Factors Influencing Job Stress in Sales-force: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The present study is focused on understanding stress phenomenon of the sales employees working in various sectors by identifying the distressing factors that affect most individuals. This research paper will also make an understanding about the demographic profiles of the respondents that causes sales stress. Sales being a most sought after area with quick rises in financial growth, most individuals choose the area of sales without bearing an understanding about their self concept. This study will relate demographic profiles of sales employees to their abilities of enduring stress and leading to positive outcomes. As a research method, we used an online questionnaire, applied to the samples which represent the target group of the project. The major findings of the study that those who are less experienced and in the young age are more likely to have sales stress. Additionally, it has been found in the present study that the composition and size of the family in which sales people are living has a significant impact on the ability to manage sales stress. The study will help in understanding whether the sales skills can be developed and sustained. It is a research which will help the recruiters to select apt persons who will be able to handle the sales stress and also help in increasing sales of the companies even amongst all competitions.

Keywords: Sales Management, Sales Stress, Marketing Management, Human Resource Management, Management of Salesforce

I. INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1. Introduction

Stress is impacting in all manners in the area of sales. The markets are growing and production is at a boom. Along with it comes an undue stress on sales employees as their work goes up in bounties. Stress can be beneficial for sales for the reason of commissions. Processing stress positively may lead to tapping energy to its maximum and gaining full benefit of the same. Stress thus, can be considered as an inevitable condition when the productivity and health of the employee is maintained. Excessive stress can influence one's productivity but health and emotions has to be taken under control. Stress can have its negative symptoms as well and can strike in the most harmful way. When employees go through a certain level of stress and anxiety, they lose confidence and interest in taking responsibilities, their performance go down and can also lead one to become suicidal.

1.2. Understanding Stress on Sales-force

As quoted in The Economic Times (ET), 'Stress levels are rising among employed Indians owing to growing uncertainty in jobs in a highly disruptive environment as well as increasing anxiety in personal lives, studies have revealed'. Increasing stress has, in turn, led to a surge in the number of people who are suffering from depression and are at high risk of suicide. Employers, therefore, face an increasing challenge of dealing with workers who are not only personally depressed but may also adversely impact the productivity of their organizations. Nearly half the employees in India suffer from some kind of stress, according to the findings of the latest survey by Optum, shared exclusively with ET. The survey was conducted among 800,000 employees in 70 large companies, each with a minimum workforce of 4,500. Another survey, conducted by www.1to1help.net, showed that the proportion of workers at high risk of suicide due to unmanaged stress has grown to 8% of all counseling cases in 2018 from 2-4% two years ago.

Stress is a type of psychological pain. Small amounts of stress may be desired, beneficial, and even healthy. Positive stress helps improve athletic performance. It also plays a factor in motivation, adaptation, and reaction to the environment. Excessive amounts of stress, however, may lead to bodily harm. Stress can increase the risk of strokes, heart attacks, ulcers, and mental illnesses such as depression. Humans experience stress, or perceive things as threatening, when they do not believe that their resources for coping with obstacles (stimuli, people, situations, etc.) are enough for what the circumstances demand. When people think the demands being placed on them exceed their ability to cope, they then perceive stress. Positive psychological stress can lead to motivation and challenge instead of anxiety. The effects of experiencing eustress, which is positive stress, versus distress, defined as negative stress, are significant. While colloquially lumped together, the various types of stress should be treated as separate concepts.

Selye (1974) proposed four variations of stress. On one axis he locates good stress (eustress) and bad stress (distress). On the other is over-stress (hyperstress) and understress (hypostress). Selye advocates balancing these: the ultimate goal would be to balance hyperstress and hypostress perfectly and have as much eustress as possible. Stress is extremely useful for a productive lifestyle because it makes working enjoyable instead of a chore, as seen with distress.

We truly need to focus on this word, actually we are living in a era of cut throat competition along with lots of expectations from ourselves as well as from our surroundings, and when we are not able to fulfill it or get it, we feel frustrated and it creates a stage of stress. It is just like; to carry a problem 24 hours with us and then the same problem will create a situation and stage of stress in our minds.

Hans Selye, one of the leading authorities on the concept of stress, described stress as "the rate of all wear and tear caused by life." Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) definition of stress reflects very clearly this way of thinking. They say that stress is," a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being.

1.3. Problem Statement

Whether it is the field of sales or any other, if the individual is not able manage hazards as part of professional requirements of the job done by him/her, it will definitely lead to stress and establishing relationship between demographic profile and stress occurred due to the profession chosen has unquestionably strategic implications.

1.4. Motivation of the Study

The first author of this research paper is an academician as well as a trainer. She trains and mentors sales people in a few renowned organizations where she has studied the relationship between demography and stress

among the trainees. The co-authors are professors of marketing management and have greatly contributed by providing useful insights in this study.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1. Research Gap

From the review of extant literature it has been found there are many studies that tried to measure sales stress and established relationship between sales stress on performance. However, relevant literature has not explored the relationship between sales stress and demography which the present study is intended to do.

2.1. Research Questions

The following are the two research questions that the present study is intending to answer:

1) What are the reasons of stress in salesforce?

2) How stress is related to demographic profile of salesforce?

2.2. Research Objectives

The following are the two research objectives of the present study:

1) To identiry the reasons of stress in salesforce.

2) To explore the relationship between stress and demographic profile of saleforce.

2.3. Data Used

The data used in the present study are solely from primary sources. The primary data has been collected from a conveniently available sample of 329 respondents by using a quantitative structured questionnaire through mailed questionnaire method.

III.   KEY FINDINGS

3.1. Demographic Profile

As stated earlier, convenience sampling has been used to collect the sample in the present study and in an aggregate a sample size of 329 respondents got achieved. Looking at the demographic profile of respondents (see Table 3.1), it is evident that the sample constitutes all types of people on the basis of experience, gender, age, marital status and family type.

Table 3.1 Demographic Profile of the Sample (Source: Primary Data)

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Experience	Less than 5 Years	91	28%
	More than 5 Years	238	72%
Gender	Female	29	9%
	Male	300	91%
Age	Less than 35 Years	300	91%
	More than 35 Years	29	9%
Marital Status	Unmarried	95	29%
	Married	234	71%
Family Type	Nuclear	249	76%
	Joint	80	24%

3.2. Section I: Analysis & Findings

The data on sales stress has been collected in the present study with the help of a quantitative structured questionnaire in which there were basically two sections. In the first section, the respondents were asked to give ratings on their job stress in a five-point likert scale where 01 = not agree at all, 02 = somewhat agree, 03 = can't say, 04 = agree, 05 = strongly agree. Table 3.2 below is depicting the perception of respondents regarding their job related stress.

From the table it can be seen that the respondents strongly believe that the nature of sales job is difficult, stressful and there is always reasonable pressure to meet the deadlines. For this reason they are always required to update their skills to avoid being replaced. Apart from it the respondents have also shown a fair degree of agreement towards large sales target, working beyond official working hours, receiving different assignments from two or more sources, working during weekends and vacations, feeling constant threat to their job security, not offered market competitive salary, incentives and benefits, not evaluated as per their competency and existence of office politics. However, there is a positive side also discovered. The majority of respondents were found saying that they are provided with clear instructions regarding the new assignments entrusted to them. In addition to it, a majority of respondents also showed strong belief on that their contributions are recognized and rewarded.

Table 3.2 Sources of Sales Stress
(Source: Primary Data)

Statements	Average
The nature of sales job is difficult	4.09
My Sales target is too large to handle.	3.53
I am forced to work with very tight work schedule.	3.42
I often work beyond official working hours.	3.82
The Sales job is stressful.	4.33
There is always reasonable pressure to meet the deadlines.	4.23
I often receive different assignments from two or more sources.	3.56
I am not provided with clear instructions regarding the new assignments entrusted to me.	2.80
The logistic is inadequate to work with.	3.34
The available information relating to my job and its outcome are insufficient.	3.33
I hardly meet my Personal Commitments in this organisation.	3.34
I have to work during my weekends and vacations.	3.53
I feel constant threat to my job security.	3.79
I always have to update my skills to avoid being replaced.	4.10
I am not offered market competitive salary, incentives, and benefits.	3.97
I am not able to meet high career advancement opportunities.	3.35
My performance is not evaluated as per my Competency	3.88
My contributions are recognised and rewarded.	3.70
I am not encouraged to innovate and take decision.	3.29
The work environment is not transparent	3.36
The relationship with the workmates is not friendly	3.06
I feel the guidance /supervision is inadequate	3.23
Office politics play a critical role while making adjustment to group pressure.	3.60
It becomes difficult to implement the new policies & procedures in place of those already in practice.	3.49
I find it difficult to go to sleep at nights.	3.33

3.3. Section II: Analysis & Findings

The first section of the questionnaire has been intended to identify and measure the sources of sales stress among respondents while the second section is meant for identifying the ways to manage sales stress. First of all, respondents were asked to four selected factors that made them work in a sales profile. From Table 3.3, it seems that majority of respondents believe that there is fair pay package, career opportunities, challenge, reward and recognition that induced them to get into sales profile.

Table 3.3 Factors Responsible for Getting into
Sales Profile
(Source: Primary Data)

Ratings	Frequency	Percentage
High Pay Package		
Excellent	57	18%
Good	82	25%
Fair	189	54%
Poor	1	1%
Career Opportunities		
Excellent	58	18%
Good	86	26%
Fair	182	55%
Poor	3	1%
Challenging Job Profile		
Excellent	49	15%
Good	77	23%
Fair	198	60%
Poor	5	2%
Reward and Recognition		
Excellent	64	19%
Good	68	21%
Fair	193	59%
Poor	4	1%

After discovering the factors responsible for getting into sale profile, the respondents were asked to reveal the primary reason for stress in their job. As per Table 3.4, it is evident that it is the profile itself that is believed to be the primary reason for stress in sales job. Additionally, there is a major chunk of people who believe that it is not possible to make

work-life balance in sales job and it is the primary reason for stress.

Table 3.4 Primary Reason for Sales Stress

(Source: Primary Data)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Primary Reason for Sales Stress		
Job Profile	177	54%
Insufficient Reward & Recognition	44	13%
Job Sercutiry	28	9%
Work-Life Imbalance	77	23%
Other	3	1%

After this, the respondents have been asked to tell what the main impact of sales stress is and it has been revealed from their responses that around 60% of people into sales feel that the stress incurred due to job causes increased health issues.

Table 3.5 Impact of Sales Stress

(Source: Primary Data)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Impact of Sales Stress		
Increased Health Issues	198	60%
Decreased Productivity	41	12%
Decreased Motivation	61	18%
Increased Attrition	24	7%
Other	5	3%

Then, it has been asked to the respondents that what one item if improved would have the greatest impact on managing stress for employees like them and a majority of 48% has told that improved peer relations is the factor having greatest impact on managing stress which is a very good sign.

Table 3.6 Impact of Sales Stress

(Source: Primary Data)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Factor having Greatest Impact on Managing Stress		
Job Profile	21	6%
Training and Development	34	10%
Reduction in Work Hours	44	13%
Leadership Style	48	14%
Job Security	22	7%
Improved Peer Relation	159	48%
Other	1	1%

After discovering the factor having the greatest impact on managing sales stress, it has been tried to find out whether the organizations in which the respondents are working have by any chance taken any steps to address stress.

Table 3.7 Steps taken to Address Sales Stress

(Source: Primary Data)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Steps taken to Address Sales Stress		
Comprehensive Programme	31	10%
Some Steps	76	23%
None	222	67%

After this, the respondents were asked to tell if their organization would take some initiatives on stress, what is the primary area would they focus on. And as per the Table 3.8 it is evident that first of all the job-prifile and then the work-life balancea are the two primary areas for initiatives on sales stress.

Table 3.8 Primary Area for Initiatives on Sales Stress

(Source: Primary Data)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Primary Area for Initiatives on Sales Stress		
Job-Profile	168	51%
Work-life Balance	79	24%
Hiring Process	16	5%
Training	27	8%
Physical Work Environment	26	8%
Work Hours/Shifts	11	3%
Other	2	1%

Lastly, the respondents have been asked to reveal their expectations from initiatives on sales stress and as per their view proper initiatives to manage sales stress will first of all increase moral and motivation and then also increase productivity and performance.

Table 3.9 Expectations from Initiatives on Sales Stress

(Source: Primary Data)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Expectations from Initiatives on Sales Stress		
Decreased Attrition	16	5%
Increased Moral & Motivation	198	60%
Increased Productivity & Performance	76	23%
Increase in Applicants for Openings	9	3%
Decline in Occupational Stress Level	21	6%
No Noticeable Change	9	3%

3.4. Results of Analysis of Variance

Analysis of variance which is popularly known as ANOVA is a parametric hypothesis testing technique that enables us whether there is a significant impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable. In the present study, the demographic variables have been taken as independent variables while sales stress has been taken as dependent variable and ANOVA has been implemented with the following null and alternative hypothesis in hand.

H0: There is no significant impact of demographic variables on sales stress.

H1: There is significant impact of demographic variables on sales stress.

The demographic variables have been taken for implementing ANOVA individually and not simultaneously and that is why the one way ANOVA has been implemented in this context. There are five demographic variables considered in this study which are: experience, gender, age, marital status and family size. As per the results of ANOVA, gender and marital status does not have any significant impact on sales stress while the other three demographic variables i.e. experience, age and family size has significant impact on sales stress where level of significant is equal to 0.05. It has found from the one way analysis of variance that the sales people who are having less than 5 years of experience, with the age of less than 35 years and living in nuclear families are having significantly more sales stress than those who are having more than 5 years of experience, with the age of more than 35 years and living in joint families. It is understandable that those who are less experienced and less matured are having more

chances to have inability of managing sales stress. Additionally, if a person is living in a joint family is more likely to be able to manage sales stess in a betten manner than those who are living in a nuclear family.

IV. CONCLUSION

4.1. Concluding Remarks
Countries like India and China have undergone major economic reforms during the past few years and that is why their economies have gained potential purchasing power (Dash & Dash, 2017). This has given rise to sales driven organizations. There has been a tremendous rise in jobs in sales and more and more people are choosing sales as a full time career. However, it has been found in the study that demographic factors have potential impact on the ability to manage sales stress. The findings of this study can act as a guideline for managing sales stress for professionals, academicians and even students.

4.2. Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research
The present study is based on a small sample and the key findings have been derived from simple descriptive analysis and inferential analysis which can be extended to much more complex analysis by future researchers in this field.

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