

ZEVO HEALTH

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WORKPLACE STRESS IN THE TECH INDUSTRY



The tech industry is one of the fastest growing industries across the world, characterized by long working hours, competitiveness, tight schedules and heavy workloads.

As a result, stress has become a significant matter of concern for employees. (Satpathy et al. 2014).

However, much of the academic research on employees working in IT environments has focused on the impact on health and wellbeing as a result of sedentary activity and high work demands.

The challenges of working in the IT industry will be discussed, however, we are only now starting to see business articles referring specifically to "Tech burnout" arising from the pressureto perform, with high expectations in a fast-paced Tech environment.

IT industry health

The term "technostress" has been used to describe what occurs when stress results from the use of computers (Padma, 2015). It can pose a significant challenge to the health of employees (Prathyusha, 2019). People working in IT can be prone to illness exacerbated by stress, such as digestive disorders, alcoholism, diabetes, asthma, IBS, and high blood pressure (Padma et al., 2015). A cross-sectional study involving 1000 IT employees in India found that a striking 56% had musculoskeletal symptoms, 54% suffered from depression, 40% were obese, 22% had high blood pressure and 10% had diabetes (Padma et al., 2015). Also, high-stress scores correlated with employees who had developed hypertension, diabetes, and obesity. This strongly suggests that the stress related to the profession is having a serious impact on health and should certainly be monitored in organizations. However, there are also significant psychological impacts to be considered.



Psychological Impact

A more recent survey by IT recruiter Harvey Nash looked at 2088 respondents from 72 different countries and found that half of them were or had been concerned about their mental health due to the pressures of work (White, 2020). Following this report, the Covid-19 pandemic saw unprecedented demand on workers to adapt IT and communication platforms to remote working, increasing the burden on Tech professionals. Harvey Nash, therefore, followed up with a supplementary survey of 1600 tech professionals which showed:



One in three reported that their mental health deteriorated during the pandemic.

One quarter is concerned about their mental health right now, in contrast to one in six before the pandemic.

For one third of those measured, this was the first time that they ever became concerned for their mental health.

They also found that women face more stress than men in the industry, a finding also supported in a study by Kavitha in 2012. So overall, in a population that is prevalent in stress and mental health issues, the pandemic has seen things get worse.



A recent report by BIMA (2019) highlighted that people working in the tech industry are staggeringly five times more likely to be depressed than the general population (data from over 3000 members of the UK technology community). 52% have experienced anxiety or depression at some point. 66% report being stressed by their work, which is at levels similar to the health service. Also, 45% feel that there is not enough mental health and support in their company. It is also important to consider here that the Tech Industry has a young population and likely won't see the impact of long-term stress for several years.



According to the community-workplace app Blind, used by Microsoft, Amazon, Google, and Facebook, almost 60% of tech workers are feeling burnout. Expecting 100 hrs. + per week has been described as an abuse of passion and drive on employees and putting the bottom line before health and wellbeing (Dice, 2019). Irish Tech News warns that stress is becoming the norm with unfair compensation, unreasonable workload, and too much overtime being reported as top-cited factors for workplace burnout (January 2020).

Research Reccommendations

White (2020) recommends that companies move beyond wellness initiatives and progress towards a culture of wellbeing, where communication and support come from leadership, and workers can contribute to a shared platform of wellbeing materials (utilizing the employee voice). BIMA (2019) recommends that organizations consider mental health as important as physical health, with the availability of mental health first aiders. Managers should receive training and be provided with a toolkit to help support those suffering from stress, anxiety, and depression. It is also recommended to set up communication structures around mental health where staff can safely ask for help. Padma et al, 2015 suggest using the stress score to identify the likelihood of stress-related health problems occurring in IT sector employees.

They also recommend lifestyle change strategies, diet advice, and psychological counseling to help minimize risks. A systematic review by Maudgalya et al, (2006) explored whether there is any relationship between burnout and working in an IT profession. They identified three key exposures: role ambiguity, role conflict, and job tasks. They recommend that managers should take action against these exposures to improve staff wellbeing as well as reduce long-term costs due to burnout. Tiwari et al, 2008 found that the most significant cause of workplace stress was down to complex infrastructures and unclear goals, therefore recommending that IT workers are provided with IT-specific employee assistance programs. Charu (2013) identified the main cause of work stress amongst IT professionals as a rapid change in technology. Moen et al, (2016) successfully used a STAR technique (from stress process and Job strain models) to reduce burnout, perceived stress, psychological distress and increase job satisfaction in High-Tech employees. It works by increasing employees' control and support at work.



Finally, Fang, Huang & Hsu (2018) found that a physical activity program was effective in improving weight, physical fitness, occupational stress, job satisfaction and quality of life in overweight high-tech employees.



TALK TO US FOR SUPPORT IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS FOR YOUR TEAMS:

Mental Health Champion training to prioritize mental health in the organization.

Policy recommendations on mental health and psychological safety.

Health & Wellbeing engagement platform.

Exercise and fitness program to counteract sedentary behavior.

Training courses to build psychological flexibility.

Counselling.

Mindfulness and work-life balance training.

Sleep hygiene and developing boundaries to prevent all-nighters.

Lifestyle behavior-change training (exercise, nutrition).

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