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**A STUDY ON STRESS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A CASE OF AN IT COMPANY IN HYDERABAD**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In this dynamic business environment one of the factors that determine what organizations can achieve is its employees. Organizations can achieve unexceptionable levels of performance only when the workforce is committed towards their work through higher productivity, self-motivation and loyalty. Every organization wants to acquire this and retain the best employees in their organization and employee engagement is the pre-eminent tool for it. Studies reveal that engagement is closely linked with organizational performance outcomes. So it becomes essential for organizations to deal with impediments to employee engagement such as stress. According to the global research conducted by Towers Watson in 2014 highly stressed employees are more vulnerable and are disengaged from their work. The study was conducted to examine the relationship between stress and employee engagement among IT employees. Sample consisted of 192 employees working in an IT company at Hyderabad. This study empirically investigates the association between stress and employee engagement in general and also in particular among women employees and employees aged 36 and above. The findings are in accord with theoretical explanation in the case of general and employees aged above 36. The empirical association between stress and employee engagement was not found in case of women employees.*

**KEYWORDS**

stress, employee engagement, organizational performance, association.

**INTRODUCTION**

The way an employee feels is the way he works. An organization wants the best out of their employees. Most of the employees are not able to engage themselves with their work consistently throughout the day. An engaged employee definitely feels in a different way which brings his best out. The literature on Employee engagement brings forth various perspectives. There is no definite universally accepted definition of employee engagement. Job satisfaction, Employee commitment and Organizational citizenship behavior are closely related to Employee engagement. The scope of employee engagement is broader and was originally defined by Kahn as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; Expressing themselves cognitively, emotionally during their role performances is one of the characteristics of engaged employees". Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., Gonzalez - Roma, V., & Bakker, A. B., (2002) defined engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by Vigor, dedication and absorption". Engaged employees extend exemplary willingness to any task that comes their way. Their level of energy remains consistent in face of difficulties. They carry a sense of pride and belongingness with their work and organization to an extent where subsequently it becomes difficult for them to detach themselves from their work and organization. Robinson et al. (2004) define employee engagement as "a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its value". Engaged employee looks for ways to enhance relations with colleagues, work together to improve the performance within job for increasing organization productivity. Employer needs to make an effort to nurture engagement by balancing the two-way relationship between them and employee. Saks (2006) found that engagement significantly predicted job satisfaction and employee commitment. Stress is like a friction in a machine. It acts as impediment to Employee engagement. Stress was originally regarded as pressure from the environment, then as tension within the person or interactions between the situation and the individual. (Michie S 2002). It may be defined as individual's reactions to the characteristics of the work environment that appear threatening to them and thus creating hindrance to being fully involved in work. Stress may not always be negative. It is just that people do not know how to handle the situation which makes them feel anxious. Stress experienced by an individual is subject to the perception level of the person. What stresses one may be challenging, exciting for the other. Individuals react to stress emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally and psychologically. Emotionally they tend to go through internal suffering. This suffering manifests psychologically in the form of showing disinterest or lack of involvement towards job etc., physically (frequent lame excuses, late coming, absenteeism, laziness etc.) or by leaving the job entirely (Beehr and Newman, 1978). The emotional connection to others and cognitive awareness lead to engagement (Khan, 1990). The emotional and cognitive connection of employees with their organization is possible when they have clarity about what is expected of them, see themselves and their co-workers as significant part of organization (Harter et al., 2002). Stress experienced by an employee plays a key role in emotional and cognitive availability at work (Ongori and Agolla, 2008). Theoretically stress is associated with the employee engagement. The current study attempts to investigate empirically stress and employee engagement. Study has been confined to an IT organization in Hyderabad investigating the connections between engagement and burnout (stress).

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To study the association between Stress and Employee Engagement in general at select Company.
2. To study the association between Stress and Employee Engagement among women employees.
3. To study the association between Stress and Employee Engagement in the case of employees aged 36 and above

**HYPOTHESIS**

Following hypothesis are set for the corresponding objectives:

H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no association between stress and Employee Engagement.

H<sub>0</sub>2: There is no association between stress and Employee Engagement in the case of women employees.

H<sub>0</sub>3: There is no association between stress and Employee Engagement in the case of employees aged 36 and above.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

For the purpose of the study a structured questionnaire has been designed. The questionnaire included the standard perceived stress scale by Sheldon Cohen and Utrecht work engagement scale. The perceived stress scale is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring perception of stress. It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. The three aspects of work engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption) are assessed by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). Around 220 employees working in the select company, Hyderabad were selected as sample respondents, but after eliminating incomplete, inconsistent & invalid responses the valid responses were found to be 192. Collected responses were analyzed using IBM SPSS. Conclusions are drawn from the results of statistical analyses.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS****STRESS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

An attempt was made to investigate whether there is an association between Stress and Employee Engagement in order to test the hypothesis "There is no association between stress and Employee Engagement" for which Chi Square test was conducted. The results of the test are as follows:

TABLE 1

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.465 <sup>a</sup>	1	.000		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	22.060	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	24.325	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	23.342	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	192				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 35.45.

According to the test results the Pearson Chi-Square value is 23.465 which is higher than 5 and the 2-sided Significance value is 0.000 which means there is an association between the two variables Stress and Employee Engagement. As the variables Stress and Employee Engagement are associated with each other, the null hypothesis "There is no association between stress and Employee Engagement" is rejected.

**STRESS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE CASE OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES**

An attempt was made to investigate whether Stress and Employee Engagement are associated with each other in the case of women employees in order to test the hypothesis "There is no association between stress and Employee Engagement in the case of women employees" for which Chi Square test was conducted. The results of the test are as follows:

TABLE 2

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.014 <sup>a</sup>	1	.906		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.014	1	.906		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.544
Linear-by-Linear Association	.014	1	.906		
N of Valid Cases	81				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.26.

According to the test results the Pearson Chi-Square value is 0.14 which is lower than 5 and the 2-sided Significance value is 0.906 which means there is no association between the two variables Stress and Employee Engagement in the case of women employees. As the variables Stress and Employee Engagement in the case of women employees are not associated with each other, the null hypothesis "There is no association between stress and Employee Engagement in the case of women employees" is accepted.

**STRESS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE CASE OF EMPLOYEES AGED 36 AND ABOVE**

An attempt was made to find whether there is an association between Stress and Employee Engagement in the case of employees aged 36 and above in order to test the hypothesis "There is no association between stress and Employee Engagement in the case of employees with age 36 and above", for which Chi square test was conducted. The results of the test are as follows

TABLE 3

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.509 <sup>a</sup>	1	.000		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	10.956	1	.001		
Likelihood Ratio	17.710	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.123	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	35				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.03.

According to the test results the Pearson Chi-Square value is 13.509 which is higher than 5 and the 2-sided Significance value is 0.000 which means there is an association between the two variables Stress and Employee Engagement in the case of employees aged 36 and above. As the variables i.e., Stress and Employee Engagement are associated with each other, the null hypothesis "There is no association between stress and Employee Engagement in the case of employees aged 36 and above" is rejected.

**CONCLUSION**

The results support the relationship between stress and work engagement. According to the test conducted it was concluded that Stress and Employee Engagement are associated with each other. Stress and Employee Engagement are associated in the case of women employees as well as Employees Aged 36 and above. The findings are in accord with previous research that says engagement level of employees is associated with the stress experienced by them (Bakker et al., 2010; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Most of the studies suggest Employee engagement as one of the most important factor that influences turnover intention and job satisfaction by mediating the relationship with job resources. According to Saks (2006), the mutual reciprocal exchanges among individuals enable them to be engaged. Engaged employees tend to share high quality relationships with their employer. As a result, be more likely to report more positive attitudes and intentions toward the organization. Work engagement is characterized by a high level of energy and strong identification with one's work. Burnout, on the other hand, is characterized by the opposite: a low level of energy combined with poor identification withone's work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2001). Studies have indicated stress can be an impediment to work engagement. Addressing the stress causing factors which impact employee in a negative way would be one way to let the high energy of work engagement sustain and flourish in an organization. The friction created by stress can be managed through various mechanisms depending upon the source of friction thereby reducing the impact of this friction on work engagement.

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