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Occupational Stress among Tertiary Eye Care Providers: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

Occupational stress concerns have grown in the healthcare industry, particularly in specialised settings like tertiary eye care centres. Occupational stress, particularly in tertiary eye care hospitals, significantly impacts healthcare professionals' well-being and productivity, leading to issues like depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular diseases. Elements like lack of support, low control, and imbalanced rewards contribute to stress, which can also cause conditions like Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS), affecting vision and performance. So, employee stress has increased because of the heavy demands placed on healthcare personnel in hospitals, which range from emotional difficulties to technical competence. To analyse the effects of occupational stress on healthcare professionals at tertiary eye care facilities and the possible stress management techniques, this review examines the research which is conducted between 2020 and 2024. The literature search included keywords using Boolean operators on the PubMed and Google Scholar databases, and no language restrictions were applied.

It was found that due to work-life balance challenges and technical competence, healthcare professionals are suffering from mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion. The need for proper policies for mapping emotional and mental status among healthcare workers is very high. This might increase the quality of treatment and quality of life of both healthcare workers and patients. The results highlight the essentials of better work conditions, mental health support, and organisational changes to reduce stress and improve patient care outcomes.

Keywords: Occupational stress, eye care, tertiary hospitals, burnout, workload, eye strain, work-life balance, visual syndrome, stress management

1. Introduction

Occupational Stress is the term that relates to the major health hazard to working individuals, both physically and mentally, and it has been globally known as the most adverse challenge to the working individual's health and environment at the workplace. [1,2] The working environment has been identified as one of the major sources of occupational stress, leading to the most adverse health conditions. Even the health workers, especially the nurses, are mostly affected due to enclosed surroundings, improper duty timings, performance pressure, a lot of noise, work changing from intense to mundane tasks, and waking up for long hours without even sitting, which results in harmful health conditions.[3,4] Excessive occupational stress can reduce the quality of nursing care. [11] Another factor is occupational burnout, which was first explored in the 1960s and described different mental and physical stresses in the workplace. Burnout has been defined as a syndrome that consists of emotional stress, feelings of cynicism, and a low sense of personal accomplishment, which is affected by stress in the workplace [5] and this all leads to different neural problems such as migraines, muscle pain, back-pain, joints-pain, long-term physical illnesses, high blood pressure, irritable bowel syndrome, duodenal ulcer, and different effects relayed to immune and endocrine illness. [6]

Many studies have shown that occupational stress can also lead to functional visual impairment of an eye or the visual system. This is generally characterized by a decreased ability to see objects clearly at both near and distant distances. Sometimes, these conditions cannot be treated through optical, medical, and/or surgical approaches. [5,6] Similarly,

visual impairment can impact the physical, economic, and mental health of an individual, which reduces their quality of life. [7] Furthermore, it creates difficulty and discomfort in doing day-to-day activities smoothly [7] and causes adverse mental fatigue, less social interaction, and the feeling of aloneness. [8,9,10] Collectively, this impacts the cognitive behaviours and social skills of the person. Therefore, this narrative review aims to analyse the causes and effects of occupational stress on healthcare professionals at tertiary eye care and their possible stress management techniques.

2. Materials and Methods
A literature search was undertaken from October to December 2025. Specific keywords and Boolean operators were used on PubMed and Google Scholar for electronic database searches. Major keywords for data searching were occupational stress, eye care, tertiary hospitals, burnout, workload, eye strain, work-life balance, visual syndrome, and stress management. No language restrictions were applied. Twenty-two full-text articles were assessed and reviewed for the comparison and narration of the current literature review.

3. Typical Causes of Workplace Stress
3.1 High Patient Volume and Time Pressure
Many patients with complicated eye diseases are seen by tertiary eye care hospitals. Eye care professionals may experience stress and fatigue due to pressure to complete a lot of cases in a short period of time, diagnose patients quickly and encounter strict deadlines. Eye care professionals can be under pressure to meet tight schedules, perform quick and accurate diagnoses, and manage large caseloads, which can lead to fatigue and stress. This pressure is particularly difficult in situations where physicians are expected to manage multiple patients with diverse conditions simultaneously, often requiring rapid decision-making in high-stress situations. The constant strain of balancing speed with accuracy can lead to mental exhaustion and affect the quality of patient care. [10]

3.2 Complexity of Cases
Patients with advanced eye problems are usually seen in tertiary eye care clinics, which require specific skills and accuracy from eye care professionals. It can be emotionally difficult to handle those cases, particularly when the results are unclear. [6] When cases are highly complex or involve poor prognoses, such as with advanced retinal disease or rare genetic disorders, the stakes are higher, and the stress increases. The emotional burden of these situations is compounded by the responsibility of delivering difficult news to patients and their families, which can lead to compassion fatigue. The complexity of these cases requires high levels of attention and decision-making, placing an extra cognitive and emotional load on healthcare providers. [10]

3.3 Technological and Surgical Demands
Eye surgeons may experience stress due to the complex nature of eye surgeries, such as cataract, retinal, or corneal procedures. High-stakes environments where exactness is the key add pressure to perform without error, which can increase mental and emotional strain. Advanced technologies like surgical lasers and diagnostic imaging equipment utilised in tertiary care hospitals can be stressful. Eye care professionals need to be aware of the new advanced technology and how it is being used to treat patients. Stress can result from inadequate training or broken equipment, particularly for specialists who must use complicated technology during crucial procedures. Inadequate access to necessary equipment or sudden technical failures during surgery can amplify stress, as these situations may threaten the success of a procedure or put patient safety at risk. [11]

3.4 Emotional Toll of Patient Care
Seeing the patients struggle with vision loss or other severe eye conditions can be emotionally difficult. Providers may develop empathy fatigue, especially when dealing with poor prognoses or high-risk surgeries. The emotional toll is heightened in situations where patients have irreversible conditions or require complex, life-altering surgeries, which can lead to feelings of helplessness or frustration. Also, the challenge of managing the emotional reactions of patients and their families while maintaining professionalism can lead to stress accumulation. For healthcare workers, it is very hard to see the emotional burden of seeing long-term or terminal outcomes, affecting their mental well-being and job satisfaction. This ongoing emotional strain can lead to burnout if not managed properly. [6]

3.5 Administrative Workload
Eye care providers may have considerable administrative tasks such as documenting cases, navigating healthcare systems, managing insurance claims, and maintaining regulatory compliance. Balancing clinical work with these demands can increase stress levels, especially when administrative tasks consume substantial amounts of time and reduce face-to-face patient interaction. Health care workers need to ensure that all documentation is exact and in compliance with regulations can lead to additional pressure, particularly in environments with limited administrative support. Moreover, dealing with insurance companies and reimbursement issues can be time-consuming and often frustrating, detracting from time that could be spent with patients or on other medical responsibilities. This administrative burden adds another layer of stress to providers who are already juggling high-pressure clinical tasks. [6]

3.6 Work-Life Balance Challenges
Continuous on-call shifts, long working hours and the need to stay updated with the new advanced technology in ophthalmology can disturb personal time and affect work-life balance, which can cause to burnout. The intensity of work, especially in a tertiary eye care setting, often requires eye care professionals to be constantly on alert, even during off-hours, leaving little room for personal or family time. The regular balancing act between professional responsibilities and personal life can lead to mental, emotional and physical exhaustion. Additionally, the high expectations placed on professionals to stay well-informed of cutting-edge medical knowledge can contribute to stress. This ongoing cycle of work demands and limited rest can erode overall job satisfaction, leading to burnout and disengagement. [6]

3.7 Interprofessional Relationships
Collaboration with multiple teams, including other ophthalmologists, nurses, optometrists, and technicians, can sometimes cause interpersonal struggle or communication challenges, contributing to workplace stress. Effective teamwork is essential in a high-stakes environment like tertiary eye care, but differing professional perspectives, misunderstandings, or miscommunications can disrupt workflows and cause tension. Stress may arise when team

members fail to align their priorities or are confused about their roles and responsibilities. Lack of clear communication can lead to errors, delays, and frustration, all of which amplify workplace stress. When interpersonal struggles are unresolved, they can negatively impact team morale and ultimately affect the quality of patient care. [10]

4. Impact of Occupational Stress
4.1 Health of the Mind and Emotions
Anxiety and depression are the main psychological problems that can result from long-term stress exposure. Eye care hospital staff members are suffering from emotional fatigue, which affects their general health and capacity to carry out their jobs as well. As stress increases, it can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression can lead to reduced job satisfaction, loss of empathy, and a lack of motivation. The emotional charge of high-stress environments can affect making important decisions, as stressed professionals may experience reduced cognitive function. Left unaddressed, these mental health issues can develop into chronic conditions, significantly impacting both the individual's well-being and patient care quality. [6]

4.2 Physical Health Consequences
Occupational stress can lead to musculoskeletal problems, headaches, and cardiovascular disorders. Healthcare workers regularly operate in physical difficulties, such as operating rooms, where prolonged standing and repetitive duties can cause physical strain. Research has shown that stress has a major role in medical staff members' declining physical health. The stress hormone, such as cortisol, released in response to high-pressure work environments can have long-term physical effects, including high blood pressure, increased risk of heart disease, and gastrointestinal problems. Due to the physical demands of long-term surgeries, lifting heavy equipment and working in ergonomics can also contribute to chronic pain or injury. Healthcare workers may also suffer from sleep disturbances, further exacerbating physical health issues, which can ultimately affect their overall quality of life. [7]

4.3 Patient Care and Job Performance
Job performance can be negatively affected by occupational stress, which can result in poor communication, delay in decision-making, and diminished concentration. This performance insufficiency can directly affect patient care and safety in the high stress setting of tertiary care hospitals, potentially resulting in medical errors and poorer care quality. Under extreme stress, eye care professionals may experience a lack of judgment, slower reaction times, or difficulty processing complex information. These issues can affect misdiagnoses, delays in treatments or other critical errors that jeopardise patient outcomes, and the added pressure of maintaining high-quality care in a demanding environment can also lead to lower employee morale and overall dissatisfaction with the workplace, further compounding the issue. [8]

5. Occupational Stress Coping Techniques
5.1 Interventions in the Organization
A holistic approach is needed to reduce occupational stress in tertiary eye care hospitals. Stress and burnout can be avoided by implementing organisational measures such as increasing workforce levels, changing tasks, and providing flexible working hours. Additionally, providing counselling services and stress management programs to employees can offer crucial help. Organisational interventions also include creating a culture of recognition and support, where staff feel valued and appreciated. With improving communication between management and staff ensures that concerns related to stressors are heard and addressed. Providing wellness initiatives like exercise facilities or access to mental health resources can also contribute to an environment that promotes mental and physical health, ultimately improving both employee satisfaction and patient care outcomes. [9]

5.2 Instruction and Training
Stress can be reduced by regularly training healthcare workers on emotional resilience and stress management strategies. It has been shown that such programs, which may incorporate productive practices, cognitive-behavioural approaches, and relaxation exercises, enhance the well-being of employees. Training sessions should also include practical techniques for managing difficult patient interactions, particularly in emotionally charged situations. By providing healthcare workers with more products to better manage stress, they can handle demanding work environments with better efficiency and reduced emotional strain. The current workshops can encourage self-reflection and personal growth, enabling employees to cultivate better-coping mechanisms and increase their overall job satisfaction. Training should be an ongoing effort, continuously evolving to meet the needs of the workforce. [3]

5.3 Peer Networks and Emotional Assistance
Stress can be reduced in the workplace by promoting emotional support. Different support networks can be a useful thing for healthcare workers to exchange stories and offer support to one another during work. Improving mental health outcomes can be achieved by providing individual counselling services and establishing secure environments where employees can talk about their emotional difficulties. Regular teamwork and social gatherings increase stronger relationships, making it easier for staff to turn to each other for advice or emotional support when needed. Working networks can also provide a sense of solidarity and fellowship that will reduce feelings of isolation. Helping them to communicate about mental health can be easy by reducing stress, improving mental well-being and creating a supportive workplace environment. [4]

5.4 Initiatives for Work-Life Balance
Reducing stress requires promoting work-life balance. Policies that help more flexible work schedules, more vacation time, and better accommodation for family obligations can be put in place by hospitals. Healthcare companies can increase job satisfaction and decrease stress by reducing the burden of different work and personal obligations. Allowing for others' work options, especially for administrative tasks, can significantly reduce the stress associated with commuting and office attendance. Encouraging employees to take regular breaks and use their vacation time can also help prevent burnout. Providing childcare services or family leave can further help employees balance personal and professional responsibilities, which will make them feel known and improve their overall well-being, both inside and outside of the workplace. [10]

6. Strategies for Managing Occupational Stress
6.1 Workload Management
Implementing systems to distribute caseloads more evenly, scheduling breaks, and ensuring time off can help reduce

pressure on eye care providers. Using a collaborative approach to care, where the tasks are shared among team members, helps prevent the burden on any single professional. Technology, such as case management software, can be different in tracking patient needs and distributing work efficiently. [6] Having clear communication regarding expectations for workload and deadlines can help prevent confusion and stress with better management. With ensuring that employees have access to appropriate resources, like administrative support, can help ease the burden of non-clinical responsibilities. Encouraging regular debriefings and check-ins can also provide a platform for professionals to discuss challenges and share strategies for managing workload effectively. [6]

6.2 Training and Support
Offering mental health support, stress management workshops, and promoting support in groups can help individuals manage stress. Mentorship programs can also help younger professionals facing stressful situations. These programs can provide emotional guidance as well as practical advice on managing the demands of complex cases. Mentors can also offer insight into how to balance professional and personal responsibilities and aid in the reduction of overall stress. Additionally, access to therapy or counselling can help employees manage trauma, grief, or burnout. Ensuring that training is specific to the unique stressors of ophthalmology and optometrists allows professionals to feel better equipped to handle their roles and reduces the risk of long-term psychological distress. [6]

6.3 Improving Work-Life Balance
Promoting reasonable work hours, flexible schedules, and the option to work from home for administrative tasks can help eye care professionals maintain a healthier balance between their work and personal lives. Changing in scheduling that will allow staff to adjust their hours to accommodate personal commitments, easing stress and preventing overwhelm. Providing adequate rest between shifts and avoiding long work hours or frequent on-call responsibilities provides to supports a better work with life balance. Encouraging staff to unplug during their off-hours and respecting their personal time nurtures a culture that values work-life boundaries. Adding and maintaining appropriate staffing levels ensures that employees are not pressured into working excessive hours to fill gaps, which can reduce burnout and enhance retention rates. [8,10]

6.4 Organisational Changes
Advancement of organisational structures, giving more time to administrative processes, and providing adequate resources for patient care can reduce stressors associated with bureaucratic tasks. Implementing technology to handle repetitive administrative work, such as patient scheduling or billing, can free up more time for direct patient care. Clear and better lines of responsibility and communication within the organisation can also reduce misunderstandings and inefficiencies that cause stress. [6] Further, investing in adequate resources, including hiring more staff or providing better equipment, enables eye care providers can perform their jobs effectively without feeling overwhelmed by a lack of support and provides a good environment. Organisational changes also include creating a culture of feedback, where staff can express concerns and suggest improvements without fear of retribution. [10]

6.5 Mindfulness and Resilience Training
Programs focused on mindfulness, relaxation techniques, and building an environment may help providers manage the emotional and mental demands of their roles and work. Mindfulness practices such as meditation, breathing exercises, or yoga can help staff develop greater emotional awareness and the ability to respond to stress in a calm and balanced with good manner. These practices also promote improved concentration, leading to better decision-making and performance under pressure. Resilience training can teach healthcare workers how to bounce back from failure, cope with high-pressure situations, and maintain a positive outlook despite challenges. By including these techniques in regular training, eye care professionals can develop stronger achievement mechanisms, reduce stress while increasing their ability to handle the emotional and physical demands of their roles. [10]

Conclusion
Occupational stress is still a major problem that has an impact on the physical and mental well-being with job satisfaction, and the standard of patient care for medical staff in tertiary eye care facilities. Elevated stress levels are caused by several factors that include a heavy workload, emotional strain, role ambiguity, work-life imbalance, and many more. Encouraging a healthy work environment, providing training and support, and implementing organisational reforms are all essential to reduce these stressors. Healthcare organisations need to recognise these stressors and implement effective strategies. In these specialised settings, addressing occupational stress will improve patient outcomes in addition to the healthcare personnel. [20]

Additionally, work-related stress is prevalent among college instructors, with nearly half of the participants affected. [22] This high prevalence is partly due to significant organizational changes in the country's higher learning institutions. [21] The main stress factors identified include uncertainty about career prospects, role confusion, and lack of resources, all stemming from an unsupportive work environment. This aligns with existing theories that higher education institutions contribute to occupational stress. To mitigate the impact on faculty performance and education quality, further research is needed. Additionally, organizational adjustments and early stress screenings for instructors are recommended to improve the work environment and academic outcomes. [22]

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