

A Study Of Life Stress In Employees To Determine A Balanced Assessment Using Ardell Wellness Stress Test

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Abstract— *It is a common perception that working life is changing across the world, and along with it there arise new challenges and problems for individuals to maintain a healthy and balanced life free of the stress. Many researchers established tests to assess the life stress of an individual using various parameters and then assess the same. Our goal here is to assess life stress with the aim of achieving and understanding how to maintain a balanced life mentally, emotionally and physically. In our study, we shall use the Ardell Wellness Stress Test created by Don Ardell in 1977 and then updated in 2018 to suit the current age employees and their mindset towards current challenges and environment.*

Keywords— *Life Stress, stress test, work-life balance, stress management*

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is the body's reaction to a perceived mental, emotional and physical distress. Albeit this definition maybe circular, there are still vital concepts within it. First and foremost is the fact that stress is perceived, i.e., the actual stress is not as important as the perception of the stress. There is no definite definition of stress that everyone accepts. Hence, it would be difficult to measure stress if there is no agreement on what exactly is the definition of stress. The impression that life's adversities cause not only unhappiness but also illness and madness has been a belief common to ages of old as well as to our own.

Life stress is a concept which is familiar to both laymen and professional alike and hence it is understood by all, so long as it is used in a sufficiently vague and general context (Cox, 1978). On the other hand, because 'stress' lacks any agreed definition, it is understood by very few, and even by those few in totally contradictory ways, whenever, a more precise account is required. This confusion over the meaning of 'stress' is not new. As the Oxford English Dictionary makes clear, the use of the term goes back to at least the early 14th century, at which time the word had already acquired several rather different meanings. Thus, 'stress' seems to apply equally to, a form of stimulus (or stressor), a force requiring change of adaptation (strain), a

mental state (distress), and a form of bodily reaction or response (that is, Selye's general adaptation syndrome of stress).

A popular definition of stress is, "a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize." Most people consider stress to be something that causes distress. However, stress is not always harmful. Increased stress can result in increased performance in people too. The original definition of stress by Hans Selye, who coined the term as it is presently used, was, "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change". This definition of stress was confusing when Selye's experimental animal results were extrapolated to humans and stress became a buzzword. For some, the definition of stress was something external, like a bad boss, for others the definition of stress referred to chest or stomach pain or some other disturbing reaction you experienced, but the definition of stress could also be the end result of these responses such as a heart attack or peptic ulcer. Selye subsequently had to create a new word, stressor, to distinguish between stimulus and response. He struggled unsuccessfully to find a satisfactory definition of stress and in his later years suggested that the best definition of stress was "the rate of wear and tear on the body". He was also unaware that the definition of stress in physics that had been in use for several centuries was the degree of distortion in a malleable metal when it was subjected to an external load. Thus, his original definition of stress was really a description of strain.

There are three components to the General Stress Syndrome. The first stage, which is termed the alarm stage, represents a mobilization of the body's defensive forces. In other words, the body is preparing for the "fight or flight" syndrome. This involves a number of hormones and chemical excreted at high levels, as well as an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, perspiration, respiration rate, etc. In the second phase — the stage of resistance — the body becomes adaptive to the challenge and even begins to resist it. The length of this stage of resistance is dependent upon the body's innate and stored adaptation energy reserves and upon the intensity of the stressor. Just as any machine wears

out even if it has been properly maintained, so do living organisms that sooner or later become the victim of this constant wear and tear. The acquired adaptation is lost if the individual is subject to still greater exposure to the stressor. The organism enters into the third and final stage — the exhaustion stage — and then dies because it has used up its resources of adaptation energy. Thankfully, few people ever experience this last stage!

The four types of stress are:

- **Acute stress:** Fight or flight. The body prepares to defend itself. It takes about 90 minutes for the metabolism to return to normal when the response is finished.
- **Chronic stress:** The cost of daily living: billing, kids, jobs, etc.. This is the stress we tend to ignore or push away. If left unchecked, this stress could affect your health, body and immune system.
- **Eustress:** Stress in daily life that has positive impact like: marriage, promotion, baby, graduation, winning money, new friends, etc..
- **Distress:** Stress in daily life that has negative effect such as: divorce, punishment, injury, financial crisis, etc..

Probably the most dominant theoretical formulation in the social etiology of distress has been the stress-distress model. Physiologist Hans Selye (1956) proposed the theory that diverse external stimuli might generate undifferentiated physiological and mental responses. This stress-distress model represented a direct convergence between the earlier sociological concerns with consequences of social integration and the physiological modeling of internal responses to the external environment. This theoretical formulation spurred research on personal life changes as a set of such social stressors.

A very long while back, Selye (1956) concentrated research consideration on harmful stressors and lab creatures' designed physiological changes in response to them. The orderly investigation of stress in people started to prosper a few years after the fact with the production of Holmes and Rahe's (1967) agenda of real life changes and their related correction weights. Actually, a huge number of articles on the negative physical and emotional well-being outcomes of significant life events were distributed in this manner. Since the late 1970s, a assortment of new strategies for estimating stress have been created and refined and stress hypothesis has been expounded to consolidate factors which moderate or cradle the impacts of weight on physical and mental health. Each of these directing variables adapting resources, coping strategies, and social help currently has its very own flourishing writing.

Finding a balance in our lives and managing that stress can be challenging on its own. The first step is recognizing the

degree to which we are stressed and later move forward to make strategies to make things better.

In this paper, we shall assess the stress for our sample employees using the Ardell Wellness Stress Test developed by Donald B. Ardell in 1977 in his book *High Level Wellness*. However, as times change, so do situations and people's perceptions. Hence, Ardell thought of updating the wellness test to suit the current trends and people. After all, what are the chances that the events and situations of 70s are still stressing the people of today. The "Ardell Wellness Stress Test" then and now incorporates physical, mental, emotional, "spiritual" (i.e., meaning and purpose) and social aspects of health. This is one reason many users report finding the test useful - it offers a balanced assessment of varied stress sources. In the section II below, we discuss the literature review on stress and their assessment using various parameters and further in III and IV we share the methodology and data analysis using the responses gathered by our sample.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cohen and Hoberman (1983) in their research suggested that both social support and positive events protect one from the pathogenic effects of high levels of stress but harm those (i.e., are associated with increased symptomatology) with low levels of stress. Further analyses suggested that self-esteem and appraisal support were primarily responsible for the reported interactions between negative life stress and social support. In contrast, frequency of past social support was not an effective life stress buffer in either the case of depressive or physical symptomatology. Moreover, past support frequency was positively related to physical symptoms and unrelated to depressive symptoms, while perceived availability of support was negatively related to depressive symptoms and unrelated to physical symptoms.

Diener, et al (1985) developed a scale and validated it to measure global life satisfaction, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). They discovered that there exists a need for a multi item scale to measure life satisfaction as a cognitive judgmental process. Their scale was designed around the idea that one must ask subjects for an overall judgement of all in order to measure stress in their life and how satisfied are they. They conducted their research for various age groups and then results were correlated. The results showed that the scale had favorable psychometric properties. The SWLS correlated at an adequate level with inter-viewer estimates of life satisfaction.

Lin and Ensel (1989) focused on as it is affected by two main environmental elements: stressors and resources. Data from a three-wave panel survey of a representative upstate New York community are examined by lagged casual relationships among these variables. Their results showed that;

- Prior physiological conditions contribute directly to current physical symptoms
- Stress and resource components of the psychological environment affect directly to the current physical symptoms
- Social resources buffer both social stressors and psychological stress, whereas psychological resources buffer only psychological stress
- Psychological stress mediates the effects of prior social stressors and psychological resources.

Tennant and Andrews (2013) constructed a comprehensive life event inventory suitable for questionnaire or interview administration. Two set of scales allowed the significance of life events to be scaled in conceptually different ways. One follows the Holmes concept of extent of life changes produced by the events and second, the Paykel concept of amount of distress caused by the event. The inventory was used for an Australian urban population.

Importantly, it was observed that social resources tend to play a vital buffering role relative to social and psychological stresses for physical well-being.

III. METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

We shall take a sample of 100 IT sector employees working in IT HUB Financial District, Hyderabad. Using their responses, we shall interpret the scores using the interpretation giving by Donald Ardell as below.

Ardell Wellness Stress Test Interpretation

- + 60 to + 75 - You are in a very good place overall, and unlikely to be significantly troubled by stressors on a consistent basis. You have a lot of positive factors in your life which, more than any stress management technique (e.g., deep breathing, meditation and so on), will render you largely immune from the adverse effects of negative emotions in dealing with what life serves up. There are few challenges likely to untrack you from a continuing sense of near wellbeing so long as your satisfaction level remains as high as indicated in this assessment.
- + 36 to + 59 - You are doing well, much better than most. You should find the information available about the wellness concept attractive and consistent with your movement toward effective and healthy living. You already have a well-tuned capacity to deal creatively and efficiently with events and circumstances. Additional advances should come easily for you. All good wishes in moving forward

while learning new skills, particularly in areas of critical thinking, the experience of exuberant living, physical fitness and expanding your personal freedoms and choices.

- + 20 to + 35 - You have a well-founded appreciation for the importance of lifestyle choices in affecting the quality of your life. You know the value of personal responsibility, a supportive environment and the cumulative positive effects of little changes, over time. In the months to come, invest additional energies in learning ways to strengthen certain areas. You can boost your satisfactions while reducing your stressors.
- 0 to + 19 - You can clearly benefit from a modest investment in learning ways to reduce stress and increase pleasures. A flurry of negative circumstances could spark emotional setbacks. Take steps now to avoid slowing your steady progression toward mastery of good living and self-efficacy.
- 0 to -19 - Stress of a daily nature that interferes will good living seems to be a problem - and it deserves your attention. Stress of a consistent negative nature will jeopardize your motivation to choose wisely and sustain energy levels needed for good health and an enjoyable life. You are a candidate for counseling. You are either too pessimistic or have severe problems in dealing with stress.
- -20 to -37 - There is almost surely too much stress to support exuberant living, with generous instances of pleasure and joy, positive excitement for fun things to do and delights in diversions and purposes. Consider a wide range of ways to boost your happiness quotient.
- -38 to - 75 - Oh my goodness. What do you do for a living - are you North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un, ruling dictator of the Hermit Kingdom? Something, lots of things, must be done to lighten the load, to eliminate much of the stress load from your life. Let's look on the bright side for a moment - you are still alive, you managed to complete the test without suffering a cardiac event and you probably have a sense of humor, more or less. But seriously, if you truly are as stressed as this little consciousness-raising set of questions would indicate, it's time

for a chat with a wellness professional. I recommend that you start now to look after yourself with more loving attention

Abbreviations and Acronyms.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

From the data collected and the scores processed in an excel sheet, it was seen that approximately 21% of the respondents came under the 0 to +19 category, 41% came under 20 to 35 and 37.5 % came under the 36 to 59 score category as shown below in Table 1.

Scores	Percentage
0 to 19	20.83333
20 to 35	41.66667
36 to 59	37.5

Table 1.

Hence, it can be seen that no one has a score in the negative which means either nobody is highly stressed in their lives or they did not answer the questions truthfully enough. Either way, for our responses it can be seen that mostly the employees under the 20 to 35 score category understand that they do have few areas of stress. But if they invest a little energy in those areas, they might lead a more happy and balanced life both personally and professionally.

Those under 36 to 59, they are living a good life. Stress is minimal and manageable than most. They focus on physical well being and positive approaches towards all situations for a balance.

20.8% fall under the 0 to 19 score, which tells us that even the tiniest negative energy can sparkle a series of emotional setbacks and stressful situations. They should focus on those negative emotions and work on them to try and maintain a positive attitude towards life. Come what may. A physical well being should also be kept into focus.

V. CONCLUSION

It is observed that employees today have a certain idea as to what the stressors in their lives are. People everywhere try to maintain a balance between personal and professional life. They tend to focus on physical well-being by joining gyms, running marathons on weekends, practicing yoga regularly. Also, it is observed that employees who are stressed and struggle overall tend to seek out helps with counsellors and loved ones. There is no shame to ask for

emotional support when it comes to having a balanced personal and professional stress- free life.

Many tests exist for measuring life stress. But they should be used correctly and should be validated for the correct study. Shea and Cieri (2011) in their study concluded that certain scales like HSE Management Indicator Tool- First Pass, Job Stress Scale were recommended not to be adopted without prior examination of their psychometric properties being specific for the study and sample. People are getting more and more aware of how stress affects and rules our lives and are taking measures to manage it in their own individual ways. Every era is different, hence ways to manage stress in life also varies. In our study, Don Ardell's test suits perfectly for our sample. Because Don Ardell made a few changes in his Stress Test so as to be up to date with the changing life styles and perceptions of the new age employees.

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Appendix 1

Ardell wellness Stress Test

Don Ardell developed a stress assessment that is unique in its holistic approach to stress. In chapter one, you learned about the importance of incorporating all dimensions of health in your understanding of stress. The Ardell Wellness Stress Test incorporates physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of health for a balanced assessment.

Rate your satisfaction with each of the following items by using this scale:

+	3	=	Ecstatic
+ 2 = Very happy	+ 1 = Mildly happy		
0 = Indifferent			
-1	=	Mildly	disappointed
- 2	=	Very	disappointed
- 3 = Completely dismayed			

1. Choice of career
2. Present job/ business/ school
3. Marital status
4. Primary relationships
5. Capacity to have fun
6. Amount of fun experienced in last month
7. Financial prospects
8. Current income level
9. Spirituality
10. Level of self-esteem
11. Prospects for having impact on those who know you and possibly others
12. . Sex life
13. Body, how it looks and performs
14. Home life
15. Life skills and knowledge of issues and facts unrelated to your job or profession
16. Learned stress management capacities
17. Nutritional knowledge, attitudes, and choices
18. Ability to recover from disappointment, hurts, setbacks, and tragedies
19. Confidence that you currently are, or will in the future be, reasonably close to your highest potential.

20. Achievement of a rounded or balanced quality in your life
21. Sense that life for you is on an upward curve, getting better and fuller all the time
22. Level of participation in issues and concerns beyond your immediate interests
23. Choice whether to parent or not and with the consequences or results of that choice
24. Role in some kind of network of friends, relatives, and/or others about whom you care deeply and who reciprocate that commitment to you.
25. Emotional acceptance of the inescapable reality of aging

(Adapted from High Level Wellness: An Alternative to Doc, Drugs and Disease by Don Ardell)

Look back at the items in the Ardell Wellness Stress Test. Identify which items related more to physical health, to mental health, to emotional health, to spiritual health, and to social health. Do you see any patterns develop? For instance, are more areas of disappointment related to physical health than to social health? Remember, for holistic health we are seeking a balance in all dimensions of health.