Stress and Suffering at Work: Possible Causes

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to analyze the possible sources of suffering in the work and its consequences, as specific objectives to evaluate the emotional state of the employees, to analyze the dissatisfaction in the work and its consequences. The methodology adopted was the descriptive, exploratory, quantitative approach. The article is part of field research carried out in companies of the fashion sector of the Passos city—MG, Brazil. For data collection, a questionnaire elaborated by the researchers was used, addressing questions related to the research problem. The data collected indicated evidence of psychic suffering and stress situations, triggered by the prevalence of psychosocial symptoms, such as muscle tension, forgetfulness, anxiety, irritability, and sleep disturbances.

Subject Areas

Psychology

Keywords

Suffering at Work, Stress at Work, Psychosocial Problems

1. Introduction

Stress has been defined in different ways over the years. Originally, it was conceived as pressure from the environment, then as tension within the person. It is a psychological and physical state generated by the individual in front of the demands and pressures before a given situation. At work stress can undermine the achievement of goals for both individuals and organizations.

In daily life, we encounter professionals with a high level of stress and demotivation, causing suffering at work, consequently affecting the quality of life of this professional and his performance in the company, triggering dissatisfaction.

Job dissatisfaction is subject to internal and external forces influences, affecting the mental and physical health of the worker, leading to the generation of possible psychosocial problems related to working conditions: physical, psychological and social.

The present article has aimed to raise the concepts and points of views of several authors on the subject researched in the scientific literature, that is, the theoretical foundation on the psychodynamics of work and to analyze the possible sources of suffering in the work and its consequences, the level of dissatisfaction and the psychosocial problems presented, confronted with field research.

2. Materials and Methods

The research was carried out in a garment company, located in the city of Passos, in the southwest of the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil.

As a criterion of inclusion in the research, a company was chosen to participate in the Central Business Program of SEBRAE—Brazilian Service of Support to Micro and Small Companies. A single company agreed to participate and sign the Statement of Consent, consenting to the participation and guarantee of its anonymity.

In order to reach the objectives, the methodological reference of the descriptive and exploratory research was adopted, since the studied population does not have deep knowledge on the subject in question. Exploratory research is carried out in an area where there is little accumulated and systematized knowledge. By its nature of probing, it does not behave hypotheses that, at all events, may arise during or end of the research. [1]

The research approach was the quantitative one describing the data, analyzing the occurrence of suffering at work and the relation of satisfaction and quality of life at work. Quantitative research starts from the principle that everything can be quantified, that is, that opinions, problems, information, will be better understood if translated in the form of numbers. It is the research activity that uses the quantification both in the modalities of information collection and in the treatment of these, through statistical techniques, from the simplest ones [2].

For the means of investigation, the field research was carried out collecting the data at the research site. According to Michel (2009) [2], field research in the natural environment is particularly important in social research, appropriate for studies of individuals, groups, communities, organizations, societies, whereas for social research, more important than finding solutions is to explain the phenomena, to understand realities, to create social meanings.

For the data collection, a questionnaire was developed by the authors of this article. The questionnaire sought to reach the proposed objectives, addressing the emotional state of employees and the problems presented; the main causes of job dissatisfaction and the conditions that lead to it; organizational stress and its physical, psychological and social consequences.

Vergara (2009, p. 39) [1] states that "a questionnaire is a method of collecting

data in the field, of interacting with the field composed of an ordered series of questions about variables and situations that the researcher wishes to investigate".

The company surveyed works in two shifts: 7 am to 3 pm and 3 pm to 11 pm. The project was presented to the employees during the shift. During the research period, the company surveyed had 232 employees in the clothing sector. The sample consisted of 125 employees, of both sexes. The choice of employees was non-probabilistic, as criteria should be in full working activity, work in the company researched and have an interest in participating. The questionnaires were applied by the researchers in the work place of the subjects. We chose the place of work, considering the availability of employees. Data collection occurred in the period from 7/23/2014 to 8/7/2014.

The subjects interviewed signed the Informed Consent Term (TCLE), as well as guaranteeing anonymity and preserving the identity of the participants, in line with the postulates of Resolution No. 196/9 of the Ministry of Health.

This article is part of a larger research carried out in the work of completing the Administration course.

3. Results and Discussions

The suffering at work is directly related to the quality of life in the organizations that comes to demonstrate the importance and the need of the people to be satisfied and happy within the organizational environment, dividing their life outside and within the organization, avoiding the suffering in the work and the emergence of occupational diseases.

Concern for the integrity of the worker, continuous improvement of health conditions, such as physical and mental well-being, are attributions of occupational medicine. This concept was replaced by that of Occupational Health, in which the environment in which the worker is inserted is now considered in the health/illness relationship, initiating a prevention movement. Currently, the reference is Worker's Health that brings about a conceptual change, relating health to the work process, considering the subjectivity of the worker [3].

The advances of the studies on mental health and work are significant, nevertheless, it is necessary to admit that still does not guarantee to the workers the sufficient support, with respect to the rights to benefits, due to psychic illness provoked in labor situation. However, studies may offer important elements to substantiate union claims about workers' mental health. They have also created an important base of knowledge to assist professionals in physical and mental health, in the identification and diagnosis of suffering or psychic disorder of employees [4].

According to the questionnaire, when asked about the emotional state, 55.2% consider their condition good and 17.6% from reasonable to poor, according to Figure 1.

With regard to emotional health, some symptoms were presented for the em-

ployees to point out the same, the main cause presented was anxiety, according to Table 1.

From Table 1, it can be deduced that 20.34% of those surveyed presented a bad mood, of the problems such as despair and depression presented a percentage of 5.08% each, 66.95% said they already suffered from anxiety and 2.54% presented other problems among them panic syndrome.

According to Borsoi (2007) [4] in the organization, psychic health and suffering are results of history that people live in the intersections of the various spheres of life and the variety of meanings and meanings that they construct both individually and collectively. Therefore, retrieving aspects of the work to understand the subjective processes and the processes of psychic illness of the collaborator does not mean isolating, from the other aspects of his life history, his previous professional career, and his immediate work situation.

Psychologists Silva *et al.* (2009) [5] admit it is not difficult to suspect that this new world of work so called by them, can generate successive disappointments and lead employees to disorders. They believe that an overload, especially mental, contaminates the collaborator in his cognitive and emotional aspects with perverse psychosocial consequences also for the interpersonal relations.

The authors cited concluded that it is up to organizations to review not only the dysfunctional environmental and organizational conditions of work but, above all, their models of health management for the employee. Organizations
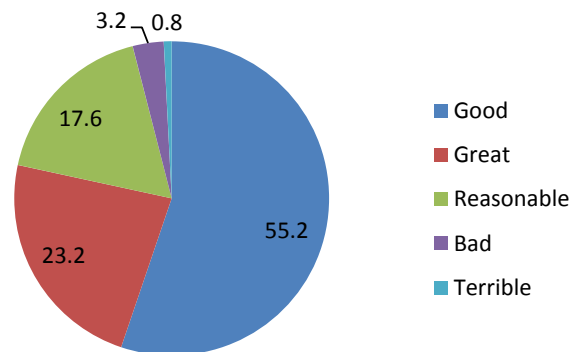

Figure 1. Distribution of research subjects according to their health condition in relation to their emotional state.

Table 1. Problems presented according to employees' emotional health condition. Data collected from 7/23/2014 to 8/7/2014.

Problems	Frequency	%
Bad mood	24	20.34
Despair	6	5.08
Anxiety	79	66.95
Depression	6	5.08
Others	3	2.54

should make feasible practices that favor the health of their members, since initiatives of this nature are economically more interesting than the remediation of the effects of any mental disorders that may afflict them. By doing so, companies will become ethically committed to the physical and mental integrity of their employees.

Dejours (1992) [6] emphasizes that psychic suffering varies with the type of work organization. Repetitive work creates dissatisfaction, which leads to somatic illness and mental disorders. Dangerous tasks, most often performed as a group, give rise to fear. Against the anguish of work, as well as against dissatisfaction, the collaborators devise defensive strategies, so that suffering is not immediately visible. Thus disguised, suffering can only be revealed according to time and profession.

When questioned about job satisfaction, 35.2% of the subjects surveyed are always satisfied; in contrast, 26.4% are satisfied only a few times, 24% are often satisfied, 9.6% are very often and still 4.8% did not respond, according to Figure 2.

According to Borsoi (2007) [4], work is a source of satisfaction, it is a source of pleasure, it is an effective part of people's lives, it becomes as significant as the love relationships built. Without it, the basic needs of our body and our desires are not satisfied. However, it only came to integrate, in an effective and systematic way, the field of preoccupations present in the studies on mental health.

It can be seen that work has always been present in the life of man, evolving its importance and meaning. According to Diniz (2013) [7], man has always worked and not just for financial reasons. Initially he needed to get his food to survive. He also had the need to defend himself against animals and other groups fighting for food or land, working on the fabrication of his own defense tools. In addition, the need for climate protection has made men work to create their coats. Thus, work, in its most varied forms of action, was characterized as a survival strategy for the fulfillment of needs.
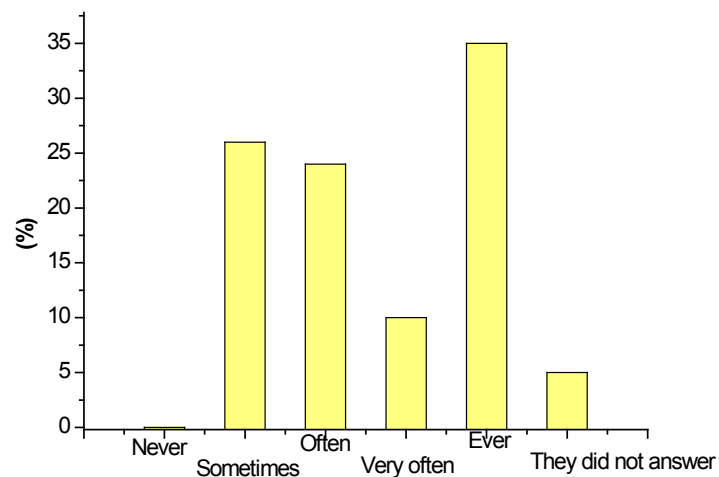

Figure 2. Distribution of research subjects in relation to their satisfaction with work.

Therefore, it is through work that man reproduces himself, develops his abilities, learns to know his own potentialities and limitations, changes his worldview, innovates and contributes to development. Work is the way to human self-realization.

Of the total number of interviewees, 21.01% indicate that the cause of greater job dissatisfaction is lack of recognition, 20.23% highlight the impossibility of professional growth and salary and work overload with a percentage of 10.12% each, according to Figure 3.

According to Murta and Troccoli (2004) [8], dissatisfaction is one of the occupational stressors and is often linked to work organization, such as pressure for productivity, unfavorable working conditions, lack of training and guidance, abusive relationship between supervisors and subordinates, lack control over the task and incoherent work and rest cycles with worker limits.

Increasingly, demands on the individual in the workplace reach households and the social life of employees. Thus, a vicious cycle is created in which the stress caused in any area of life, work or home, overflows and makes difficult the confrontation of the other.

When asked about the relation between stress at work and the relationship with social life, they presented the following responses, according to Figure 4.

As a result, 41.6% of the subjects surveyed think they have stress at work and 53.85% think that stress affects their social life; in contrast, 44.23% think that
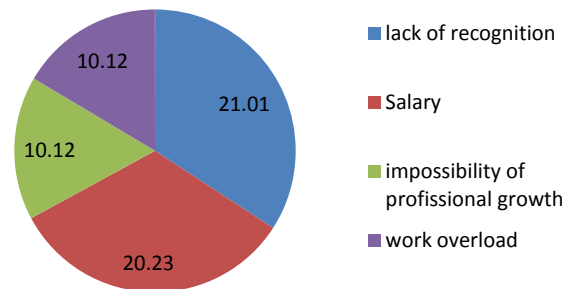

Figure 3. Distribution of the subjects of the research in relation to the four reasons that cause them the most dissatisfaction at work.
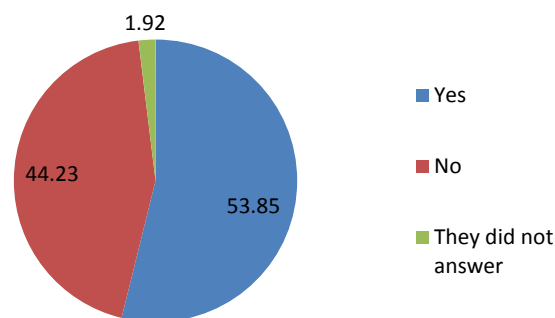

Figure 4. Distribution of research subjects in relation to the fact that they feel stressed at work, this harms their social life.

they do not and 1.92% do not respond. Already 57.6% do not think they have work stress and 0.8% did not respond.

According to Dejours (2008) [9] work also causes a series of sufferings due to social constraints, injustice, contempt, humiliation; the requirements of users and customers. To work is also to withstand this suffering.

Dejours (1992) emphasizes that the manifestation of suffering at work begins when the relation of the collaborator to the organization of work is blocked; when he used the maximum of his intellectual, psycho-affective, learning and adaptive faculties. Therefore, the greater the organizational pressure, the greater the possibilities for the manifestation of suffering.

When questioning about the symptoms of stress in the last week they presented the answers below (Table 2).

Thus, in the last week, some psychosocial symptoms were reported: the muscular tension, for example, jaw tightening, neck pain; forgetting mundane things, such as forgetting the number of a telephone he uses frequently, where he has placed the key; anxiety and tiredness when getting up.

Situations that can cause stress are those that are unpredictable or uncontrollable, uncertain, ambiguous or unknown, or that involve expectations of conflict, loss, or performance. Stress can be caused by time-limited events such as test pressures or work deadlines, or by ongoing situations such as family demands, job insecurity, or long commutes.

The workplace factors that have been found to be associated with stress and health hazards can be categorized as those to do with job content and those to do with the social and organizational context of the job. Therefore, we list some

Table 2. Symptoms presented by employees last week.

Symptoms	Frequency	%
Muscle tension, for example, jaw tightening, neck pain;	52	14.13
Heartburn with no apparent cause;	14	3.80
Forget about everyday things, like forgetting the number of a telephone you use frequently, where you put the key;	38	10.33
Excessive irritability;	25	6.79
Will to disappear from everything;	29	7.88
Feeling of incompetence, that you will not be able to deal with what is occurring;	20	5.43
Think about one subject or repeat the same subject;	10	2.72
Anxiety;	74	20.11
Sleep disorder, or sleep more or less;	33	8.97
Tiredness when rising;	44	11.96
Work at a level of competence below normal;	11	2.99
Feeling that nothing is worth it;	7	1.90
None of the above.	11	2.99

symptoms for the employee to indicate those presented in the last week. Some psychosocial symptoms have been reported and the most presented are: muscular tension, such as jaw tightening, neck pain; forgetting mundane things, such as forgetting the number of a telephone he uses frequently, where he has placed the key; anxiety and tiredness when getting up. However, there are many sources of stress that the individual probably perceives as outside their power to change, such as the structure, management style or culture of the organization. Quality of life programs have yielded good results.

For Diniz (2013) [7], a quality of life program at work can and should reach all levels of the organization, directing efforts towards the motivation and development of skills. Their actions cover the physical, sociological and psychological aspects of employees, interacting dynamically and directly interfering with employee satisfaction and occupational context.

The author also points out that there are interventions in the workplace that generate results, such as stress management programs that identify stressors at work and strategies to improve the ability to cope with stress; comprehensive programs involving tactics focused on the individual and organization that relies on improving employee productivity; brief individual therapy for employees with mental problems; partnership between employee and employer that relies on having a good relationship and communication, which can result in a faster recovery if the employee becomes ill; good management practices, maintaining a good relationship with employees, avoiding turnover.

Chiavenato (2014) [10] points out that welfare programs are adopted by organizations that seek to prevent health problems from their employees. These programs start by recognizing their effect on employees' behavior and out-of-work lifestyle encourage people to improve their standard of health.

According to the above-mentioned author, work hygiene is related to the environmental working conditions that ensure the physical and mental health of people and the conditions of well-being. Being that, a pleasant work environment facilitates the interpersonal relationship, improving productivity, reducing accidents, illnesses, absenteeism, and turnover. Making the environment a pleasant place to work has become a necessity of organizations.

4. Conclusions

Studying the issues related to job satisfaction and suffering is directly related to important issues of the organization itself, which is the quality of life of workers and productivity.

Based on the analysis of the questionnaires, it is believed that everything that hinders or makes work satisfaction unfeasible triggers work suffering and presents psychosocial problems, such as muscle tension, such as jaw clenching, pain in the nape; forgetting mundane things, such as forgetting the number of a telephone he uses frequently, where he has placed the key, anxiety and tiredness when getting up.

Stress at work is triggered in social life, thus causing psychic suffering, in the daily life of the worker.

According to the literature review, we can say that different people demonstrate different ways of responding to stress and psychic suffering, presenting different thresholds for responses to stress. A successful workplace stress avoidance strategy will ensure that work is appropriate to the individual, rather than trying to get people fitted into tasks for which they are not appropriate.

A fact presented as a trigger for work stress is the lack of professional recognition on the part of the managers; therefore the success in the management and prevention of stress will depend on the culture of the organization and the processes of Innovative People Management.

Stress should be seen by managers as useful information to guide action, not as a weakness in individuals. A culture of openness and understanding, not guilt and criticism, is essential. Building this kind of culture requires active leadership and exemplary top-level organizational models concerned with employee quality of life and implementation of one to identify problems early and to review and improve strategies developed to address them.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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