



Social

## OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN A DAIRY FACTORY IN BRAZIL

Graziele Oliveira da Rocha <sup>1</sup>, Dr. Paulo Lourenço Domingues Junior <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ)

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### Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the repercussions of occupational stress in a dairy factory in the city of Três Rios (state of Rio de Janeiro). The technique used for data collection was the interview. We have done a research field in the year of 2019. The results indicated that the main causes of occupational stress are failures in interpersonal relationships, overwork, physical and mental tiredness. Another factor that was addressed was the bureaucracy and dependence on other sectors, causing stress. We concluded that occupational stress results from a precarious work process, marked by overtime.

**Keywords:** Stress; Working Conditions; Company.

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### 1. Introduction

Today's world has as its symbol the highest point of computerization, economic development, cutting-edge technologies, shaped by the so-called knowledge age. These changes accelerate the process of development of the so-called globalization phenomenon, however it is no longer a concept to become a way of producing and distributing wealth, determining profound changes in the living conditions of the population.

The pursuit of productivity at any cost bumped into the limits of the human being itself and resulted in increased stress. That is, the theory of stress is born in the context of the explosion of production and consumption. Although substantial and significant changes have taken place in the working world, with the achievement of significant technological advances, lack of motivation, helplessness, hopelessness, fatigue remain as challenges. The organization has been seeking to improve competitions among client markets, and thus to compete for the most important resource: human talent. "Leadership is, in a way, a kind of personal power. Through leadership, one person influences other people based on existing relationships (...)" (Chiavenato, 2004, p.21).

We did a research in a company located in the city of Três Rios (Rio de Janeiro), which maintains the policy of constant investments in the improvement and modernization of its facilities, as well

as training and professional qualification programs, aiming to win the preference of its consumers and exerts business performance. The survey was carried out with 10 employees of different ages. We found that over 75% of respondents indicate that their stress level is high.

Stress can be defined as "the physiological, psychological and behavioral response of an individual who seeks to adapt and adjust to external and internal pressures" (Michal, 1998, p.34). Studies on stress show that while there is no agreement on a clear definition of stress, given that diverse concepts and conceptions about stress, one should not totally disagree with the idea of stress as physiological responses to stress. Occupational stress is not a new subject, but a new field of study that has gained relevance as a result of the emergence of diseases such as hypertension, ulcer among others. Therefore, occupational stress can be conceptualized as a consequence of the complex relationships that occur between working conditions, conditions outside the work and individual characteristics of the worker, compromising the individual and the organizations.

The production line environment is still an important source of stress for professionals. The different work situations associated with workers' conflicts and feelings compromise not only their productive performance but also their physical and emotional balance. "Unlike other occupational hazards, usually related to specific jobs, stress is associated in various ways with all types of work, harming not only the health but also the performance of workers." (Limongi, 2002, p.54). The general objective of the research was to analyze and identify which factors cause stress in everyday life within the company.

## **2. Theoretical Foundations**

Among the habits that people develop throughout their lives, regular exercise has proven to be an important variable for overall health. There is evidence that regular physical activity increases occupational stress tolerance (Taylor, 1986). Several authors have highlighted a variety of quick exercises designed to help executives and other workers to control and reduce levels of work stress (Freeberg, 1984). Programs to improve the quality of life at work have also developed a lot in recent years, particularly in large companies. These programs often aim to help employees increase productivity through workplace health improvements; most of them include some type of physical activity.

According to Van Doormen and De Geus (1993), numerous studies have shown that people with good physical fitness are less vulnerable to work stress. Simplicio (1995) studied in a sample of 1,139 subjects, the impact of moderate physical activity and observed that, in the experimental group, the stress level was lower when compared to the control group, particularly in the 18- to 25-year-old subjects and men aged 46 to 60 years. Literature reviews have concluded that, among the many current methods for dealing with stress, physical activity and fitness reduce both physiological, psychological and social stress (Crews and Landers, 1987). The impact of frequency and amount of physical activity was studied by Aldana et al. (1996) a sample of 32,229 employees with an average age of 35.3 years. The authors observed an inverse relationship between physical activity and stress.

According to Jex (1998), the definitions of occupational stress are divided into three aspects: (1) stressor stimuli: occupational stress refers to workplace stimuli that require adaptive responses

from the employee and exceed their coping ability; These stimuli are commonly referred as organizational stressors. (2) responses to stressful events: occupational stress refers to the responses (psychological, physiological and behavioral) that individuals emit when exposed to work factors that exceed their coping skills; (3) stress-response stimuli: occupational stress refers to the general process in which job demands impact employees.

Stress has always been present in human history, so it is not something unique to today's society. It is something pertinent to the human being that helps him to face the adverse situations of daily life (Nassif and Marasea, 2003).

### **3. Methodology**

We did a qualitative research through interviews. With qualitative research, respondents are freer to point out their views on certain subjects that are related to the object of study. In a qualitative research the answers are not objective, and the purpose is not to count quantities as a result, but to be able to understand the behavior of a particular group. Typically, qualitative surveys are done with a small number of respondents. The interview is a conversation between two or more people (the interviewer (s)) and the interviewee (s) where questions are asked by the interviewer in order to obtain necessary information from the interviewee.

This research is based on random data collection in the sector of a dairy factory in the city of Três Rios (Rio de Janeiro), with employees from various sectors of work. The company maintains a constant investment policy in the improvement and modernization of its facilities, as well as in training and professional qualification programs.

We visited the research site and explained the research objectives. Then, authorization was requested for the study. The population to be interviewed was intentionally chosen to achieve the study objectives; the research subjects were employees who met the established criteria: employees with more than one year in the company and were available to participate in the research.

The total number of respondents was 10 employees in various sectors of the factory. They answered a closed questionnaire of 4 predetermined questions and the completion of personal data. Employee speeches were presented with abbreviation and numbering according to the sequence of interviews to ensure anonymity. Data were collected from the work establishment in the form of small interviews during one workday. We used the individual interview, given that the interview has well-defined purposes allowing information to be gathered from certain basic questions. There was resistance from 4 people, who refused to answer the questionnaire due to discomfort and distrust.

### **4. Results**

A stressor is any situation or experience that generates feelings of tension, anxiety, fear or threat that may have internal or external origin. In this item we sought to learn what were the situations experienced by employees who represented stressors. We asked them what activities performed by them in their daily work, which caused more tiredness, anxiety, tension, conflict, among others.

The answers converged on the following categories: working conditions; interpersonal relationship; pressures, demands, emotional burden and low pay.

In a sample of 10 people, 3 complained that interpersonal relationships, bureaucracy and dependence on other sectors have been a stressor in the company, since socializing with co-workers can become a burden when there is a lack of complicity, trust and companionship.

“I think the bureaucratic issue, the bureaucratic issue is very stressful, even because it involves other professionals, understand? And sometimes professionals who are not so committed ... and that causes a lot of stress, tension ... We sometimes argue among professionals trying to solve an issue” [...]. (F 08)

“The difficulty of being able to do a job that depends on another sector ... What causes most stress is this. ” (F 01)

Another striking factor is that 20% of people also complained about the working condition such as: lack of material; the accumulation of services; the workload; the fast pace of work; the need for improvisation in the execution of daily activities.

We noted that the main causes of stress at work are mostly derived primarily from deviation from function 42% and secondly from interpersonal relationships with 35% of respondents.

“The work itself, I don't find stressful. I find the working conditions we are subjected to stressful ... The lack of material, the accumulation of services, various functions at the same time ... this is stressful. [...] It stresses me when I do not have material to work with, to do a certain activity, when I don't have enough employees, when it is very tumultuous, it stresses me. [...] because you waste a lot of time trying to see a way, a way, a way to develop a simple activity [...]” (F6)

Low pay was another factor discussed by four of the employees who said it is a stressor. The amount of work is large, the strain on performing such activity is immense, and they are not rewarded neither financially nor with recognition, another issue also addressed by employees.

“It is the physical and mental tiredness all the time, you burst with people, because sometimes it happens, right? You keep accumulating and when you put it out, that is precisely the tiredness” (F3)

Another aspect in the employees' speeches is the complaint about the lack of time: lack of time for herself or himself, for the exercise, leisure, the various forms of learning and the self-care, particularly the care with health.

“I don't have time for me, for home, for myself. Because to go to the doctor I should make an appointment, schedule that day... I have some routine exams from the cardiologist, but I have no time to schedule the exams, understand? Because it's on my work schedule and I don't want to miss my job to take an exam”. (F4)

## 5. Discussions

It is noticeable that the work environment in some sectors of this company is not friendly at all; the production team is even hostile regarding the lack of integrative projects that encourage integration and trust among employees. These difficulties in interpersonal relationships in the company have consequences in all areas, as it causes a difficulty in communication between sectors. This caused distrust even when answering the questions asked, for two reasons. The first reason is that employees are not used to being heard, meaning they can talk about what bothers them within the company. Second reason when asked about what they meant by stress, the employees did not clearly spell out a concept, but described the factors and situations that lead to stress, its causes and, mainly, that results from stress, the consequences.

In general, employees become discouraged from doing their best because they are not recognized for what they do. This is generating a lack of interest, and makes employees become average in everything they do, because they know that being excellent or average, what matters is to perform task, and nothing will change.

Despite the workload of 44 hours per week on average, employees showed great tiredness, even not working with physical effort. This shows how a bad work environment can generate mental fatigue in employees, which is not recovered with just a good night's rest.

Research suggests that stressful and job-specific factors, such as: negative work climate, ambiguous roles, lack of clarity in tasks performed, unmet expectations, work overload, have adverse effects on workers' health contributing to the emergence of work stress and consequently affecting mental health. Irritation, tiredness, discouraged workers, sleep disorders and decreased immune defenses are the main consequences of stress at the dairy factory.

A significant portion of 4 people in a sample of 10 shows that the main way to deal with stress is by exercising. They did exercises as a way to deal with stress. Physical activity is also one of the most effective ways to improve mental health and can have a positive impact on depression, anxiety, and more. It also relieves stress, improves memory, helps better sleep and improves overall mood. Physical activity helps relax muscles and relieve tension in the body.

## 6. Conclusion

The management of occupational stress can't be done without taking into account the structural features of the socioeconomic reality of the country. These workers are experiencing a scenario of instability and insecurity and still have to live with the absence of adequate hours of rest and with the lack of time to perform other daily activities.

The empirical results taken by qualitative research, showed that the stress factors in the interviewed sector are: the lack of recognition, low pay, high collection contingencies, overwork. In addition, it was observed that interpersonal relationships are a big factor of stress within the company.

It is concluded that occupational stress resulting from a work process marked by precarious working conditions and increased working hours, has strong repercussions in the daily work life,

and the respondents stated that the way of relieving stress was with the help of physical activity for better mental health and better performance.

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\*Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [pldominguesjr@uol.com.br](mailto:pldominguesjr@uol.com.br)