

Stress and Workplace Stress in Pandemic

El Estrés y El Estrés Laboral En Pandemia

Betty Acosta

Instituto Superior Edwards Deming, Quito,
Ecuador b.acosta@deming.edu.ec,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4448-3975>

Abstract

History can be divided into the world before the pandemic and in the post-pandemic world, most scientific studies now add the pandemic label to their analyzes, because the effect of this unusual event definitely reached all spheres of life today. Under this context, Psychology must update its concepts within the impact of the pandemic on people and Organizational Psychology will logically be within this school. That is why a topic continually addressed as stress deserves to be updated because it is undoubtedly more present in the reality that now surrounds us. Knowing the classic concept of stress, it will advance to its definition in the workplace and finally approach the strategies that will allow it to be managed and overcome.

Keywords: Work stress, Mental health, Psychological and social well-being.



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Resumen

La historia podrá dividirse en el mundo antes de la pandemia y en el mundo post pandemia, la mayoría de estudios científicos ahora añaden el rótulo de pandemia a sus análisis, porque definitivamente el efecto de este inusitado evento alcanzó a todas las esferas de la vida actual. Bajo este contexto, la Psicología deberá actualizar sus conceptos dentro de la afectación de la pandemia sobre las personas y la Psicología Organizacional lógicamente estará dentro de esta escuela. Es por eso que un tema abordado continuamente como el estrés, merece ser puesto al día porque indudablemente está más presente en la realidad que ahora nos envuelve. Conocer el concepto clásico del estrés, permitirá avanzar hasta su definición en el ámbito laboral para finalmente acercarse a las estrategias que permitirán manejarlo y superarlo.

Palabras clave: Estrés laboral, bienestar psicológico, social.

Introduction

Nowadays the word stress is continuously repeated in everyday vocabulary, however, not everyone knows its real meaning. Most people associate the word stress with illness and although this connotation is not totally wrong, it is important to broaden this concept and know that stress is also positive and gives the body the possibility to face situations that endanger its existence. This article provides a brief theoretical explanation of the meaning of stress, then applies it to the workplace and finally shares strategies to overcome it.

Materials and Methods

The world changed after March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. This new reality affected the human being, disturbed society and ended the world economy, perhaps because its cells, that is, the companies had to make radical changes to try to survive, they even had to go against the nature of the human being, they forgot their social essence and separated them to survive. It was the first time that human beings united would disappear, since that March 11, only separated could they stay alive.

There is probably no other phenomenon as determinant as Covid for mental health so far in the 21st century. That is why several mental health studies have been conducted and repeat terms such as depression, anxiety, stress, among other problems triggered by social isolation.

The pandemic affected all levels, however, the medical sector faced the collapse of its entire system due to the high number of infections, with saturated hospitals, lack of supplies to treat patients and an indolent population that did not follow their suggestions for preventive care but demanded the highest level of care. Health personnel faced extreme working hours, with 24-hour shifts and without sufficient time for rest. This area has merited several studies to identify the possible mental health problems they could suffer, such as insomnia, stress, anxiety, an example of which can be read here:

In the fight against the Coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic, health personnel may experience mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, insomnia, denial, anger and fear. A study in China found that the rate of anxiety among health care personnel was 23.04%, higher in women than in men and higher among nurses than among physicians. Likewise, in the general population of China, 53.8% of moderate to severe psychological impact was observed; 16.5% of depressive symptoms, 28.8% of anxious symptoms and 8.1% of stress, all between moderate and severe. (Lozano-Vargas, 2020).

Stress, as the subject that interests us now, has been considered by the WHO as a mental problem of the 21st century and has been defined as the set of physiological reactions caused by the inadequate response to external stimuli in the work and personal environment.

To understand it more broadly, we must go back to the fact that it is thanks to stress that mankind has survived. The human being, subjected to an aggressive environment, had to defend himself; so under these circumstances, the body wisely prepared itself, increasing adrenaline, releasing hormones to alert the brain and tense the muscles and in this way could defend itself from aggressive stimuli that could be animals or natural forces among others and finally, once faced with the stimulus, return to a state of rest. Thanks to this dynamic, homo sapiens has managed to remain above all living beings for 315,000 years.

Although it is true that stress has historically accompanied human beings and allowed them to survive, today's world has changed, and it is no longer necessary for people to defend their lives from animal attacks or to find food by crossing mighty rivers. Now man lives in safe dwellings and it is enough to open the refrigerator to have access to his daily food. Stressful stimuli have changed from wild animals to strenuous working conditions, from wild landscapes to cold roads flooded with cars driven by aggressive people. Within this reality, stress has reached a pathological point because the person overreacts to a stimulus and keeps tense muscles, high levels of adrenaline and accelerated palpitations, showing inability to control it and maintaining it for so long that he/she ends up exhausted, not allowing the body to rest and opening the possibility of contracting possible diseases.

There are several types of stress, we could talk about academic stress, identified in the educational community, where teachers radically changed their teaching methodology and students, as mentioned by Contreras Melgar (2016) and Fernandez (2015) point to the overload of homework and evaluations as the main factors that worry them.

Another type of stress, widely studied is work stress, according to the World Health Organization, work stress is identified as a group of emotional, psychological, cognitive and behavioral reactions to professional demands that exceed the knowledge and skills of the worker to perform optimally, WHO, 26 Aug.2020.

- Responses to work stress can be:
- Physical: insomnia, hypersensitivity, skin problems, headaches, headaches.
- Emotional: panic or anxiety attacks
- Cognitive: problems with memory, attention, concentration, etc.

When a worker perceives his work environment for a long time as harmful it causes stress. Factors that can cause this reaction in the workplace are:

Excessive responsibility, an event in which the employee with little decision-making power is responsible for part of the process but assumes the consequences of the entire task.

Too much workload, a common situation nowadays when the rate of layoffs increases and the employer reduces costs by dividing the responsibilities of the laid-off personnel among the employees who are still working.

Unsatisfactory working conditions, considering issues such as insufficient or inappropriate working tools for the task, the physical area where the activities are carried out, poor recognition of results or exposure to hazardous working conditions.

Harassment at work, either by management or by co-workers

Low salary

Lack of motivation, repetitive tasks or strict bosses who order but do not recognize the achievements of their subordinates.

Lack of incentives, mainly when additional or different work than usual is given.

Life outside of work also affects the employee's work, for example, the loss of a family member or if the employee is dealing with an urgent situation at home. Political or social problems are also considered here.

Undoubtedly, when the pandemic started in 2020 and the number of unexpected deaths began to grow, people were forced to confine themselves. The human being, the social animal of Aristotle, who states that "man by nature is destined to live in community and live together with others", now, in the midst of the pandemic, avoids human contact, works alone and the closest he can get to his co-worker is through a screen. His social identity has changed, he no longer rejoices in the warmth of a human group, be it university, work, prayer group, etc., now survival surpasses all human needs and man achieves security in isolation.

At the beginning it was thought that this situation of isolation would soon end, however, after a year, the world has been transformed and now the fear of contagion, the fear of the disease, the lack of social support, the overexposure of the media and the collapse of health centers have forced people to live in a new reality. Within this panorama, it is worth mentioning other aspects that cast a further shadow over the environment, such as the fear of losing one's job and the economic insecurity that this entails. Not all people are able to handle these factors correctly and they can cause more serious or pathological stress.

In a global economy where smart companies were nurtured by a human team, the questioning of entrepreneurs focuses on the extent to which their team of collaborators contributes 100% to their company. The current labor reality is very different from the reality before the pandemic. Not only do we have people with possible mental

disorders who no longer contribute in the same way to their company, but also more than three million deaths by May 2021.

It is therefore mandatory to look for strategies to deal with labor stress and thus allow companies to maintain production levels equal to or higher than those recorded before the pandemic in order to try to overcome the critical economic situation in the world. Several authors consider that many of the strategies to reduce stress are found in prevention, i.e., neutralizing its sources from the very experiences that can be associated with stress. Then we should move on to interpersonal relationships, where the subject should show a healthy way of relating in a group. Finally, focus on the environment in which he/she usually develops in order to reduce or eliminate the stressful stimuli that affect him/her.

At this point, the Hierarchy of Needs theory could be considered, where Maslow explains the existence of needs organized from the most important ones. Considering this theory can serve to establish in the human group, which requirements they consider important at present, if these are attended by their bosses, they could decrease the stressful effects in the human group.

Based on the neuroscientific approach to stress management I quote

The Hervat Neuroeducational Program, offered by Ortiz in the Summer Courses at the University of Burgos. Doing neuroplasticity exercises with repetitivo, regular, systematic and precise training to favor the synapse or functionality of neurons; practicing good hydration and cerebral oxygenation with deep breathing; attractive exercises of short times to guarantee concentration and active attention, doing one minute of ocular motility and one minute of passive tactile discrimination, among others, which are detailed in the cited material.(Ortíz, Álvarez, Maldonado, 2018).

Results

Stress is a concept known throughout human history, in many moments positive because it has allowed the survival of the person in spite of the ruggedness of the world around him. However, it can become negative when "civilized" man leaves the caves behind and exchanges physical stressors for psychological stressors that are stronger and do not give him peace. This stress has become the perpetual

companion of the human being, so it is not surprising to find it at work and identify it as occupational stress.

Discussion

In this very brief tour through the theory of stress, we first seek to identify and understand its concept and then try to find ways to prevent it or in the worst case, when it is already present, to know that there are ways to overcome it. It is important to note that a defining factor is also the personality, because there will be situations that are extremely stressful for one person, while the same situation for another may not mean any problem. This reality is important to consider in order to avoid generalizations. Unfortunately in our society, stress is a current issue; therefore, its continuous study will allow more people to find psychological and social balance and control it.

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