

STRESS MANAGEMENT BY THE AGRICULTURAL OFFICERS

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Stress is the spice of life and we would have to live with stress from womb to tomb. Stress is common in the world of day today activities and at minimal level it may not be hazardous to individuals. But when individuals experience extreme stress it affects all aspects of human behaviour including the work in which he is actively involved. Stress reduces the efficiency in working people and at times becomes so overbearing that normal coping mechanisms of working people fail and they start seeking refuge in drugs, alcohol or may develop mental illness. So an optimum level of stress is necessary to live happily. The optimum stress level varies and is defined as the stress level at which an individual can function efficiently without feeling any physical or mental ill effect. At optimum stress level you feel fit and fine.

The Agricultural Officers in the course of their job have to deal with different types of people like superiors, farmers, administrative staff, supporting staff, subordinates and so on. Most of the times, they are transferred once in few years and sometimes within a year and this is more common in the case of Agricultural Officers rather than Scientists. The Agricultural Officers have to get the technologies from research institutes or scientists and transfer them to the farmers for adoption.

One of the important situations which they (Agricultural Officers) face is that getting inputs in time for demonstrating the worth of technologies in the farmers fields. There are also situations when they have to move out to get their job done either to villages or other places. In these processes, the situations in the extension systems, sometimes become unpredictable. Walter Cannon (1932) defined stress as a 'fight or flight' syndrome that is

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when an organism is stressed either it responds by fighting with the stress or running away from it. Selye (1956) the father of modern stress research defined stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it and proposed the general adaptation syndrome which stated that when an organism is confronted with a threat the general psychological response occurs in three stages the alarm reaction, resistance and exhaustion.

Keeping these points in view, this study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To estimate the quantum of stress of Agricultural Officers
2. To know the effect of stress on performance of Agricultural Officers
3. To find out the ways and means by which the Agricultural Officers cope up with the stress

Methodology

The study was conducted in the state of Andhra Pradesh as the researcher hails from the state. An Ex-post-facto research design was adopted for the study. One of the three regions i.e., Telangana region was selected purposively. Four districts of Telangana region viz., Warangal, Mahaboobnagar, Rangareddy and Nalgonda were selected by random sampling technique. All the Agricultural Officers working in these four districts were selected as respondents. However, 150 Agricultural Officers have given complete information, which constituted the sample of the study.

A comprehensive interview schedule covering all facets of the problem was developed and pre-tested. This was administered to the respondents by the researcher by direct personal investigation method.

Results and Discussion

It could be observed from the Table 1 that majority of the AOs were found to experience moderate to low level of personal stressors. About 70.00 per cent of the Officers experience moderate level of personal stressors. On the other hand, few Officers (16.00%) had experienced low level and only 14.00 per cent of the Officers experienced a high level of personal stressors.

Table 1: Distribution of AOs according to their personal stressors

(n = 150)

S.No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low	24	16.00
2.	Moderate	105	70.00
3.	High	21	14.00

Mean: 9.62; S.D: 1.82

It could be inferred from the Table 1 that a great majority of the AOs had moderate to low level of personal stressors. The moderate level of personal stressors indicates that in Indian context, the average individual experiences an average of ten common stressful events in life time viz., family member unemployed, construction of house, death of close family member, financial loss or problems, property damaged etc. the low level of personal stressors might be due to uncommon events viz., death of spouse, divorce, love failure, suspension etc. which would have not occurred or less frequently occurred in the respondents lives. The high level of personal stressors may be due to more frequency and intensity of the stressful events viz., illness of family member, major purchase, change in residence, unfulfilled commitments, going on vacation etc., that occurred in their lives. The findings are in line with Holmes and Masuda (1974), Gray-Toft and Anderson (1981) and Jemmott *et al.* (1985)

It is clear from Table 2 that majority of the AOs were found to experience moderate to high level of organisational stressors. About 68.67 per cent experienced moderate level while 16.67 per cent had high level of organisational stressors. A few respondents (14.66%) belonged to low level category.

Table 2: Distribution of AOs according to their organisational stressors

(n = 150)

S.No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low	22	14.66
2.	Moderate	103	68.67
3.	High	25	16.67

Mean: 63.05; S.D: 9.24

It could be inferred from Table 2 that majority of the AOs found to experience moderate level of organisational stressors viz., change in responsibilities at work, change in working hours, role ambiguity, time deadlines, academic pressures, failure to meet targets, transfer, numerous meetings etc. The moderate level of organisational stressors might be due to the fact that the AOs spend vast amount of their time in work situations so there is every chance of getting stress. The high level may be due to the multiple sources of stress in Organisations which exerts direct control, pressures, demands, absence of clearcut policies and procedures, hinderances in the attainment of goals etc. The low level of organisational stressors might be due to too little participation at work. The findings are in line with Harvey and Raider (1984) and Kadushin (1985).

It could be observed from Table 3 that majority of the AOs were found to experience moderate to high level of job stressors. About 51.34 per cent of the officers experienced moderate level of job stressors. On the other hand, 36.00 per cent of the officers experienced high level and only 12.66 per cent of the officers belonged to low level category.

Table 3: Distribution of AOs according to their job stressors

(n = 150)

S.No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low	19	12.66
2.	Moderate	77	51.34
3.	High	54	36.00

Mean: 71.62 S.D: 9.64

It could be inferred from the Table 3 that majority of the AOs had experienced moderate to high level of job stressors viz., giving technical guidance to VEOs, building professional competence of VEO, obtaining solutions to problems from researchers, communicating solutions to farmers, discussing technical and practical problems in fortnightly meeting, dealing with input supply, market analysis of input supply etc. The moderate level might be due to nature of job of Agricultural officers which is routine and repetitive

work in the organization. The high job stressors would have resulted due to various job demands in terms of workload, responsibility, role conflicts and controllability and also persons responsible for others experience higher levels of stress. The low level of job stressors may be due to inadequate reinforcement by higher ups, low job satisfaction and motivation to work. The findings are in line with Margolis *et al.* (1974), Karasek (1979) and Karasek *et al.* (1981).

It could be seen from Table 4 that all the three variables had shown significant and negative correlation with the dependent variable job performance. The correlation coefficient values (-0.7672, -0.4510 and -0.6092) of personal stressors, organisational stressors and job stressors with regard to job performance of AOs were found to be greater than table value (0.209 at 1% level of significance). The negative relationship indicated that as the levels of stress increased job performance decreased. In other words, the respondents who are highly stressful, job performance tends to decline because stress interferes with it and when the respondents who experience low stress job performance tends to increase. The findings are in line with Beehr *et al.* (1976), Harris and John (1982), Godstein and Dorforman (1978).

Table 4: Correlation coefficients between performance and independent variables of the AOs

S.No.	Variable	'r' value
1.	Personal stressors (X_1)	-0.7672**
2.	Organisational stressors (X_2)	-0.4510**
3.	Job stressors (X_3)	-0.6092**

** Significant at 0.01 level of probability

Multiple regression analysis was taken up between dependent and independent variables to find out the effect of different independent variables on dependent variable viz., job performance. The results are presented in Table 5. It could be seen that the R^2 value was 0.7087 indicating that 70.87 per cent of the variation in job performance was explained by the independent variables included in the study. The regression coefficient of the variables

Table 5: Multiple regression analysis with independent variables on job performance of AOs

S.No.	Independent variable	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Computed 't' value
1.	Personal stressors	0.0121	0.0106	1.1379NS
2.	Organisational stressors	0.0773	0.0115	6.7379**
3.	Job stressors	0.0796	0.093	8.5696**

$R^2 = 0.7087$

** Significant at 0.01 level of probability

NS = Non significant

organisational stressors and job stressors were found to be significant at 0.01 level of probability. The analysis revealed that an increase in one unit in organisational stressors would result in an reduction of 0.0773 unit in the job performance and vice versa. Job stressors was also found to reduce with job performance. A unit increase in the job stress would reduce 0.0796 unit job performance and vice versa.

Coping Strategies Followed by Agricultural Officers

1. Personal coping strategies followed by Agricultural Officers

Table 6 exhibits the personal coping strategies followed by the AOs

The personal coping strategies followed daily given in Table 6 indicated that majority (92.00%) of the respondents were taking good balanced diet daily. About 89.33 per cent of the respondents were seeking social support through family members while 70.66 per cent coped through walking. About one-sixth of the respondents (60.00%) sought social support through colleagues. A little more than half of the respondents (50.66%) had control of excessive eating, drinking and smoking and a little less than half (49.33%) planned ahead. About 35.33 per cent were following recreational sports such as cricket, badminton, tennis, caroms, shuttle, chess, cards etc, and 34.00 per cent of the respondents used relaxation technique such as expressing their emotions. Around 32.00 per cent of them coped by getting proper sleep and about 18.00 per cent sought social support through friends. More than one-

Table 6: Personal coping strategies followed by AOs

(n = 150)

S.No	Personal strategies	Daily	Weekly	Fort-nightly	Monthly
1.	Exercise (yoga)	10 (6.66)	-	5 (3.33)	5 (3.33)
2.	Good balanced diet	138 (92.00)	6 (4.00)	-	-
3.	Seek social support	-	-	-	-
	a) Friends	32 (18.00)	72 (48.00)	33 (22.00)	5 (3.33)
	b) Family members	134 (89.33)	4 (2.66)	-	4 (2.66)
	c) Colleagues	90 (60.00)	15 (10.00)	20 (13.33)	4 (2.66)
4.	Plan ahead	74 (49.33)	30 (20.00)	3 (2.00)	-
5.	Take a vacation	-	4 (2.66)	3 (2.00)	17 (11.33)
6.	Relaxation techniques				
	a) Express your emotions	51 (34.00)	40 (26.66)	14 (9.33)	3 (2.00)
	b) Empty chair technique	1 (0.66)	10 (6.66)	-	3 (2.00)
	c) Pillow hit technique	-	3 (2.00)	5 (3.33)	-
	d) Write out technique	-	6 (4.00)	5 (3.33)	5 (3.33)
7.	Meditation	16 (10.66)	2 (1.33)	-	-
8.	Sleeping	48 (32.00)	4 (2.66)	-	-
9.	Walking	106 (70.66)	4 (2.66)	-	-
10.	Jogging	13 (8.66)	1 (0.66)	3 (2.00)	-
11.	Running	1 (0.66)	-	-	-
12.	Swimming	1 (0.66)	-	-	-
13.	Recreational sports	53 (35.33)	20 (13.33)	2 (1.33)	9 (6.00)
14.	Control excessive eating, drinking, smoking	76 (50.66)	8 (5.33)	-	-
15.	Counselling and psychotherapy	1 (0.66)	1 (0.66)	-	-
16.	Medical care	3 (2.00)	1 (0.66)	2 (1.33)	19 (12.66)

(Figures in parenthesis represent percentages)

tenth of the respondents (10.66%) followed mediation while 8.66 per cent were doing jogging. Few respondents (6.66%) followed exercises (yoga).

While looking at weekly strategies nearly half (48.00%) of the respondents sought social support through friends. More than one-fourth of the respondents (26.66%) relaxed by expressing their emotions. One fifth of the respondent (20.00%) planned ahead. About 13.33 per cent coped by recreational sports and one-tenth (10.00%) of them seeked social support through colleagues.

The fortnightly strategies indicated that 22.00 per cent of the respondents sought friends and about 13.33 per cent sought colleagues for social support. About 9.33 per cent of the respondents expressed their emotions while 3.33 per cent of them followed exercises (yoga) pillow hit technique and write out technique.

The monthly personal strategies followed revealed that 12.66 per cent of the respondents have taken medical care while 11.33 per cent could cope up by taking a vacation and 6.00 per cent were following recreational sports. A few respondents (3.33%) were coping through exercises (yoga), friends and write out technique.

It could be inferred from the Table 6 that the major personal coping strategies followed by AOs were taking good balanced diet, social support through family members, colleagues, friends, walking, control of excessive eating, drinking and smoking, recreational sports, getting proper sleep. The reason for majority of the respondents following these strategies was due to the fact that these are the most commonly occurring strategies and persons who possess supportive net works of family members, friends, colleagues are often better able to cope with job related stress.

The other strategies viz., exercises (yoga) relaxation-techniques, mediation, jogging, running, swimming, counselling and psychotherapy were followed at a very lower rate or totally absent in most of the respondents. The reason may be that these strategies requires a higher degree of self control, disciplined and regular practice. So extension functionaries should create awareness on these strategies so that the AOs can cope effectively with stress because

the inability to cope with stress can lead to reduced job performance. The findings are in line with Nilson *et al.* (1981) and Cohen and Wills (1985).

Organisational coping strategies followed by Agricultural Officers

Table 7 exhibits the organisational coping strategies followed by the AOs

The organisational coping strategies followed daily as given in Table 7 reads that majority (90.00%) of the respondents were working together for common

Table 7: Organisational coping strategies followed by AOs

(n = 150)

S.No	Personal strategies	Daily	Weekly	Fort-nightly	Monthly
1.	Decentralisation	42 (28.00)	14 (9.33)	12 (8.00)	-
2.	Active involvement in work	134 (89.35)	16 (10.66)	-	-
3.	Working together for a common goal	135 (90.00)	8 (5.33)	-	-
4.	Role clarification	94 (62.66)	-	-	-
5.	Time management	115 (76.66)	12 (8.00)	19 (12.66)	-
6.	Delegation	36 (24.00)	-	-	-
7.	Search for more information	30 (20.00)	23 (15.33)	8 (5.33)	25 (16.66)
8.	Finishing un-finished business				
	a) Just do it	31 (20.66)	29 (19.33)	-	-
	b) Set short term goals	35 (23.33)	22 (14.66)	17 (11.33)	-
	c) Establish reserve time	20 (13.33)	14 (9.33)	20 (13.33)	-
	d) Make decision	55 (36.66)	33 (22.00)	17 (11.33)	-
9.	Effective Communication	124 (82.66)	-	-	-
10.	Adjustment in reward system	-	-	12 (8.00)	8 (5.33)
11.	Improved techniques of training	-	47 (31.33)	85 (56.66)	18 (12.00)

S.No	Personal strategies	Daily	Weekly	Fort-nightly	Monthly
12.	Participation in decision making	47 (31.33)	32 (21.33)	26 (17.33)	-
13.	Improved lines of communication	60 (40.00)	19 (12.66)	8 (5.33)	-
14.	Change in nature of specific jobs	22 (14.66)	20 (13.33)	14 (9.33)	20 (13.33)
15.	Job enrichment	65 (43.33)	20 (13.33)	-	8 (5.33)
16.	Job enlargement	37 (26.66)	17 (11.33)	-	-
17.	Skill improvement	20 (13.33)	25 (16.66)	75 (50.00)	11 (7.33)
18.	Participative management	50 (33.33)	30 (20.00)	23 (15.33)	9 (6.00)
19.	Flexible work schedules	12 (8.00)	17 (11.33)	53 (35.33)	33 (31.33)
20.	Overload avoidance	14 (9.33)	12 (8.00)	33 (22.00)	32 (31.33)
21.	Task variation	-	9 (6.00)	10 (6.66)	16 (10.66)
22.	Avoid simultaneous pressure	15 (10.00)	29 (19.33)	51 (34.00)	40 (26.66)
23.	Reduce job demands	14 (9.33)	6 (4.00)	15 (10.00)	18 (12.0)
24.	Clarify job requirements	33 (22.00)	12 (8.00)	-	-
25.	Team building	79 (52.66)	29 (19.33)	20 (13.33)	-
26.	Goal setting programs	46 (30.66)	28 (18.66)	27 (18.00)	6 (4.00)

(Figures in parenthesis represent percentages)

goal. About 89.35 per cent of the respondents were actively involved in their work while 82.66 per cent had effective communication in the organization. More than three-fourth of the respondents (76.66%) could cope up through time management. Around 62.66 per cent of the respondents had clarification on their roles and more than half of them (52.66%) were involved in team building. About 43.33 per cent of the respondents used the job enrichment strategy while 40.00 per cent of them involved in improved lines

of communication. Around 36.66 per cent of the respondents were involved in making decision, 33.33 per cent were engaged in participative management, 30.66 per cent in goal setting programs, 28.00 per cent in decentralisation. A little less than one-fourth of the respondents (24.66 per cent) were enlarging their jobs, 24.00 per cent in delegation, 23.33 per cent were setting short term goals and 22.00 per cent in clarifying job requirements. More than one-fifth of the respondents (20.66%) were just doing their work, 20.00 per cent of them searched for more information.

The results of weekly strategies revealed that 31.33 per cent of the respondents had coped through improved techniques of training. About 24.00 per cent of the respondents had used time management strategy, 21.33 per cent participated in decision making and 20.00 per cent in participative management. A little less than one-fifth of the respondents (19.33%) were involved in just doing the work, avoiding simultaneous pressure and team building. About 18.66 per cent of the respondents were involved in goal setting programs, 16.66 per cent in improving their skills, 15.33 per cent searched for more information. About 14.66 per cent were setting short term goals, 13.33 per cent were involved in changing nature of specific jobs and job enrichment.

The fortnightly strategies being followed by 56.66 per cent of the respondents had coped through improved techniques of training and about half of the respondents (50.00%) had skill improvement. About 35.33 per cent of the respondents had flexible work schedules and 34.00 per cent avoided simultaneous pressure. Around 22.00 per cent of the respondents avoided overload, 18.00 per cent had goal setting programs, 17.33 per cent participated in decision making and 15.33 per cent had coped through participative management strategy. About 13.33 per cent of the respondents engaged in establishing reserve time and team building, 12.66 per cent in time management, 11.33 per cent to setting short term goals and making decisions.

While looking at monthly strategies, 31.33 per cent of the respondents were coping through overload avoidance and 26.66 per cent avoided simultaneous pressure. About 22.00 per cent had flexible work schedules while 16.66 per cent searched for more information. Around 15.33 per cent of them followed

the job enrichment strategy, 13.33 per cent had changes in nature of specific jobs. More than one-tenth of the respondents (12.00%) could cope up improved techniques of training and reduced job demands, 10.66 per cent had task variation as a coping strategy.

A peep into Table 7 indicated that majority of the AOs followed most of the organisational coping strategies viz., working together for common goals, active involvement in work, effective communication, time management, role clarification and team building etc. However, strategies such as delegation, search for more information, adjustment in reward system, change in nature of specific jobs, job enlargement, participative management, flexible work schedules, overload avoidance, task variation, avoiding simultaneous pressure, reducing job demands, clarify job requirements were followed at a lower rate by the respondents. The reason might be due to lack of time to develop a suitable array of coping strategies by the AOs to dissipate stress. In recent years, institutions should involve in organizing workshops, training programmes and consultation services for dealing with organisational coping strategies. The findings are in line with Barnes (1986) and McGeegail *et al.* (1987).

Conclusion

It could be inferred from the above tables that majority of the AOs had experienced moderate to low level of personal stressors, moderate to high level of organisational stressors and job stressors. The independent variables viz., personal stressors, organisational stressors and job stressors with dependent variable viz., job performance showed significant and negative relationship. The three variables taken together explained 70.87 per cent variation in job performance.

The major personal coping strategies were found to be balanced diet, social support through family members, walking, recreational sports while working together, effective communication, time management were the organisational strategies. Therefore there is a need for introduction of improved techniques of training on stress management to help individuals perform their jobs with minimum strain and to avoid mismatch between AOs and their job.

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