

**A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF JOB STRESS AND  
EFFECTIVENESS OF EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCE HANDLING; A  
CASE STUDY ON A PRIVATE SECTOR COMPANY IN  
COLOMBO DISTRICT, SRI LANKA**

**A.HariniNavoda De Zoysa\***

**Abstract**

Job stress is a kind of stress which builds up in our body over a particular period of time and it can happen to either a person who is already employed or to a person expecting a job. It affects the mind, body and behavior in many ways and everyone experiences stress differently. In today's world, employee grievance handling is an important component in every company, which is conducted by Human Resources Management. Problems are often aggravated in most organizations because of ineffective grievance handling. The Managers from the supervisory level to the senior management level should have a sound knowledge in employee grievance handling. In this study, the researchers have studied the effectiveness of the employee grievance handling to reduce their stress at work place. This study focuses on identifying the employee grievances experience in an organization in Sri Lankan context. In addition to the main objective, the sub-objectives are to identify symptoms and causes of excessive job stress, to identify the employee grievance management techniques used in practice and to identify the importance of employee grievance handling to encourage relationship between employee and employer relationship. The sample included 200 employees as 100 females and 100 males. Methodology followed for this study is quantitative in nature and both primary and secondary data collection methods were used. The main finding of the research was the majority of employees are stressed at work. Therefore grievance procedures are necessary for any organization because it gives employees an opportunity to voice out their problems whether it concerns occupational health &

**\* Assistant Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka**

safety or complaints concerning harassment, discrimination, and any problems within the work area. Once we able to identified the employee grievances, it is very important to develop an appropriate techniques as early as possible, to provide proper solutions for their matters on time.

**Keywords: Job Stress, Employee Grievance Handling, Human Recourses Management**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper reviews a major concept in the field of psychology, namely “stress”. We generally use the word ‘stress’ when we feel that everything seems to have become too much. The term ‘stress’ can be defined in various ways as follows:

*“Stress is body’s way of responding to any kind of demand. (Liggy Webb, 2013)*

*Stress is a normal physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance in some way.”(Anne Hunt, 2010)*

Stress can have positive as well as negative results. It is a normal physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance in some way. Stress is the way human beings react both physically and mentally to changes, events and situations in their lives. (M Bickford, 2005)The stress response is the body’s way of protecting people. When working properly, it helps to stay focused, be energetic, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save life and give extra strength to defend one self. The stress response also helps to overcome challenges.

Stress is one factor responsible for many different problems in everyday life. (MR Salleh, 2008)People experience stress in different ways for different reasons. A lot of factors can cause stress. Some of them can be identified as job stress, exam stress, relationships (eg. spouse, kids, and boyfriend/girlfriend), economy, personal health concerns, housing costs, personal safety, health problems affecting family etc.

In this study, the researcher considers only about the stress at workplace. Secondly, this paper reviews the effectiveness of employee grievance handling procedures in an organization. It may help the employee to reduce their stress and give a better service to the workplace. The intention

of this paper is to identify the reasons that lead to the stress of the employees and discover how the employee grievance handling procedure helps to reduce their stress and do their work in a better environment with a good mentality.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Due to fierce competition in today's business, employees in many organizations have to contend with stress when dealing their work. Therefore, the concept of stress management has become important in today's world, especially in the commercial industry. Top managerial personnel are bound with organizational goals while leading their subordinates towards the same goal. Time boundaries and targets are the extra burdens born by the top level personnel.

Every employee has certain expectations, which he thinks must be fulfilled by the organization he is working for. When the organization fails to do this, he develops a feeling of dissatisfaction. When an employee feels that something is unfair in the organization, he is said to have a grievance. Hence problems are often aggravated in most organizations because of ineffective grievance handling. The managers from the supervisory level to the senior management level should have a sound knowledge in employee grievance handling. But the problem is, are they using this effectively and efficiently?

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

#### **KEY OBJECTIVE**

- To identify the employee grievances experience in an Organization within Sri Lankan Context.

#### **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

- To identify symptoms and causes of excessive job stress.
- To identify the employee grievance management techniques used in practice.
- To identify the importance of employee grievances handling to encourage relationship between employee and employer.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

Employee is the key factor of any organization. Therefore, keeping employee retention is very important. Hence management should identify the employee requirements and expectations by studying the employee grievance handling procedure. It will help employees to do their work without any stress in a good environment.

On the other hand identifying employee grievances is very important to the organization because, management can provide facilities to motivate the employees to get optimal service from them.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

Even though there are so many private sector companies in Sri Lanka, the research has been limited for studying a private company in the Insurance field. Among the related insurance companies there are 120 branches spread island wide, the research has been limited for studying employee grievances randomly at the Head Office. And also there are nearly 3000 employees working there and the sample has been limited to 200 employees among them.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The sample included 200 employees as 100 females and 100 males. Methodology followed for this study is quantitative in nature and both primary and secondary data collection methods were used. The researcher has utilized primary data gathered in the form of questionnaire and secondary data in the form of journal articles, books and the internet. The questionnaire was developed by referring the literature on the job stress and the grievances.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Concept of 'Job Stress'**

Most people experience stress because of their work place. The reasons are having too much of responsibility, pressure to perform and meet rising expectations, having a heavy workload, and poor working conditions.

Some job stress is normal, excessive stress can interfere with productivity and can impact human physical and emotional health. Job stress has been a relatively neglected area of research among

organizational psychologists. Negative effects of stress in the workplace on the health and well-being of workers have been observed throughout human history. The phrase “mad as a hatter” came into the English language long before anyone knew that mercury in the materials used in making hats affected the central nervous system (Kahn, 1981). In the nineteenth century, descriptions of the “black lung” disease of coal miners recognized a causal link between a hazardous work environment and a particular physical disorder. The World Health Organization has noted that “...occupational health and the well-being of working people are crucial prerequisites for productivity and are of utmost importance for overall socioeconomic and sustainable development”.

### **Concept of a ‘Grievance’**

Employee’s grievances are one of the major issues in employee relationship of any organization. It is said that employee’s grievances are at the heart of the company. Therefore, this should be handled very carefully, for the success of any organization.

Gary Dessler has defined a grievance as: “Any factor involving wages, hours, and conditions of employment that is used as a complaint. Similarly it could be expressed or not expressed.” (Dessler Gary, Human Resources Management, P.27)

International Labour Organization has defined a grievance as:

“Any complaint or dissatisfaction on the part of a worker or a group of workers relating to their employment in the undertaking, with the general claims which normally fall within the scope of collective bargaining as a result of employment.” (The International Labour Organization)

A grievance can be any discontent or dissatisfaction, whether expressed or not, whether valid or not, and arising out of anything connected with the company that the employee thinks, believes, or even feels as unfair, unjust, or inequitable. (Jucicus, Michael J) Thus, a grievance represents a situation in which the employee feels that something unfavorable to him has happened or is going to happen.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

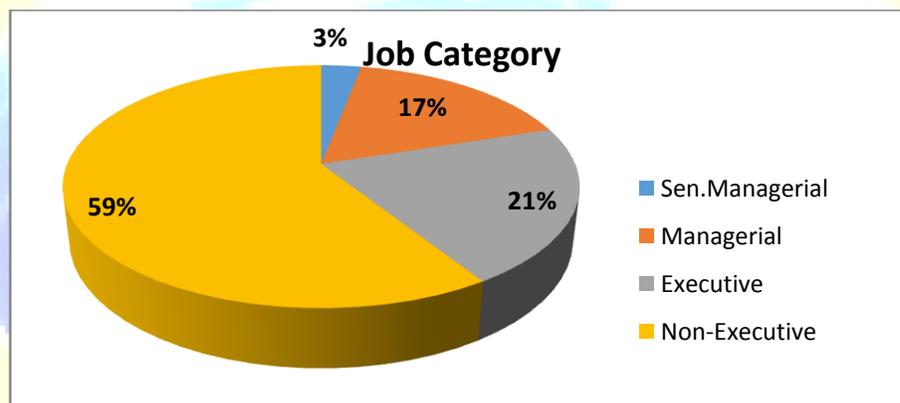
The sample included 200 employees as 100 females and 100 males.

**Table 1: Gender**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	100	50
Female	100	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

From the total sample of 200 employees 50% represent males and 50% represent females.

**Chart 01: Job Category**



According to the chart the majority of the employees (59%) are in the Non-executive grade.

**Figure 01: Symptoms of Job Stress**



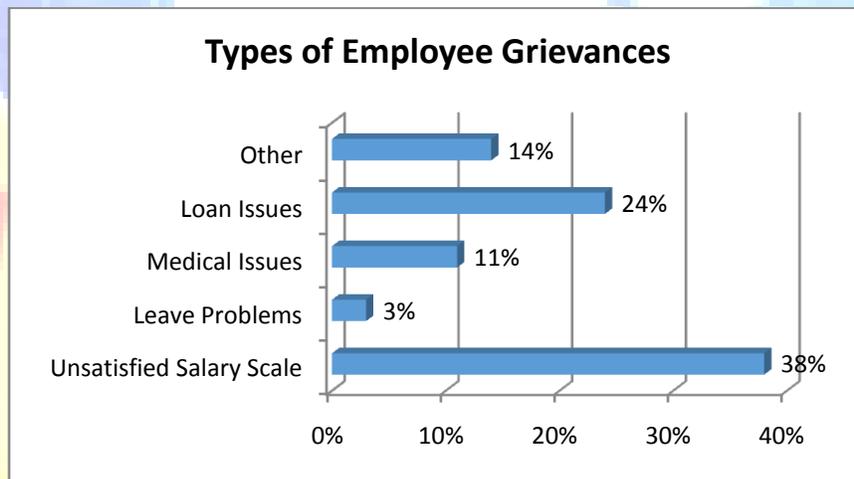
31% of the employees have the symptom of trouble concentrating of job stress.

**Chart 02: Causes of Job Stress**



Most of the employees (32%) are stressed because of their workload.

**Figure 02: Types of Employee Grievances**



38% employees are not satisfied with their salary scale.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Employee Grievance Management Techniques**

Once we able to identified the employee grievances, it is much important to get an appropriate techniques as early as possible, to provide proper solutions for their matters on time.

The management should take care of the following aspects to develop a culture of trust and confidence for the customers.

They should always ensure that the managers involved in handling grievances have proper training and know how to empathize with others. They should ensure that they have adequate time to be devoted to the complainant and show respect. Employees should be allowed to present their issues without prejudging or commenting. Use a positive, friendly way to resolve the situation. They should not show annoyance, impatience, sarcasm or hostility.

The following features can be identifying in a grievance.

- Can be real or imaginative feelings of personal justice that a customer has, about the company relationship.
- It need not be expressed to become a grievance.
- It need not be true or correct
- A feeling arising from imaginative conditions or from incorrect reasoning is still a grievance if it causes a feeling of injustice

### **The Importance of Grievance Handling**

Intoday's world, employee grievance handling is an important component in every company which is conducted by Human Resources Management.

There are several important ways of having a sound grievance handling procedure. Some of them can classify as below.

- To improve human/industrial relations
- Improve morale / motivation
- Helps to enhance productivity
- Improve the image of the organization
- Establish recognizable grievance handling procedure
- Improve Communication
- Ensure speedy solutions for grievances.
- Improve employee - employer relationship

## CONCLUSION

The majority of employees are stressed at work. Through this survey, it was possible to identify employee grievances and obtain proper answers to them. Otherwise, all these will lead to poor work output, poor quality and will in turn affect the productivity of the organization. Therefore the management should develop effective grievance handling procedures to avoid unnecessary problems. It will reduce the job stress of the employees and improve the image of trust about the company.

## REFERENCES

1. Anspangh, D.J., (2011). '*Coping with and managing Stress*'. New York: McGraw Hill.
2. Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. *Wellness in the Workplace*. Hamilton: CCOHS, 2002, 2004
3. Cooper, C.L., Cooper, R.D., Eaker, L.H., (1987). '*Living with Stress*'. Penguin.
4. Lehrer.P.M., Woolfolk, R.L., (1993). *Principles and Practices of Stress Management*, Guildford Press.
5. Lennard, S., (2001). *Stress and Depression*, Hodder.
6. Lewin, David, and Richard B. Peterson.(1999). '*Behavioral Outcomes of Grievance Activity*'. Industrial Relations.
7. Payne, R., (1995). *Relaxation Techniques: a Practical Handbook for Healthcare Professionals*, Churchill Livingstone.
8. Quick, James C., editor. *Work Stress: Health Care Systems in the Workplace*. New York: Praeger, 1987.
9. Reeves, Z., T. (1995). '*The Use of Employee-Based Grievance Systems.*' Review of Public Personnel Administration.
10. Seaward, B.L., (1999). *Managing Stress: Principles and Strategies for Health and Wellbeing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Jones and Bartlett Publishers.
11. Simmons M., Daw W. (1994) *Stress, Anxiety, Depression: a Practical Workbook*, Winslow Press.