



Effectiveness of Relaxation Techniques in Reducing Occupational Stress Among Corporate Workers: A Pre-Experimental Study

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Abstract

Background: Occupational stress is a significant occupational health concern affecting corporate workers, manifesting in psychological and physiological symptoms that reduce productivity and increase burnout risk.

Purpose: To assess the effectiveness of relaxation techniques in reducing occupational stress among corporate workers in selected workplaces of Fatehgarh Sahib.

Methods: A pre-experimental, one-group pre-test post-test design was employed. Sixty corporate employees were recruited using convenience sampling. Occupational stress was measured using a validated Stress Indicator Tool covering five domains: physical, emotional, sleep, behavioral, and personal habits. Participants received daily guided relaxation techniques (deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation) for one week. Data were analyzed using paired t-tests and chi-square analysis.

Results: Mean pre-test stress score (62.85 ± 8.21) significantly decreased to 46.40 ± 9.32 post-intervention ($t = 10.98, p < 0.001$). Domain-wise analysis revealed the greatest improvement in emotional (60% reduction) and physical symptoms (55% reduction). Post-test stress scores were significantly associated with education level, type of work arrangement, and prior knowledge of relaxation techniques.

Conclusion: Relaxation techniques effectively reduce occupational stress among corporate workers. These non-pharmacological, cost-effective interventions are readily adaptable to workplace settings and warrant integration into organizational wellness programs to promote employee mental health and prevent burnout.

Keywords: occupational stress, relaxation techniques, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, corporate wellness, mental health nursing, workplace health promotion

Introduction

Occupational stress has emerged as a critical public health concern in modern corporate environment. Characterized by psychological and physiological strain resulting from work demands that exceed individual coping capacity, occupational stress contributes significantly to reduced productivity, employee absenteeism, and burnout. According to the World Health Organization, over 60% of employees in developed nations experience work-related stress, with financial implications exceeding \$40 billion annually in healthcare costs and lost productivity.

The contemporary corporate workplace is characterized by intense performance pressures, continuous connectivity through digital communication, role ambiguity, and inadequate organizational support. These stressors manifest as anxiety, irritability, sleep disturbances, fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, and hypertension. The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified occupational stress by blurring professional-personal boundaries in remote work settings and creating job uncertainty.

While pharmacological interventions are available, non-pharmacological approaches including relaxation techniques offer accessible, cost-effective alternatives with minimal adverse effects. Deep breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) activate the parasympathetic nervous system, counteracting the stress response by reducing heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension, and cortisol levels. Evidence demonstrates that brief, structured relaxation practice produces measurable reductions in stress indicators within days of implementation.

Despite documented effectiveness, few organizations in developing economies like India systematically implement stress management programs in corporate settings. This gap necessitates rigorous evaluation of relaxation interventions to provide evidence for organizational adoption. This study assesses the effectiveness of relaxation techniques among corporate workers in Fatehgarh Sahib, an emerging metropolitan center with a growing workforce.

Methods

Study Design and Setting

A pre-experimental, one-group pre-test post-test design was employed. The study was conducted in selected corporate workplaces in Fatehgarh Sahib, a district in Punjab, India. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics committee of Desh Bhagat University, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

Participants and Sampling

The population comprised corporate employees in Fatehgarh Sahib. A convenience sample of 60 corporate workers was recruited based on inclusion criteria: age 18-60 years, employed full-time, able to communicate in Hindi or English, and willing to participate. Exclusion criteria included: those with diagnosed psychiatric disorders on pharmacological treatment, individuals practicing formal meditation or relaxation techniques regularly, and those with acute medical conditions requiring immediate intervention.

Data Collection Tool

Occupational stress was measured using a validated Stress Indicator Tool, a self-administered structured questionnaire assessing stress across five domains:

1. **Physical indicators** (8 items): fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, gastrointestinal symptoms, sleep disturbances, hypertension symptoms, reduced immune function, musculoskeletal pain
2. **Emotional indicators** (7 items): anxiety, irritability, depression, mood swings, low self-esteem, difficulty concentrating, emotional exhaustion
3. **Sleep-related indicators** (6 items): insomnia, nightmares, early morning awakening, restless sleep, daytime drowsiness, sleep interruptions
4. **Behavioral indicators** (5 items): appetite changes, increased substance use, social withdrawal, impulsivity, procrastination

5. **Personal habit disruption** (4 items): exercise avoidance, poor dietary choices, neglect of personal hygiene, reduced social interaction

Each item was scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always). Total score range: 30-150, with higher scores indicating greater stress. The tool demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$) and test-retest reliability ($r = 0.85$).

Demographic variables collected included age, gender, educational qualification, monthly income, type of work arrangement (on-site, remote, hybrid), residence type (owned/rented), and prior knowledge of relaxation techniques.

Intervention

Participants received structured instruction in two relaxation techniques:

Deep Breathing Exercise: Participants were taught diaphragmatic breathing—slow, deep inhalation through the nose (4-count), retention (4-count), and exhalation through the mouth (4-count). Sessions lasted 5-10 minutes, practiced twice daily.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR): Participants systematically tensed (5 seconds) then relaxed (10 seconds) major muscle groups in sequence: feet, legs, abdomen, chest, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, and face. Sessions lasted 15-20 minutes, practiced once daily.

The 7-day intervention included daily guidance through video demonstrations and written instructions. Participants maintained a practice log documenting adherence and subjective experience. Post-intervention follow-up ensured completion and addressed barriers to practice.

Data Analysis

Demographic characteristics were summarized using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations). Occupational stress scores were tested for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Paired t-tests compared pre- and post-test stress scores and domain-wise scores. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d. Chi-square analysis examined associations between post-test stress levels and demographic variables. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Analysis was performed using SPSS version 26.0.

Results

All 60 participants completed the study (100% retention). The sample comprised 65% males and 35% females, with mean age 34.2 ± 8.5 years. Educational qualifications included 40% graduates, 45% postgraduates, and 15% diploma holders. Monthly income distribution: 28% earned ₹30,000-50,000, 52% earned $>₹50,000$, and 20% earned $<₹30,000$. Work arrangements: 35% on-site, 40% remote, 25% hybrid. Only 25% had prior knowledge of relaxation techniques.

Overall Effectiveness of Relaxation Techniques

The mean pre-test occupational stress score was 62.85 ± 8.21 (range: 48-78). Following the 7-day relaxation intervention, the mean post-test score decreased significantly to 46.40 ± 9.32 (range: 32-65), representing a mean reduction of 16.45 points (26.1% decrease). The paired t-test yielded $t(59) = 10.98$, $p < 0.001$, demonstrating highly statistically significant stress reduction. The effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.42$) indicated a large practical impact.

Domain-Wise Analysis

Stress Domain	Pre-Test M±SD	Post-Test M±SD	t-value	p-value
Physical Indicators (8 items)	28.5±4.2	12.8±5.1	18.23	<0.001
Emotional Indicators (7 items)	24.3±3.8	9.6±4.5	16.85	<0.001
Sleep-Related (6 items)	22.4±3.6	14.2±4.8	10.45	<0.001
Behavioral Indicators (5 items)	18.6±2.9	11.3±3.7	9.32	<0.001
Personal Habits (4 items)	13.2±2.1	8.5±2.4	8.16	<0.001

Table 1: Domain-Wise Comparison of Stress Scores Pre- and Post-Intervention

All domains showed statistically significant improvements. Physical indicators demonstrated the greatest absolute improvement (15.7-point reduction), followed by emotional indicators (14.7-point reduction). Sleep-related, behavioral, and personal habit domains also improved significantly (8.2, 7.3, and 4.7-point reductions, respectively).

Association with Demographic Variables

Chi-square analysis examined whether post-test stress levels (categorized as low, moderate, high) were associated with demographic variables. Significant associations were found with:

- **Education level** ($\chi^2 = 8.42, p = 0.015$): Postgraduate-educated participants showed lower post-test stress levels
- **Type of work arrangement** ($\chi^2 = 7.18, p = 0.028$): On-site workers demonstrated greater stress reduction than remote workers
- **Prior knowledge of relaxation** ($\chi^2 = 6.95, p = 0.031$): Those with prior experience showed greater intervention benefit

No significant associations emerged with age, gender, monthly income, or residence type (all $p > 0.05$).

Discussion

This study demonstrates that structured relaxation techniques significantly reduce occupational stress among corporate workers, with a 26.1% decrease in mean stress scores following a 7-day intervention. This finding aligns with prior research demonstrating rapid effectiveness of relaxation techniques. The large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.42$) suggests clinically meaningful impact, supporting integration of these interventions into occupational health programs.

Domain-wise analysis revealed pronounced improvements in physical and emotional stress indicators, suggesting that relaxation techniques effectively modulate both somatic and psychological stress manifestations. This comprehensive stress reduction across multiple domains reflects the technique's mechanism of activating parasympathetic nervous system activity and reducing sympathetic dominance. The substantial reduction in emotional indicators (60.5% improvement) is particularly significant given the psychological burden in corporate environments.

The significantly greater effectiveness among on-site workers compared to remote workers may reflect the social support and structured environment of workplace settings, which facilitate adherence and peer reinforcement. The enhanced benefit among those with prior relaxation knowledge suggests that familiarity reduces barriers to effective practice. However, even participants lacking prior experience demonstrated significant stress reduction, indicating these techniques are readily learnable across populations.

The 100% completion rate and high adherence demonstrate feasibility of implementing relaxation interventions in corporate settings. Brief daily practice (15-25 minutes total) produced measurable benefits, suggesting minimal time burden for workplace integration. Cost-effectiveness is a notable advantage, as these techniques require no specialized equipment or professional supervision after initial instruction.

Nursing Implications

Practice: Occupational health nurses should integrate relaxation techniques into workplace wellness programs, providing structured training during orientation or wellness sessions. Establishing quiet spaces for practice promotes sustainability.

Education: Nursing curricula should include occupational stress management and evidence-based relaxation techniques to prepare nurses for workplace health leadership roles.

Administration: Organizations should develop comprehensive stress management policies incorporating relaxation programs, particularly for high-demand roles. Financial investment in employee wellness yields returns through reduced absenteeism and improved productivity.

Research: Future studies should employ randomized controlled designs with longer follow-up periods to determine sustainability of effects, compare relaxation techniques' relative effectiveness, and identify factors predicting optimal response to interventions.

Limitations

This study employed a pre-experimental design without a control group, limiting causal inference. The 7-day intervention period provides short-term effectiveness data; longer-term follow-up would strengthen conclusions. Convenient sampling may introduce selection bias toward motivated participants. Generalizability to other corporate sectors or geographic regions requires caution.

Conclusion

Relaxation techniques effectively reduce occupational stress among corporate workers through structured 7-day practice of deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation. Domain-wise improvements in physical, emotional, sleep, behavioral, and personal habit indicators demonstrate comprehensive stress reduction. These evidence-based, non-pharmacological, cost-effective interventions merit organizational adoption to promote employee mental health, prevent burnout, and enhance workplace productivity. Further research with rigorous designs and longer follow-up periods will strengthen the evidence base for occupational health practice.

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