

Anxiety and Stress:

How Poor Performance and Absenteeism Affect the Workplace

Angela Stinson

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STRAYER UNIVERSITY

Anxiety and Stress:
How Poor Performance and Absenteeism Affect the Workplace

by

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A Directed Study Project Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Health Service
Administration in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Health Services Administration

Submitted To

Steven L. Jordan, Sr., PhD

Summer 2009

CERTIFICATION AND APPROVAL

This directed study project on the affects of stress and anxiety in the workplace is submitted as my own research for approval of the Graduate School of Strayer University in candidacy for the degree of Master of Science in Health Service Administration.

Submitted by Angela Stinson, September 14, 2009

Approvals _____

Steven L. Jordan, Sr., Ph.D.
DRP Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This research is designed to define stress and anxiety and will explore the various signs and symptoms of each condition. In addition to defining each condition, the research will also investigate how the effects of a person suffering from stress and/or anxiety can affect work performance and workplace financials. One aspect of workplace financials that will be discussed will be the effects of workman's compensation and disability claims. Additional chapters of the study will explore various health conditions that can arise from excess or untreated stress and anxiety, an assortment of causes for stress and anxiety and some of the most common prevention and treatment techniques commonly used to treat stress and anxiety.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Context of the Problem

Dr. Presley Reed's definition of acute stress disorder indicates “a feeling of being in a daze or dream. The individual could show decreased emotional responsiveness and feel detached from his or her surroundings. These feelings have a negative impact on work performance” (Reed, 1997, p. 1466). Dr. Reed also defined generalized anxiety disorder as “chronic and excessive worry regarding aspects of life. The individual often notices anxiety upon awakening. The anxiety is so severe that it impairs the person's ability to function in social relationships or at work” (Reed, 1997, p. 98).

Outside and work related stressors can have an immediate and long term impact on an individuals work performance and attendance. Most individuals encounter anxiety over time from daily life events. The individual suffers from the effects of the situation, but may not realize the impact for an extended period of time, or until work performance has already suffered. An individual may still appear to function in a normal setting, as a result, stress and anxiety can go undetected and untreated. An individual can go on with their daily routine and not realize the long term affects of their condition on their health and work productivity as “the stress response narrows your ability to think clearly or function effectively. It can disable you physically and emotionally” (Jaffe, 2007, par. 2).

Possible impacts on the individuals work setting could mean accommodations for a flex time or part time schedule, time off to attend doctor appointments and/or therapy groups, break times according to need and not schedule and adjustments to the office setting to minimize

distractions. Some factors that could lead to job stress are specific work factors, environment, workplace changes and personal relationships. Some techniques to deal with the effects of stress are listed as getting enough sleep, regular exercise and having a balanced diet. Jaffe (2007) argues that caffeine and sugar produce temporary highs which can end in excessive fatigue after the high is gone.

If stress and anxiety get to the point of being unmanageable, Dr. Presley Reed estimates an individual could have the need to remain out of work for anywhere from one to twenty eight days for symptoms to resolve (Reed, 1997). During this time of disability, their co-workers are left covering their job duties until they return to work. Needless to say, the impact of these conditions does not affect only one individual. There is an obvious impact to their work environment, the quality of their work and ultimately their co-workers level of productivity and morale.

Statement of the Problem

The more a person takes on such as work demands, school, children, hobbies, etc. the more they spread themselves thin and lose their focus and concentration. This has become an ever increasing problem in the workforce. Therefore, this proposal will delve into the world of stress and anxiety, the effects they have on an individual and ways to treat and overcome the problems that arise from being over stressed or anxious and being able to function effectively at work.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify the various forms of stress and anxiety and to determine how stress and anxiety affect people and their work performance. To assist in answering this primary research question, a set of three sub-questions have been created and will be the foundation for the acquisition of information that will be obtained and analyzed.

1. To what extent can other conditions develop if left untreated?
2. What factors are causing individuals to suffer from stress and anxiety?

To identify some of the factors that cause individuals to suffer from stress and anxiety.

3. What form of treatment plans exist to help treat stress and anxiety in order to maintain a healthy work and personal lifestyle?

Significance of the Study

The majority of Americans need to work full time to earn a living, and in most cases there are two income families. In addition to work, there are many other environmental and social factors that add to an individual's level of stress such as crime rates and the state of the economy. Because of such things as financial worry, people are placing more emphasis on getting ahead at work. It goes without saying that we are placing the pressure on ourselves.

Imagine a day where you are not feeling stressed, but may just have a headache. How is your daily life impacted? Now imagine a day where you have a headache, you were not able to sleep well the night before which is affecting your concentration and all of this is related to overwhelming worry over some event in your personal or work life. How well do you think you will be able to effectively perform your job duties? If these symptoms do not resolve, you may

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need to take some time away from work to see your physician. This time away from your work duties is in addition to your quality of work that has already suffered due to your lack of concentration. You need to start on a medication that has sedating effect and may have to see a therapist. It is not hard to see how a little stress or anxiety can quickly spiral out of control and affect your work performance and attendance.

Research Methodology

In an attempt to answer the proposed research questions, the research methodology of this study will follow the qualitative style of research. The author will use various methods of research such as medical and occupational statistics and any available individual interviews or surveys regarding the effects of stress and anxiety in their personal lives. The goal is to unite all forms of data to support the purpose of the paper.

Research will be done to determine the most common stressors in American society, and to determine the most common methods of dealing with stress and anxiety. The statistics will be used to help identify what is directly causing today's society to be overly stressed and anxious and the various forms of prevention and treatment plans. The researcher expects to evaluate such business as physician offices, executive offices, retail locations and churches with the intent to determine the stress and anxiety levels of various occupations and lifestyles.

The researcher will attempt to locate individual surveys that address questions such as determining what a person considers to be their primary cause of stress and their ways of dealing with those stressors. Additional questions to be considered will be how they feel their level of stress affects their performance at work and if they feel they need professional counseling, medications and/or time away from work to deal with their level of stress.

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Medical data will be collected and analyzed to define stress and anxiety, distinguish common symptoms of stress and anxiety and identify available treatment plans. Occupational data will be collected and analyzed to develop a conclusion on how work performance is affected by stress and anxiety. By obtaining occupational data, the researcher also hopes to develop an analysis of how these stressors can be avoided and/or treated to avoid future missed work days and poor performance.

The final set of data to be collected will be statistics that reflect the average number of work days missed, the average amount of dollars spent paying a disability claim and the expected number of labor hours spent processing a disability claim. The researcher will include written interpretation of this data as well as a graphical interpretation to assist in showing the affect stress and anxiety have on the workplace.

Organization of the Study

The organization of this study is to research and present statistical information based on a qualitative research method. The researcher will also establish planning, research requirements and chapters of results while adhering to the requirements for DRP research, preparation and structure.

Chapter 1 will contain the context of the problem. This chapter will define stress and anxiety and cite the common forms of stress and anxiety. It will comment on how stress can affect an individual's work performance and how a decrease in work performance can affect an entire organization. This chapter will also comment on various forms of treatment.

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Chapter 2 will be Literature Review. This chapter will cite reviews of literature, statistics and research findings. The author will define stress and anxiety and discuss how these conditions affect workplace performance.

Chapter 3 will discuss additional health problems that can develop as a form of stress and anxiety. This chapter will also discuss the signs and symptoms of each condition.

Chapter 4 will highlight some of the causes of stress and anxiety in today's American society. There are many forms of environmental, occupational and personal stress and each person will be affected differently.

Chapter 5 will discuss various tips for prevention and cures for stress and anxiety. The more serious the condition, the more time it will take to diagnose, treat and recover.

Conclusion

Although there are many forms of mental illness, there are also many ways an individual's life can be impacted. This proposal will focus on specifically stress and anxiety. Research for this proposal is intended to define stress and anxiety and their various symptoms and treatment options. This study will also serve to identify the impact of these diseases on the workplace and insurance companies.

As a reminder, the following sub-questions will be researched and answered in support of the primary research question for this study.

1. To what extent can other conditions develop if left untreated?
2. What factors are causing individuals to suffer from stress and anxiety?
To identify some of the factors that cause individuals to suffer from stress and anxiety
3. What form of treatment plans exist to help treat stress and anxiety in order to maintain a healthy work and personal lifestyle?

Stress and Anxiety

The expected method of research used to address the above questions will be a qualitative design. Additional data and literature will be reviewed as secondary data to offer support and provide answers to the above sub-questions of the study.

The research and results of this study are significant due to the American society becoming more overwhelmed causing an increase in the levels of stress and anxiety. If the results of this study show simple means for prevention and treatment, there is the possibility for a significant impact on the number of work days missed and cost of insurance.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Although stress and anxiety tend to be taken lightly, they are actual medical conditions that can be diagnosed and treated. Stress and anxiety can take on many different forms and create many different signs and symptoms. The two most common are acute stress disorder and generalized anxiety disorder. The definitions of Dr. Presley Reed are given in chapter one of this study. However, there are many more interpretations of stress and anxiety. In several articles written by Melinda Smith and contributing authors, stress is defined as “stress is a normal physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance in some way. When you sense danger – whether it’s real or imagined – the body's defenses kick into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the “fight-or-flight” reaction, or the *stress response*” and generalized anxiety disorder is defined as “generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) involves anxiety and worry that is excessive and unrelenting. This high-level anxiety makes normal life difficult and relaxation impossible” (Smith, 2009, par. 3).

There are many factors that can influence the way a person reacts to stress. One of those factors that will now be discussed is personality type. Type A personality is noted to be the most affected by stressors. An individual with a type A personality is said to be “involved in a never-ending struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time”. Traits of this personality type are:

- a. Chronic sense of urgency about time
- b. Extremely competitive

- c. Thinking about other things when talking to someone
- d. Impatience with barriers to task accomplishment
- e. Sense of guilt when relaxing or taking a vacation (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2007)

In addition to the type A personality, there is a type B personality. An individual with this personality trait is noted to be “easygoing and relaxed, patient, a good listener, and takes a long-range view of things” (Hellriegel, 2007, p. 180). One last personality type that can seem to counter the effects of stress is noted to be the hardy personality, which is defined as “a person with a cluster of characteristics that includes feeling a sense of commitment, responding to each difficulty as representing a challenge and an opportunity, and perceiving that one has control over one’s life” (Hellriegel, 2007, p. 180).

Another form of personality traits that can actually have an impact on how the level of stress at work can be perceived would be communication styles. There are several different ways that communication styles are described and tested. The author will review a few of these styles.

The first style determinant is the Strong Interest Inventory which was developed by psychologist E.K. Strong. This inventory is more designed to help an individual prepare for a career path; however, if an individual is happy with what they are doing in their professional life their level of stress can remain lower. The results of the Strong Interest Inventory identify the following six different occupation directions:

1. Realistic--practical, physical, hands-on, and tool-oriented careers
2. Investigative--analytical, intellectual, scientific, and explorative careers

3. Artistic--creative, original, independent, and chaotic careers
4. Social--cooperative, supporting, helping, and healing/nurturing careers
5. Enterprising--competitive, leadership, and persuasive careers
6. Conventional--detail-oriented, organizing, and clerical careers (edu411, 2009).

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is also commonly used in determining personality types.

This indicator was developed by psychologist Carl Jung with the understanding that variation in an individual's behavior is consistent due to individual differences in perception and judgment.

This indicator is broken down into lettered personality types with a various combinations. The descriptions and combinations are noted below.

1. Extraversion (E) versus Introversion (I)--extroverts focus on the outer world, while introverts focus on their inner world.
2. Sensing (S) versus Intuition (N)--sensors place value in information gathered directly, while those who favor intuition place more value on possibilities and patterns with the information they receive.
3. Thinking (T) versus Feeling (F)--thinkers make decisions based on logic while feelers first examine the people behind the decision and any special circumstances.
4. Judging (J) versus Perceiving (P)--those who judge prefer to make decisions, while those who perceive are open to new information and options edu411, 2009).

Using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to learn different personality styles gives a huge advantage in the workplace by being able to understand the different types of personalities an individual can come across in the workplace and learning how to have low stress interactions with co-workers (edu411, 2009).

Another aspect of low stress interaction is learning your own communication style in addition to your personality style. Learning communication styles will also allow individual's the opportunity to learn how to communicate effectively with co-workers. Communication styles fall into one of the following categories:

1. **Passive Style**--you communicate by putting the rights of others before your own, thereby minimizing your own self-worth, you are a passive communicator. Passive communicators imply that their feelings are not important, and are often apologetic and timid in tone. Non-verbal clues include lack of direct eye contact and poor posture.
2. **Assertive Style**--you communicate by ensuring your rights and maintaining the respect of others' rights, you are an assertive communicator. Assertive communicators typically exude confidence, maintain eye contact, and have relaxed posture. This type of communicator generally places value in both the communicator's and the target audience's message.
3. **Aggressive Style**--you communicate by ensuring your own rights, but neglect others' rights, you are an aggressive communicator. Aggressive communicators imply that the listener's opinions are inconsequential and exude a sense of superiority. Typically, these communicators use 'you' statements and have rigid posture (edu411, 2009).

One last personality style that will be discussed is the DISC model. The DISC model breaks down personality traits based on behavioral characteristics. Many companies use the DISC model in the development of their staff. The following list is an example of some of the ways employers can benefit from the use of the DISC model to ensure a low stress work environment.

- a. Build productive teams
- b. Develop effective managers, supervisors, leaders
- c. Train a powerful sales force
- d. Improve customer service
- e. Ease frustrations and interpersonal conflict

- f. Enhance Communication
- g. Conflict Management resolution
- h. Team Development and team building
- i. Improves personal diversity awareness and recognition
- j. Improve the bottom line: productivity
- k. Assists in hiring, recruiting, placement, promotion, outsourcing
- l. Change management, Quality enhancement
- m. Managing, counseling, coaching (The Institute for Motivational Living, 2009).

Some of the components of the DISC model are noted below.

D (Drive)

General Characteristics:

Direct. Decisive. High Ego Strength. Problem Solver. Risk Taker. Self Starter

Value to Team:

Bottom-line organizer. Places value on time. Challenges the status quo. Innovative

Possible Weaknesses:

Oversteps authority. Argumentative attitude. Dislikes routine. Attempts too much at once.

Ideal Environment:

Innovative focus on future. Non-routine challenging tasks and activities. Projects that produce tangible results. Freedom from controls, supervision, and details. Personal evaluation based on results, not methods.

Remember a High D May Want:

Authority, varied activities, prestige, freedom, assignments promoting growth, "bottom line" approach, and opportunity for advancement.

I (Influence)

General Characteristics:

Enthusiastic. Trusting; Optimistic. Persuasive; Talkative. Impulsive; Emotional

Value to Team:

Creative problem solver. Great encourager. Motivates others to achieve. Positive sense of humor. Negotiates conflicts; peace maker.

Possible Weaknesses:

More concerned with popularity than tangible results. Inattentive to detail. Overuses gestures and facial expressions. Tends to listen only when it's convenient.

Ideal Environment:

Practical procedures. Few conflicts and arguments. Freedom from controls and details. A forum to express ideas. Group activities in professional and social environments

Remember a High I May Want:

Social esteem and acceptance, freedom from details and control, people to talk to, positive working conditions, recognition for abilities, opportunity to motivate and influence others.

S (Steadiness)

General Characteristics:

Good listener; Team player. Possessive. Steady; Predictable. Understanding; Friendly.

Value to Team:

Reliable and dependable. Loyal team worker. Compliant towards authority. Good listener, patient and empathetic. Good at reconciling conflicts.

Possible Weaknesses:

Resists change. Takes a long time to adjust to change. Holds a grudge; sensitive to criticism. Difficulty establishing priorities.

Ideal Environment:

Practical procedures and systems. Stability and predictability. Tasks that can be completed at one time. Few conflicts and arguments. A team atmosphere.

Remember a High S May Want:

Security in situations, sincere appreciation, repeated work patterns, time to adjust to change, limited territory of responsibility.

C (Compliance)

General Characteristics:

Accurate; analytical. Conscientious; careful. Fact-finder; precise. High standards; systematic.

Value to Team:

Perspective: "the anchor of reality." Conscientious and even-tempered. Thorough to all activities. Defines situation; gathers, criticizes and tests information.

Possible Weaknesses:

Needs clear-cut boundaries for actions/relationships. Bound by procedures and methods. Gets bogged down in details. Prefers not to verbalize feelings. Will give in rather than argue.

Ideal Environment:

Tasks and projects that can be followed through to completion. Specialized or technical tasks. Practical work procedures and routines. Few conflicts and arguments. Instructions and reassurance that they are doing what is expected of them.

Remember a High C May Want:

Autonomy and independence, controlled work environment, reassurance, precise expectations and goals, exact job descriptions, planned change.

While these are just a few areas that can help employees and employers understand themselves, their co-workers and their work environment, there are many other aspects of the DISC model that can be explored to help decrease the effect of workplace stress. For an example, some of these areas are what to do and not do when dealing with an individual of a certain personality type and the DISC model also identifies areas for personal growth within each personality type.

All of this above information is just a start in the process of examining how stressors affect each individual person. Stressors are defined as "the physical or psychological demands in the environment that cause this condition," and the body has only a limited amount of capability to deal with these stressors (Hellriegel, 2007, p.176). The effects of stress and anxiety can manifest differently from one person to another. However, there are many common signs and

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symptoms to alert an individual that they may be suffering from stress and/or anxiety. Not only are there mental complications from the effects of stress, the body can suffer a physical response as well. This response comes in the form of “releasing a flood of stress hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones rouse the body for emergency action. Your heart pounds faster, muscles tighten, blood pressure rises, breath quickens, and your senses become sharper” (Smith, 2008, par. 3).

Like acute stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorder has its own set of causes and symptoms that can be identified. However, unlike acute stress disorder, anxiety can be caused by many factors other than life situations. Since there are many different factors that can influence anxiety, it is no wonder that anxiety disorders are the most common type of mental illness in the United States. It is noted that about 40 million individuals suffer from anxiety each year (Smith, 2006). Suffering from anxiety can also cause attacks, known as anxiety or panic attacks. Therefore, it is extremely important to identify and recognize the various signs, symptoms and causes of anxiety. Some of the signs and symptoms of stress and anxiety are noted in the tables below.

<p>Cognitive Symptoms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory problems • Inability to concentrate • Poor judgment • Seeing only the negative • Anxious or racing thoughts • Constant worrying 	<p>Emotional Symptoms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moodiness • Irritability or short temper • Agitation, inability to relax • Feeling overwhelmed • Sense of loneliness and isolation • Depression or general unhappiness
<p>Physical Symptoms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aches and pains • Diarrhea or constipation • Nausea, dizziness • Chest pain, rapid heartbeat • Loss of sex drive • Frequent colds 	<p>Behavioral Symptoms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating more or less • Sleeping too much or too little • Isolating yourself from others • Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities • Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax • Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)

Table 1: Signs and symptoms of acute stress disorder.