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# RELATION BETWEEN OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND RESILIENCE – A POST PANDEMIC EMPIRICAL STUDY

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**Abstract:** The recent Covid-19 pandemic has emphasized the need of HR department to focus thoroughly on occupational stress and employee wellbeing aspects. Building individual and organizational resilience has become essential for the HR leaders in the pandemic period, in reshaping the knowledge and skills of employees. Besides, the unwavering spirit of the employees coupled with the extended support from HR leaders, have certainly helped the global organizations not only to stay alive during the pandemic, but also to arise stronger, after second wave. As the companies were forced to take incessant steps for making the workspaces secure, the employees too willingly engaged in learning, up-skilling and reskilling themselves over the last eighteen months. Abhay Singh, Senior HR Director of Applied Materials, emphasizes the need of resilience, learning agility, design thinking, psychological safety, growth mindset, and empathy as the most important requirements of pandemic<sup>1</sup>. Resilience as a skill, is both teachable and learnable, and is very much important during the times of uncertainty. The HR leaders are expected to proactively give solutions for the employees struggling with occupational stress, sleep disorders, and prolonged uncertainty challenges, and the best approach they can adopt is Resilience. The threats of imposter syndrome is also sneaking into the post covid zone, compelling HR leaders to constantly focus on employee wellbeing. This study aims to analyze the relationship between resilience and occupational stress, as well as highlight the need for adopting resilience as an important factor in the organizational success. A questionnaire based on the standardized psychometric tests to measure the level of resilience, and the occupational stress index were used to test the correlation factors. The results show the importance of resilience at the individual level.

**Key Words:** Resilience, Occupational Stress, Employee Wellbeing, Imposter Syndrome, Organization.

## INTRODUCTION

Resilience, in simple, is the ability to recuperate swiftly from difficulties. Companies across the globe, during the covid time have witnessed a drastic shift in the employees' approach of handling difficult situations. The employees were able to single-handedly take care of varied things that once were thought to be difficult even in their personal lives. The organizations to some extent were able to address the human element with wide-ranging developments in each aspect of employment and work, coupled with the uncertainties concerning business partners, and customers. Furthermore, companies started realizing the need to focus on absolute certainty despite of uncertain global situations, specifically after the second wave of covid.

With the companies looking for employees who are more dependable, flexible and can multi-task, the employees also started to sense the burden of intensified expectations. The necessity to juggle between the new work norms, diligently balancing the responsibilities at home and workplace, has indeed taken a toll on the mental health of employees across the globe. Working on individual and organizational resilience has become essential for the HR leaders in the pandemic period, in reshaping the knowledge and skills of employees.

The human-centric approach of the organizations has indeed played a vital role in transforming the organizational culture. The stress management and immunity booster programmes, together with employee health and wellbeing initiatives, helped the companies to outperform in comparison to pre-covid times. The virtual collaborations and video conferences enabled the employees to work comfortably from their home setups instead of engaging in hectic and long commutes by travelling to different countries and hoping between continents. The organizations too started to work strategically, exploring simple solutions, and tried to have an appropriate plan for every situation. As the companies were forced to take incessant steps for making the workspaces secure, the employees too willingly engaged in learning, up-skilling and re-skilling themselves over the last eighteen months.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The current study focuses on the need of resilience as an important post pandemic approach for the organizations, through the objective of analyzing the relationship between occupational stress and resilience.

## METHODOLOGY

**Sample:** A total of 132 working professionals from IT & ITES, Banking & Financial Services, Retail, and Other categories, were selected for the study. Both male and female in the age group of 22 years to 62 years with an annual CTC of minimum 2 lakhs to above 15 lakhs, and work experience of minimum 1 year to above 20 years, was applied for the study. Convenience sampling method was used to collect the information.

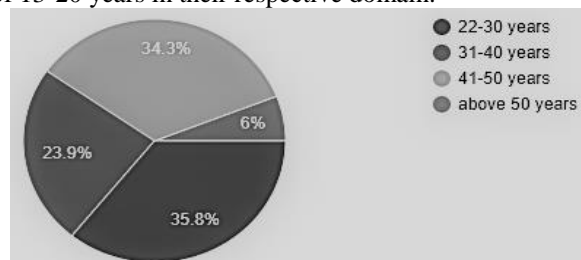
**Instruments:** A questionnaire based on the standardized psychometric tests to measure the level of resilience, and the occupational stress index was used for the study.

Occupational Stress Index (OSI) developed by Dr. A K Srivastava and Dr. A P Singh (1984) was used to measure the occupational stress of the employees. The 46 item questionnaire includes a number of declarations that employees at times say or feel about different components of their professional work. The 'five-point-scale' covered 12 dimensions such as Role overload, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Group and Political Pressures, Responsibility for Persons, Under Participation, Powerlessness, Poor Peer Relations, Intrinsic Impoverishment, Low status, Strenuous Working Condition, and Unprofitability.

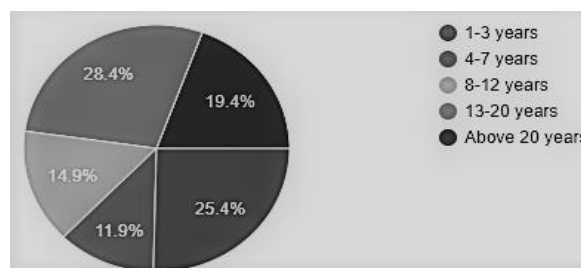
Nicholson McBride Resilience Questionnaire (NMRQ) designed by McBride (2010) was used to test the resilience levels of the employees. The 'five-point-scale' of 12 items defined the score under four resilience levels such as Developing level (0-37), Established level (38-43), Strong level (44-48), and Exceptional level (49-60).

**Results:** The data was analyzed statistically. The obtained results are shown as under:

In the current study of 132 working professionals, 89 individuals (67%) were male and 43 individuals (33%) were female employees. Almost 68% of employees (both male and female) were in the age group of 31-50 years. 28% of the sample collected had a professional work experience of 13-20 years in their respective domain.



**Figure 1: Chart Showing the Age Group of Working Professionals**



**Figure 2: Chart Showing the Professional Work Experience in Years**

Correlation analysis was done to identify the relationship between occupational stress and resilience of the working professionals. The results were summarized in the following tables.

**Table 1: Calculation of Correlation Coefficient for Occupational Stress Index (OSI) and Resilience Scale (RS)**

Occupational Stress Index	Correlation
Resilience Scale	-0.296

The above correlation analysis table 1 shows that there is a significant low degree negative correlation ( $r = -0.296$ ) between occupational stress and resilience among the total sample of 132 professional workforce.

**Table 2: Calculation of Correlation Coefficient of Occupational Stress Index (OSI) and Resilience Scale (RS) for IT & ITES Domain**

Occupational Stress Index	Correlation
Resilience Scale	-0.415

The above correlation analysis table 2 shows that there is a low degree negative correlation ( $r = -0.415$ ) between occupational stress and resilience of the working professionals of IT & ITES Domain. Employees from IT & ITES sector accounted for 43.3% of the total sample (of 132 subjects), as compared to 25.4% of Banking & Financial Services.

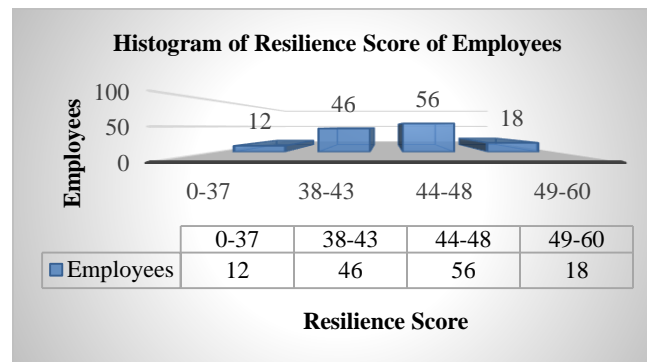
**Table 3: Calculation of Correlation Coefficient of Occupational Stress Index (OSI) and Resilience Scale (RS) for Banking & Financial Services Domain**

Occupational Stress Index	Correlation
Resilience Scale	-0.476

The above correlation analysis table 3 shows that there is a low degree negative correlation ( $r = -0.476$ ) between occupational stress and resilience of the working professionals of Banking & Financial Services Domain. Employees from IT & ITES sector and Banking & Financial Services accounted for almost 68.7% of the total sample (of 132 subjects).

**Table 4: Percentage of Employees under Different Resilience Levels**

Resilience Score	Resilience Level	No of Employees	Percentage (%)
0-37	Developing Level	12	9.10
38-43	Established Level	46	34.84
44-48	Strong Level	56	42.42
49-60	Exceptional Level	18	13.64
		TOTAL = 132	100

**Figure 3: Percentage of Employees under Different Resilience Levels**

From the above table 4, it is understood that almost 77% of employees are more resilient by nature as their resilience scores are in established level and strong level. The professional workers from the collected sample have exhibited a stronger ability to withstand difficulties, psychological challenges and demands during the post-pandemic period. The established level indicates that the employees rarely give up on circumstances although at times they feel tough when things doesn't go their way. The 42% employees with strong resilience level can easily deal with a series of difficulties and are good at turning obstructions into opportunities. The 14% workforce in the exceptional level trust in making their own luck and are always resilient, rarely failing to bounce back on whatever challenges life throws at them. Only 9% of employees are in the category of developing level indicating that they can benefit significantly by becoming more resilient.

**Table 5: Calculation of Mean, Variance and Standard Deviation**

Resilience Score	Employees – f	Lower limit	Upper limit	Mid Point (x)	fx	x-x bar	(x-x bar) <sup>2</sup>	f*(x-x bar) <sup>2</sup>
0-37	12	0	37	18.50	222.00	-24.24	587.70	7052.34
38-43	46	38	43	40.50	1863.00	-2.24	5.03	231.31
44-48	56	44	48	46.00	2576.00	3.26	10.61	594.26
49-60	18	49	60	54.50	981.00	11.76	138.24	2488.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>				<b>5642</b>			<b>10366.24</b>

RESULT	Mean $\bar{x}$	42.74	sum of fx / sum of f
	Variance	78.53	sum of f*(x-x bar) <sup>2</sup> /sum of f
	SD	8.86	sqrt of variance

From the above table 5, it is understood that the mean score attained for resilience was 42.74 with a variance of 78.53 and standard deviation of 8.86 (SD=8.86). It shows that the values derived from the obtained sample of 132 subjects are disposed towards higher level of resilience.

### STRESS IN POST-PANDEMIC PERIOD

Post-pandemic, the HR personnel are forced to deal with the workplace stress as it continues to affect the physical and mental health of the employees to a greater extent. The work from home difficulties including navigating between household responsibilities and work specific challenges has affected the psychological health primarily with anxiety and depression. A recent report states that almost 76% of the professional workforce complain of workplace stress, post-pandemic, and the prime reason being not able to take time out for themselves<sup>2</sup>. Further, the threats of imposter syndrome is also sneaking into the post covid zone, compelling HR leaders to constantly focus on employee wellbeing. The constant doubts of competence and worthiness has worsened the employee morale to certain extent<sup>3</sup>. The prolonged uncertainty, after the pandemic, is also one of the reasons for increased stress levels, and the HR is trying to address the issue by arranging stress management sessions, at regular intervals.

Post pandemic, few companies are cutting back on 'not so important' calls and meetings by introducing 'no-meeting Fridays and Wednesdays' to enable the employees work without disruptions of meetings or calls. Besides, some companies are encouraging recharge days along with power naps of 10 to 20 minutes at the workplace, for the employees to get recharged, after a very stressful covid year. Further, results-only job environments are introduced, to ensure that employee performance matters most than the hours worked by them, to reduce workplace stress.

### RESILIENCE AS AN IMPORTANT APPROACH

Resilience is perceived to be an important concept in the field of positive psychology. Few perceive it as a personality trait 'miracle drug' that can right all wrongs and heal all wounds. The best part of resilience is, it can be improved, as the general tendency of resilient person is to bounceback<sup>4</sup>. It is about staying optimistic, positive, and adapting well during tragedy, trauma, and adversity.



Resilience enables people to recover from a major setback, be it at home or workplace. People, in general, display resilience and it is ordinary. It is primarily about staying optimistic, high-functioning and on task during the distressing, difficult, and negative events of life. Resilience can be demonstrated at individual level, by having a positive outlook of self and confidence in one's abilities. It is also important to have the capacity to formulate realistic plans and cope with strong impulses and feelings. In the words of Glenn Schiraldi, a resilience expert and author, resilient person is someone who exhibits belief in life matters, sense of autonomy, optimism, rational thought process, self-esteem, humor, emotional intelligence, altruism and stay calm under pressure<sup>4</sup>.

Besides, resilient people comprehend that life has its unavoidable highs and lows, and effectively manages their feelings by successfully handling their behaviors, emotions, and thoughts. Resilience also has a major impact on the health of an individual. It leads to positive health effects such as resistance to stress, less depression, positive relations and emotions. Resilience as a skill, is both teachable and learnable, and is very much important during the times of uncertainty. The self-learned resilience enables a person to build himself/herself by allowing varied emotions, recognizing support system, being optimistic, maintaining a routine, practicing self-compassion, cultivating forgiveness, facing the fears and challenges, establishing reasonable goals, developing problem solving skills, meditating and practicing mindfulness, taking therapist help if needed, and becoming aware of themselves (strengths and weaknesses).

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The present study shows that most of the professional workers from the collected sample are more resilient by nature. The following steps can be considered further for boosting the resilience levels of the employees at the workplaces.

**Success:** Professional workers should be encouraged to *visualize success* by creating an independent vision of success with specific and realistic goals. They need to know what is achievable and possible, instead of winding up the time on unrealistic dreams and feeling disappointed about not achieving them.

**Self-Esteem:** Employees should be encouraged to *boost their self-esteem* by regularly checking on the things that they feel positive about, and reminding themselves of such aspects regularly. They should also allow others to recognize their abilities, and do accept praises for such characteristics.

**Seize:** Professional workers should also *take control of unhelpful beliefs* like "I'm on my own, you only get one shot, I'm the cause for my own history, this isn't fair, there's so much to do and it's not even worth trying, and there's a right answer to everything" etc. The employees should strictly reframe from the above drag anchors by recognizing a negative thought, and immediately turning it to positive.

**Self-Confident:** Employees should always look on the brighter side of life and be *very confident of their own capabilities* and reclaim on what they can from problematic circumstances.

**Stressors:** Professional workers should be encouraged to *identify the individual stressors* and work on them either by adopting distraction technique or resolution technique. Various aspects like "hiding feelings, displaying hostility, being over-perfectionist, having difficulty relaxing, being unable to listen properly, and being generally critical" should be completely eliminated.

**Shift:** Employees should work towards *becoming more intuitive* by building experience, trusting their gut, estimating decision-making shortcuts, establishing worst-case scenarios, and taking risks. In addition, they need to *become more rational* by not rushing to judgement, gathering data, talking to relevant parties, establishing criteria, using a rational process, and sense checking the answer.

**Seek Help:** Professional workers should be motivated to *seek help* from others in times of need. They need to know the best persons to turn to, and should freely reach out to them by mapping out the relationships and the support to be received.

**Style:** Employees should be able to deal with conflicts regularly by ensuring *the style of resolution*, is relevant. They should have the skill to handle conflicts constructively by analyzing the nature of problem, and the most possible approach to resolve it.

**Self-Aware:** Professional workers should be encouraged to be *self-aware of themselves* and being determined to improve their resilience without offending their core values and identity. They should always think of drawing lessons from their experiences and learning the best, by regularly strengthening the learning muscle.

The limitations of the study include the low sample size. The professional workers from IT & ITES, Banking & Financial Services, were very much unwilling to fill the questionnaire as it was quite lengthy. The questionnaire included 46 questions referring to the occupational stress index and 12 questions relating to resilience score, apart from questions related to age, gender, professional work experience, and annual cost to company.

## CONCLUSION

With almost 70% of the sample in the established and strong level of resilience, it is understood that most of the professional workers enjoy better psychological health and can easily take up the challenges at the workplace. Further, organizations can encourage the employees to be resilient by creating a safe and supportive environment, celebrating the employee progress along with organizational success, providing prospects for goal setting and reflection, and developing belongingness among the workforce. According to Susan Kobasa, a leading psychologist, the three most indispensable elements for resilience include commitment, challenge, and personal control<sup>5</sup>. Resilient people are highly committed to an active and problem-solving approach towards life. They also have positive approach to stress and take it as a challenge that can be handled. Further, resilient people worry less about the uncontrollable situations of their life and put effort on proceedings they can control. The common attributes of resilient people include being compassionate and empathetic, handling peer pressure, healthy relationships, having a positive reflection of the future, building strong goals and a deep desire to attain them, focusing their energy and time on things that matter at workplaces and homes. A resilient mindset can be developed by learning to relax with a good sleep routine and physical relaxation techniques, practicing positive thought process, learning from failures and mistakes, practicing cognitive restructuring, building self-confidence, and being flexible to the changes in the work environment despite strenuous organizational challenges.

## SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present empirical study was carried out with a limited sample of 132 subjects with prime focus on IT & ITES, Financial and Banking Services domain. In future, an in-depth study can be carried with a large sample including professionals from various other domains.

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