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MENTAL HEALTH AMONG IT PROFESSIONALS IN RELATION TO JOB STRESS AND ADJUSTMENT

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Abstract

The IT sector relies heavily on its human capital. At the same time, it is highly paid sector making it most sought profession especially after the AI revolution. However, it has attained the reputation of most stressed profession as well. Anxiety, stress, depression and isolation in the workplace contribute to mental health issues for IT workers, who also report low self-esteem, discontent, and social, marital, and sexual difficulties. The present paper is an attempt to understand the meaning of mental health and investigate the present status, the job stress and adjustment as prime contributor to mental health of IT professionals. The present quantitative study was conducted on 200 IT professionals. The data was collected using Mental Health Inventory, Job Stress Scale and Bell's Adjustment Inventory. The results revealed job stress and adjustment as significant predictors of mental health of IT professionals with job stress as stronger contributor.

Introduction

The future and progress of any country depends on the mental health of its young ones. Mental health and employment are inextricably linked for most of the global population. Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness. Rather, mental health is a state of mental wellbeing that enables individuals to deal with life's challenges, realise their potential, learn and work effectively, and contribute to their communities. Mental health conditions

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occur regardless of whether work has contributed to their development. Poor mental health has a negative impact on a person's cognitive, behavioural, emotional, social, and relational well-being and functioning, as well as their physical health, personal identity, and well-being in relation to their work. Consequently, a person's capacity to partake in the workforce may be impaired by a decrease in productivity and performance, a decrease in the ability to work safely, or difficulty retaining or gaining employment.

In the workplace and in society as a whole, mental health is one of those topics that receive the least amount of emphasis. However, the truth is that if left unaddressed, it can cause a negative impact on both the health and productivity of individuals.

Mental Health

Mental health is looked up as 'the absence of mental illness/ diseases/ disorder' alongwith a 'state of well-being in which the individual realizes his/her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his/her community'.

The American Heritage Dictionary of English Language (2000) defined mental health (*n*) as (i) a state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society and meet ordinary demands of everyday life (ii) a branch of medicine that deals with the achievement and maintenance of psychological well-being (iii) a person's overall emotional and psychological condition.

The National Mental Health Association (1997) cited 10 characteristics of people who are mentally healthy.

i. They feel good about themselves.
ii. They do not become overwhelmed by emotions, such as fear, anger, love, jealousy, guilt, or anxiety.
iii. They have lasting and satisfying personal relationships.
iv. They feel comfortable with other people.
v. They can laugh at themselves and with others.
vi. They have respect for themselves and for others even if there are differences.

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vii. They are able to accept life's disappointments.

viii. They can meet life's demands and handle their problems when they arise.

ix. They make their own decisions.

x. They shape their environment whenever possible and adjust to it when necessary.

Mental and physical health is equally important components of overall health. Poor mental health increases the risk for many types of physical health problems, like heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, cancer, Alzheimer's disease and many more.

According to Open-Source Mental Illness (OSMI) data, 51% of those working in the IT industry have been given a diagnosis of a mental health issue; 71% of workers in the technology industry reported that mental health issues have an impact on their productivity; 57% of employees in the technology business reported feeling burned out. Meri (2021) of Westfield Health reported that almost twenty percent of IT workers are finding it challenging to adapt to the new ways of working, and thirty-four percent are developing anxiety about their jobs; over half of workers working in the information technology sector reported that the pandemic had an impact on their mental health. It is also documented that around 320,000 businesses in United Kingdom have wellness programmes that are not realising their potential. Additionally, 33 percent of IT professionals sought additional wellbeing support.

The workers in the technology industry desire additional help for their mental health (30%) as well as long-term improvements to the way they do their jobs (40%). However, 59% of human resources leaders stated that they would like to be able to do more in terms of wellbeing, but they are prevented from doing so by the culture of the firm. According to Dave Capper, chief executive of Westfield Health, "As the world of business begins to pick up the pace again, it has never been more pressing to ensure that IT companies take it upon themselves to care for the mental and physical wellbeing of their employees."

Rao and Chandraiah (2012) investigated the influence of job level on occupational stress, mental health and coping behaviour of male IT professionals – junior managers having less than 5 years of experience and senior managers having 5-10 years of experience. A total of 180 professionals consisting 80 senior managers and 100 junior mangers were taken as

sample for the study. The result of the study reveals that the senior managers are experiencing better mental health than the junior managers.

Hummel et al. (2021) compared the mental health of medical professionals with non-medical professionals in eight European countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was collected using cross-sectional online survey during peak COVID-19 months. The sample of 609 professionals consisting of 255 nonmedical professionals, 189 doctors and 165 nurses was selected for final analysis of data. Much against the expected belief it was found that non-medical professionals were significantly higher in depression and anxiety which indicates the severity of the situation.

WHO (2023) reported that more than 50% of the world's population is currently engaged in paid labour and 15% of working age people are affected by mental illness. Mental diseases and other conditions that influence mental health can have a negative impact on a person's confidence and identity at work, as well as their capacity to work productively, their absences, and the ease with which they can keep or find work if they do not receive adequate help. Depression and anxiety alone are responsible for the annual loss of 12 billion working days and cost the global economy a total of one trillion US dollars, primarily due to lower levels of productivity.

The situation is alarming and shocking. Therefore, the issue of employees' mental health in the technology business cannot and should not be overlooked.

The studies revealed that out of the various factors, job stress and adjustment of the employees are two important contributing factors.

Job Stress

Job stress has emerged as one of the major concerns for IT professionals which is also termed as occupational or work stress. When abilities, skills and expertise of a person fails to meet their work pressures and demands, it creates job stress. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (2002) defined job stress as “harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirement of job does not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the workers”.

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Caplan, Cobb, and French (1975) referred job stress as "any characteristics of the job environment which pose a threat to the individual". According to Beehr and Newman (1978) "Job stress is conceptualized as a condition where job related factors interact with the individual to change his/her psychological or physiological conditions such that the person is forced to deviate from normal functioning". Comish and Swindle (1994) elucidated that "Job stress is a mental and physical condition which affects an individual's productivity, effectiveness, personal health and quality of work." Montgomery, Blodgett and Barnes (1996) defined job stress as "an employee's awareness or felling of personal dysfunction as a result of perceived conditions or happenings in the workplace and the employee's psychological and physiological reactions caused by these uncomfortable, undesirable or threats in the employee's immediate workplace environment". According to Robbins (2001) explained, "Job stress as a dynamic condition in which the individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important."

Srivastva and Singh (1981) have listed 12 job stresses, as "role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, group and political pressure, responsibility for others, under participation, powerlessness, poor peer relations, intrinsic impoverishment, low status, strenuous working conditions and unprofitability".

- Role overload is a situation in which require a person to do more than what he/she is capable of doing. It is demanding to do too many tasks in too little time or to perform more difficult task than he/she can do.
- Role ambiguity is lack of clarity and adequate knowledge about the work a person has to perform in an organization. Role ambiguity may cause loss of confidence, low self-confidence and decrease job satisfaction and emerged as most powerful stressor.
- Role conflict is simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of responsibilities causing adherence to one task leading to difficulty in adherence to the other tasks" (Khan et al., 2013).
- Group and political pressure are caused due to groups and politics present in work environment like pressure to unwillingly operate in a group, difficulty in adjustment

with political and group pressures maintenance of group conformity, breach of formal procedures and politics and organisational rules and instructions etc.

- Responsibility taken for others such as responsibility for organization's progress, burden of responsibility of colleagues, responsibility of future of fellow employees etc. This type of job stress can be felt when job attains responsibility for wellbeing of others and their task performance. People in managerial posts are most vulnerable to this type of job stress.
- Under Participation job stress occurs when the person does not accept his/her position in organization and hence does not fully perform his/her assigned duties making the person incapable of participation in various activities.
- Powerlessness includes lack of coordination of interest and decision making, non-acceptance of suggestions and non-acceptance of decisions taken by persons among personnel etc. Powerless people devote their energy to dysfunctional behaviour of withholding information, avoiding, carelessness etc.
- Poor peer relations include the relationship areas like lack of co-operation among colleagues in solving legislative and work-related problems, lack of support, cooperation, mutual respect and trust among personnel, disgrace by co-workers, humiliation or ridiculing by boss, subordinate or colleague leads to acute job stress.
- Intrinsic Impoverishment includes less freedom to learn, freedom to acquire competency and expertise, lack of placement of suggestions in problem solving, less opportunities to utilize capability independently, monotonous nature of work leading to job stress.
- Low Status causes job stress when due worth or place of respect is not given to the individual at his/her work place. At any work place, if status is assigned on the basis of creativity, productivity, commitment, cohesiveness, contribution to the organization, or some other quality, it is more durable. Any form of lowering the status leads to job stress.
- Strenuous working conditions is another form of job stress which includes working conditions being unsatisfactory, assignments being risky and complicated,

circumstances in which work is done being tense from perspective of employees' comfort and welfare.

- Unprofitability is a very important variable of job stress. It covers both internal and external aspects such as incentives, rewards, appraisals, appreciation, promotion and salary. In IT sector, the most important predictors of job satisfaction and job stress are promotion and salary (Sowmya and Panchanatham, 2011, Chahal et al., 2013).

Adjustment

Adjustment is the behavioural process by which humans and other animals maintain a balance between their needs and environmental obstacles. Adjustment begins when a need is perceived and concludes when it is met. In general, the adjustment process consists of four components: (1) a need or motivation in the form of a strong persistent stimulus; (2) the thwarting or nonfulfillment of this need; (3) varied activity or exploratory behaviour accompanied by problem solving; and (4) a response that either removes or reduces the initiating stimulus and leads to the adjustment.

Shaffer (1961) defined adjustment as 'the process by which a living organism maintains a balance between its needs and the circumstances that influence the satisfaction of these needs.' This definition emphasises two prime aspects of the process of adjustment: (i) the need for organisms, and (ii) the conditions that affect those requirements. These requirements may originate from biogenic, socio-genic, individualistic, or any other plausible source. Consequently, circumstances influencing these needs can also be found in the individuals who have an effect on them, such as their physical and mental condition, capacity, attitude, and interests, etc. Adjustment has been viewed as an indicator of integration; it is a person's harmonious behaviour that allows other members of society to recognise him or her as well-adjusted (Pathak, 1990).

The human behaviour is the result of adjustment and have a communal influence on a person's psyche. Kulshrestha (1979) defined it as, "Adjustment process is an individual's endeavour to manage stress, tensions, conflicts, etc. and meet his or her needs. Individuals also strive to maintain harmonious relationships with the environment during this process. Thus human condition is the result of adjustment and predominantly has a communal

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influence on a person's psyche. Adjustment disorder can cause serious consequences like feeling sad, hopeless or not enjoying life's pleasures, frequent crying, worrying or feeling anxious, nervous, or stressed out, trouble sleeping, lack of appetite, difficulty concentrating, feeling overwhelmed, difficulty functioning in daily activities, withdrawing from social supports, avoiding going to work, suicidal thoughts or behaviour. With such symptoms, no person can progress in his/her profession.

The studies conducted by Pathak, Y.V. (2014), Srinivasan and Arokiyavanitha (2016), Bala, R. (2018), Patel, N. B. (2021) reported a significant relationship between mental health and adjustment whereas Suresh and Taj (2015), Moghanlou, et al. (2016), Schonfeld, Bianchi, and Jones (2017) reported that job stress was major contributor of poor mental health of workers.

The present work is an attempt to explore the influence of job stress and adjustment on mental health of IT professionals.

Statement of the Problem

MENTAL HEALTH AMONG IT PROFESSIONALS IN RELATION TO JOB STRESS AND ADJUSTMENT

Operational Definitions

Mental Health: Mental health is defined as the scores obtained by teachers on mental health inventory by Verma & Batra (2005). Mental health is an attitudinal concept towards ourselves and others. It presents a humanistic approach towards the understanding and assessment of the self, good physical well-being, free from anxiety, positive interpersonal relationships, initiative and social drives and possession of teacher traits.

Job Stress: In the present study, job stress refers to series physiological and psychological conditions that cause adverse physical and emotional reactions to the body as a result of mismatch between individual needs and organizational demands in IT industry.

Adjustment: Adjustment is the behavioural process of balancing conflicting needs, or needs against obstacles in the environment. It includes adjustment in four areas – home, health, social and emotional adjustment.

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Objectives

1. To measure the relationship between of mental health and job stress of IT professionals.
2. To investigate the relationship between of mental health and adjustment of IT professionals.
3. To study the conjoint effect of job stress and adjustment on mental health among adolescents.

Hypotheses

1. There exists a significant relationship between of mental health and job stress of IT professionals.
2. There exists a significant relationship between of mental health and adjustment of IT professionals.
3. The job stress and adjustment contribute towards the prediction of mental health of IT professionals both independently and conjointly.

Method

Descriptive survey method of research was used for the present study.

Sample

The target population for the present study was IT professionals. A sample of 200 IT professionals from Hyderabad working in the position of software engineers in their respective firms. Fairly equal representation will be given to male and female IT professionals.

Tools Used

1. Mental Health Inventory (MHQ) by Verma & Batra (2005)
2. Job Stress Scale (JSS) by Shukla & Srivastava (2016)
3. Bell's Adjustment Inventory (BAI) by R.K. Ojha (2006)

Statistical techniques

To test the hypotheses, Pearson's Product Moment correlation and regression analysis had been employed.

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Results and Discussion:

The results of the study are presented below:

Table No 1 showing coefficient of correlation between Mental Health, Job Stress and Adjustment

Variables	Category	r	Inference
Mental Health and **Job Stress**	IT professionals	-0.61**	p=.000
Mental Health and **Adjustment**	IT professionals	-0.40**	p=.000

It can be evident from Table 1 that the coefficient of correlation between the scores of IT professionals on the variables of mental health and job stress is -0.61 ($p < .01$) which is significant at 0.01 level of significance. This indicates that the correlation between mental health and job stress is significant and negative which shows that, there is negative and significant relationship between mental health and job stress. The IT professionals, who have low job stress deem to have better mental health and IT professionals, who have low job stress have good mental health.

Hence, the above hypothesis 1 i.e., there exists a significant relationship between mental health and job stress among IT professionals, is accepted.

Table 1 also shows that the coefficient of correlation between the scores of IT professionals on the variables of mental health and adjustment is -0.40 ($p < .01$) which is significant at 0.01 level of significance. As Adjustment Inventory is negative in nature which means high scores indicates low adjustment and low scores indicates high adjustment, the negative coefficient of correlation between mental health and adjustment indicates that IT professionals, who have high adjustment level deem to have good mental health and IT professionals, who have low adjustment level deem to have poor mental health.

Hence, the above hypothesis 2 i.e., there exists a significant relationship between mental health and adjustment among IT professionals, is accepted.

Regression for predictive efficiency

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'The conjoint effect of job stress and adjustment on mental health of IT professionals is higher than their individual effects'

Variable	R	R^2	% Variance	F	Inference	Step-up Regression Equation
YX_1	0.610	0.373	37.3	117.54	Sig at 0.01 level	$Y=186.73-1.59X_1$
YX_2	0.405	0.164	16.4	38.83	Sig at 0.01 level	$Y=43.52-0.77X_2$
YX_1X_2	0.669	0.448	44.8	79.90	Sig at 0.01 level	$Y=139.98-1.42X_1-0.53X_2$

Y - Mental Health, X_1 - Job Stress, X_2 - Adjustment

The effect of job stress on mental health of IT professionals was found significant at .01 level (F (1, 198) = 117.54). The computed value of R^2 of job stress and mental health among IT professionals (YX_1) is 0.373 which indicates that the contribution of job stress on mental health of IT professionals is 37.3%. The mental health of IT professionals can be predicted with the equation

Mental Health = 186.73-1.59 x Job Stress

i.e., for every unit of increase in job stress, mental health of IT professionals decreases 1.59

The effect of adjustment on mental health of IT professionals was found significant at .01 level (F (1, 198) = 38.83). The computed value of R^2 of adjustment and mental health among IT professionals (YX_1) is 0.164 which indicates that the contribution of adjustment on mental health of IT professionals is 16.4%. The mental health of IT professionals can be predicted with the equation

Mental Health = 43.52-0.77 x Adjustment

i.e. for every unit of increase in adjustment, mental health of IT professionals decrease 0.77

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The conjoint effect of both job stress and adjustment on mental health of IT professionals was found significant at 0.01 level of significance (F (2,197) =81.12). The computed value of R^2 of Social anxiety disorder with family environment and school environment ($Y_1X_1X_2$) is 0.448 which indicates the contribution of job stress and adjustment on mental health of IT professionals is 44.8%.

As %age variance(=44.8) of variables of job stress and adjustment conjointly on mental health of IT professionals shows increase in its value from job stress (%age variance=37.3) and adjustment (%age variance = 16.4), it indicates that the conjoint effect of job stress and adjustment on mental health of IT professionals is higher than that of job stress and adjustment separately.

The mental health of IT professionals can be predicted with the equation Mental Health = 139.98-1.42 x Job Stress -0.53 x Adjustment

Hence, hypothesis 3 stating, "The job stress and adjustment contribute towards the prediction of mental health of IT professionals both independently and conjointly" stands accepted.

Conclusion:

On the basis of the above results, following conclusions were drawn:

The job stress has significant negative relationship with mental health of IT professionals which indicates that the IT professionals who experience more stress at job front succumb to poor mental health whereas IT professionals who can resist stress at job front enjoy good mental health.

The adjustment has significant negative relationship with mental health of IT professionals. Bell's adjustment inventory being negative by nature, it indicates that the IT professionals who adjust well at job front are healthy mentally whereas IT professionals who are maladjusted in their jobs suffer from poor mental health.

It is quite apparent from the regression model summary that job stress and adjustment would contribute towards the prediction of mental health of IT professionals both independently and conjointly. Further it also revealed that the job stress is the stronger contributor of mental health of IT professionals.

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Implications:

The alarmingly deteriorating state of mental health of IT professionals has become a matter of great concern globally. The employees in the IT industry are prone to develop a number of health issues like alcoholism, diabetes, fatigue, tension headache, hypertension, insomnia, irritable bowel syndrome, peptic acid disease, psychoneurosis, sexual dysfunction, and skin diseases alongwith psychological issues like job insecurity, low self-esteem, anger mismanagement, suicidal thoughts etc. India has become the hub of IT industry and one of the fastest-growing IT markets in the Asia-Pacific region in recent years and hence the strongest economic booster. Thus, it becomes imperative to safeguard the mental health of the people working in IT industry so that we can grow as a happy and prosperous nation. The study revealed that job stress and adjustment are the significant contributors of mental health of IT professionals with job stress as stronger predictor. It calls for the minimising (if not totally eliminating) the stress at job front by identifying and plugging the factors contributing to job stress in IT industry. Further employees should also be given frequent life skills lessons to make them more equipped to adjustment mechanisms at job, home and social fronts.

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