years, the banks have reduced their interest rates, like anything. These interests used to be the hump of a camel in midst of desert, for a large mass of senior middle-class segment of India. But with each passing day, they are losing their faith in the nationalized banks, and depositing their retirement benefits with the post-offices, where the schemes are more lucrative. (e.g. the ever-growing length of the queue of MIS-holders (Monthly Income Scheme) bears the evidence of this fact) Thus the thought of blurry future adds to the predicament of the present.

Lastly, with modernization of the workplaces, the fear of losing out to fresh employees is fattening. Young persons are more adaptive to the present-day technology like computers. While their senior colleagues feel uncomfortable to cope with the recent discoveries of mankind, thereby, adding to their fear-psychosis.

Physical Reasons behind job-stress

Contemporary stress tends to be more pervasive, persistent and insidious because it stems primarily from psychological than physical threats. It is associated with ingrained and immediate reactions over which we have no control that were originally designed to be beneficial such as:

- (i) Heart rate and blood pressure soar to increase the flow of blood to the brain to improve decision making,
- (ii) Blood sugar rises to furnish more fuel for energy as the result of the breakdown of glycogen, fat and protein stores,
- (iii) Blood is shunted away from the gut, where it not immediately needed for purposes of digestion, to the large muscles of the arms and legs to provide more strength in combat, or greater speed in getting away from a scene of potential peril,
- (iv) Clotting occurs more quickly to prevent blood loss from lacerations or internal hemorrhage.

These and myriad other immediate and automatic responses have been exquisitely honed over the lengthy course of human evolution as life saving measures to facilitate primitive man's ability to deal with physical challenges. However, the nature of stress for modern man is not an occasional confrontation with a saber-toothed tiger or a hostile warrior but rather a host of emotional threats. Unfortunately, our bodies still react with these same, archaic fight or flight responses that are now not only useless but potentially damaging and deadly. Many of these effects are due to increased sympathetic nervous system activity and an outpouring of adrenaline, cortisol and other stress-related hormones. Repeatedly invoked, it is not hard to see how they can contribute to hypertension, strokes, heart attacks, diabetes, ulcers, neck or low back pain and other "Diseases of Civilization".

Adverse Effects on Physical Health

We all know that the real determinants of health are not only one's genetic make-up and lifestyles, but also working conditions, education, environment, social support and living conditions. Certain types of chronic and more insidious stress due to loneliness, poverty, bereavement, depression and frustration due to discrimination are associated with impaired immune system resistance to viral linked disorders ranging from the common cold and herpes to AIDS and cancer. Stress can have effects on other hormones, brain neurotransmitters, additional small chemical messengers elsewhere, prostaglandins, as well as crucial enzyme systems, and metabolic activities that are still unknown.

Researches show that occupational pressures are believed responsible for: 30% of workers suffering from back pain;28% complaining of "stress";20% feeling fatigued;17% having muscular pains;13% with headaches.

In fact, job stress is also very costly with the price tag for U.S. industry estimated at over \$300 billion annually as a result of accidents, absenteeism, and employee turnover, and diminished productivity, direct medical, legal, and insurance costs.

Adverse Effects on Emotional Health

The sustained fear of losing financial stability re-shapes the personality of a person in a major way. Usually the person becomes lonely and remains highly susceptible towards mental depression. In this process of social alienation, the person usually develops a kind of "identity crisis". He/she loses the spirit to take risks or invest in any venture. As a by-product of this prolonged anxiety, the person gets irritated at the minutest disturbances. This vehemently affects the other members in the family.

For the working women in developed nations, the case is much more critical, compared to their counterparts in developing nations. Financial independence is one of the most vital ingredients for ego-satisfaction for western women, dearth of which leads to an inexplicable mental strain. The trend seems to be arriving in Indian society too, along with other threats of the so-called globalization.

To add to it, workplace violence is rampant in western countries due to this exuberant emotional stress. There are almost 2 million reported instances of homicide, aggravated assault, rape or sexual assaults in the workplace. Homicide is the second leading cause of fatal occupational injury and the leading cause of death for working women in US.

Viable Solutions

After the brief discussion of ill-effects of job-insecurity over emotional health we offer a handful of solutions to re-dress this social peril.

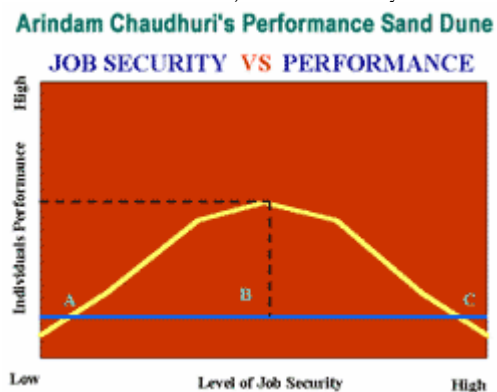
First of all, to bring financial stability, other members of the family e.g. spouse, need to be self-supportive (if at all possible). Hence, the panic would be reduced. In this respect, part-time jobs can be thought of as a feasible alternative solution.

Secondly, spending quality time with the family members is highly desirable. It remains as the responsibility of the other family-members to show care & concern for the feelings of the person, and motivate him/her in whatever he/she does. A person should be distracted from his/her professional distresses as soon as he/she reaches home. (e.g. disconnecting the telephone line for a certain interval of time) so that the stressed out victim could relax in peace for a while.

Thirdly, more than half of the 147 million workers in the European Union complained of having to work at a very high speed and under tight deadlines and approximately half reported having monotonous or short, repetitive tasks and no opportunity to rotate tasks. Hence the HR teams of corporate houses need to be more careful regarding the monitoring of the mental health of their employees, and prevent them from 'burning-out' when exposed to such stresses. In this regard, they might go for occasional recreation for their staffs. The companies need to be more nurturing, declaring bonuses/allowances for satisfactory performances and thereby show their concern for the well-being of their human resources.

Criticism

No doubt that job-insecurity has been one of the major burning issues of the twenty-first century. But on the other hand, Mr. Arindam Chaudhuri, the famous management guru, questions the credibility of the employees when crossed with enhanced job security. He presents the following graph of job-security plotted against performance, which undoubtedly speaks of reduced performance index when compared to higher level of 'job-insurance'.



Conclusion

The present issue of our discussion has been acknowledged in the international forum for its unforeseen plight. A 1992 *United Nations Report* labeled job stress "*The 20th Century Disease*" and a few years later the *World Health Organization* said it had become a "*World Wide Epidemic*". This subtle social disease has transcended the political barriers across the globe and its consequences are grossly affecting us, percolating through all our social strata. Greek philosopher *Epictetus* rightly pointed out, "*People are disturbed not by things, but by their perception of things*". We need to change our perception and

attitude towards financial security. Only then we could rise up to a state of mental peace and harmony.

References:

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