



## STRESS MANAGEMENT AMONG THE CORPORATE HOUSE WORKERS THROUGH MOVEMENT THERAPY

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Stress is an increasing phenomenon in modern world. It produces numerous symptoms including diabetes, psychological distress and severe psychological trauma. **Objectives:** In the present study use of dance movement for the management of stress has been applied among different corporate house professionals. **Methods:** The participants went through many kinds of activities including breathing exercise, different dance games like body power, body trust, movement puzzles, multi-tasking activity, role-play etc, where team-building skills, interpersonal relations and problem-solving abilities were reinforced. For the assessment Likert scale was used. **Result:** The therapeutic sessions resulted into development of self-efficacy, self-confidence, psychological busting and improved physical and mental fitness. The participants reported high level of confidence, felt relaxed and their stressed condition was somehow lowered after completion of dance movement therapy sessions. **Discussion:** Practice of dance movements is the best way to avoid stress in any situation. It is more beneficial for its aesthetic value which is absent in other therapies like yoga. Dance movement therapy is based on the idea that body and mind are co-relational, that the physical state of the body can affect the emotional and mental wellbeing both positively and negatively. Breathing with specific movements helps to release stress and also to unwind, and sharpens thinking and reflexes in order to respond better to work pressure. **Conclusion:** To cope up with a stressful life daily practice of dance movements is very helpful for the physical exercise. It also reduces stress, physically and mentally, and enhances self-confidence in the studied population.

**KEYWORDS:** Dance, dance game, movement therapy, stress management.

### INTRODUCTION

Stress can be considered as an increasing phenomenon in the modern world with the human reaction to environment, particularly in the presence of stressors.<sup>[1]</sup> Han Selye defines stress as wear and tear on the body. Stress can be eustress (good stress) or distress (stress from bad sources). Distress may be resulted from difficult work environment, overwhelming sights and sounds, threat of personal injury, etc. Stress produces numerous symptoms which vary according to persons, situations and severity. These can include physical health decline as well as depression.<sup>[2]</sup>

We live in a very stressful society which is constantly putting us under pressure. This pressure can sometimes be too much to handle, leading us to feel stressed out. This everyday feeling can be caused by simple things such as work pressure, marriage and relationships, parenting or children, health problems such as diabetes, financial insecurity, traffic, and the fight-freeze or flight response. Stress can be caused by physical factors (like an injury or illness) or psychological or social factors

(unresolved work issues, bereavements, moving house, unresolved relationship problems).<sup>[3]</sup>

General stress resolves itself within a day or two and every one has this kind of stress. No intervention is necessarily required for this stress. Cumulative stress may have more serious mental anguish. Acute traumatic stress is a normal reaction to abnormal events. It produces considerable psychological distress. Post traumatic stress produces severe psychological trauma and lasting changes.<sup>[4]</sup>

Acute stress is usually for a short time and may be due to work pressure, meeting deadline pressure or minor accident, over exertion, increased physical activity, searching something that you misplaced, or some similar thing. Symptoms of this type of tension are headaches, back pain, stomach problems, rapid heart beat, muscle aches and body pain. Chronic stress is the most serious type and this is prolonged stress existing for weeks, months and even years. People suffering from this stress

sometimes can not realize that they are in stress and get used to it. It is very harmful for their health.<sup>[5]</sup>

Some sources of stress are immediate and short term. Other sources of stress can go on for much longer. The body may have higher levels of stress hormones during this time. As a result blood glucose levels can be increased over a long period. A long period of psychological stress may have the same effect. In stressed condition, the body quickly responds by releasing hormones that give cells access to stored energy, fat and glucose, to help the body get away from danger. This instinctive physiological response to perceived threats is known as the 'fight-freeze, or flight' response. The fight-freeze or flight response is an evolutionary coping mechanism enabling us to deal with threats and stressful situations. Over time, both physical and mental stress can wear us down mentally and lead to depression and other mental health issues.<sup>[6]</sup>

## OBJECTIVES

Health related discussion and therapeutic implementation of dance forms particularly in stress management has been discussed very little in India. In the present study the use of dance movement for the management of stress has been applied among different professionals of corporate houses. The participants went through many kinds of activities in which team-building skills, interpersonal relations and problem-solving abilities were reinforced. The main aims of this study were the use of dance and movements to:

- improve group coordination,
- increase concentration and focus,
- enhance rhythm synchrony,
- increase social skills,
- enhance emotional expression,
- build trust and rapport,
- develop leadership qualities,
- increase range of movement,
- enhance creativity and imagination,
- build physical strength.

## METHODS

### i. Participants

The study was applied to solve the stress related problems in the corporate house workers. The participants expressed that they often feel stressed due to heavy work pressure. The non-sympathetic attitudes of office bosses and colleagues sometimes aggravate this stressed situation in them.

The target based work load also caused the stress. Due to this work pressure the majority of them can not give sufficient time to their families, and it also causes frustration among them. The family members also become unhappy in this situation, which also creates a stressed family life in the participants.

The total number of participants was six in the age group of 19-36 years old. They were working in different

corporate sectors with tremendous work pressure. Few of them had to work for over 17 hours in hectic schedule. All the participants were non-dancer, and it was their first experience of dance in therapeutic mode. The training programme, exploring the use of body movement as a form of therapeutic recreation, was held for this group of corporate professionals.

### ii. Permission

Written consent was taken from all after narrating them about the objective of the study and procedure of evaluation.

### iii. The sessions

The participants were given experience of dance movements with light music first, after the body warm-up exercise. They were also asked to perform any dance style they like with or without music or song. Then the participants were allowed to experience different dance movement games. The whole participants were divided into groups. One group leader was selected among the participants as per the choice of the participants. The leadership was also changed in each dance game. Movement routines and games were devised. The participants were taught breathing exercise, different dance games like body power, body trust, movement puzzles, multi-tasking activity, role-play, etc.

The idea of multi-tasking was used in two different ways. Participants chose a prop or musical instrument to be moved or played and combined them with body movements. At the same time they had to generate and combine their body movements to accompany the movement and rhythm of the instrument and music. In another activity, props or musical instruments were not used. Different body parts were used to perform different movements at the same time. In role-play the entire participants underwent activities that explored a new range of movements and freed their bodies from uncomfortable postures.

The participants were encouraged to use their bodies and facial expression in positive attitudes, moving freely with difficult dance movements. For this purpose they were also asked to perform different role play and role reversal using the procedure of drama therapy incorporating dance movements. The rhythm patterns include palms clapping against each other, sticks held in each hand being hit against each other, cymbals held in each hand being hit against each other like the dance forms named *garba* from Gujrat.

For the assessment Likert scale was used employing questionnaires with consultation with psychologists and medical practitioners.

### iv. The questionnaires

Stress scale questionnaire helped to ask questions on various aspects causing stress in a Likert scale.<sup>[7]</sup> This helped the respondent to choose the precise option that

suits him or her. Then a gross total or categorizing of the questions was done to better analyze it.

1. The work in my office is hectic –(strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree)
2. Every work is appreciated and we are encouraged to aim higher –(always true, usually true, occasionally true, usually not true, never true)
3. I have to deal with many worried and anxious customers –(very frequently, frequently, occasionally, rarely, never)
4. I miss my deadlines – (very frequently, frequently, occasionally, rarely, never)
5. The work environment is encouraging and incites learning –(strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree)
6. I have many responsibilities but no authority – (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree)
7. I spend time with my family –(very frequently, frequently, occasionally, rarely, never)
8. My family is important for me – (very important, important, moderately important, of little importance, unimportant)
9. My work leaves no time to contribute to the demands at home – (very frequently, frequently, occasionally, rarely, never)
10. I have no time to pursue games or leisure activities with friends –(always true, usually true, occasionally true, usually not true, never true)
11. I work for longer hours in office –(always true, usually true, occasionally true, usually not true, never true)
12. My job needs immense physical fitness that I lack – (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree)
13. My colleagues help me cope with work stress –(very frequently, frequently, occasionally, rarely, never)
14. My organization takes care of employee safety and security –(strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree)

15. I am happy with my relationship –(strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree)

16. The dance therapy sessions were encouraging – (always true, usually true, occasionally true, usually not true, never true)

17. I feel relaxed after this dance movement therapy sessions –(strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree)

## RESULTS

In all the cases the therapeutic sessions resulted into development of self-efficacy, self-confidence, psychological busting and improved physical and mental fitness, as shown in Figure 1. Rhythm activities can sustain the attention span and stamina for a long period of time. It also gave more confidence because they could dance to rhythm that they created. It reduced passivity and withdrawal to a large extent and promoted social skills among group members. As part of a creative exercise they learned to converse with each other through various kinds of rhythms. In pairs, partners used rhythms instead of words to talk to each other. The participants reported high level of confidence after the therapeutic sessions as noted in Figure 1. The participants also reported that they felt relaxed after these dance games as shown in Figure 2.

Some of the participants showed much happiness after performing all the games and participating in the dance performance. All of them reported that the work pressure was really hectic and they have to spend long hours in office for that. Thus they had a little time to spend with their families during week days. Further, sometimes they also had to spend their week end in work due to achieve the scheduled target. This hampers their personal relationships. For all these they always suffered from a cumulative stress. But after completion of the dance movement therapy sessions they felt that this stressed condition was somehow lowered in them as expressed in Figure 3.

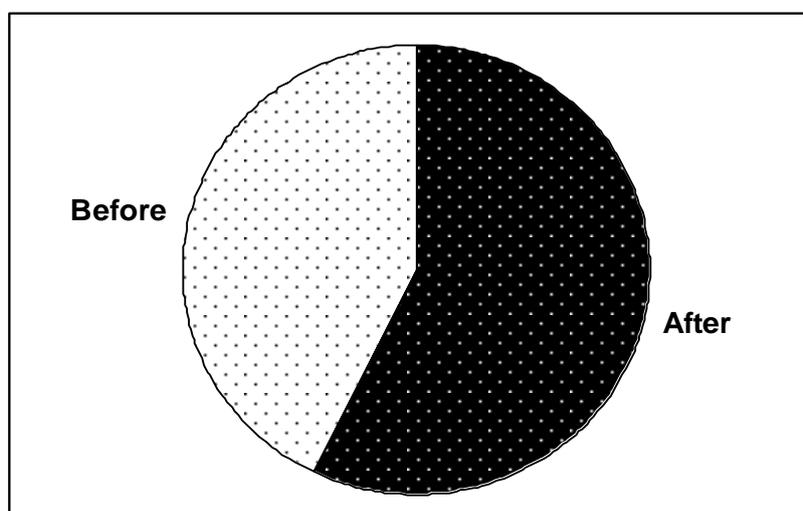


Figure 1: Participants feel confident before and after dance therapy.

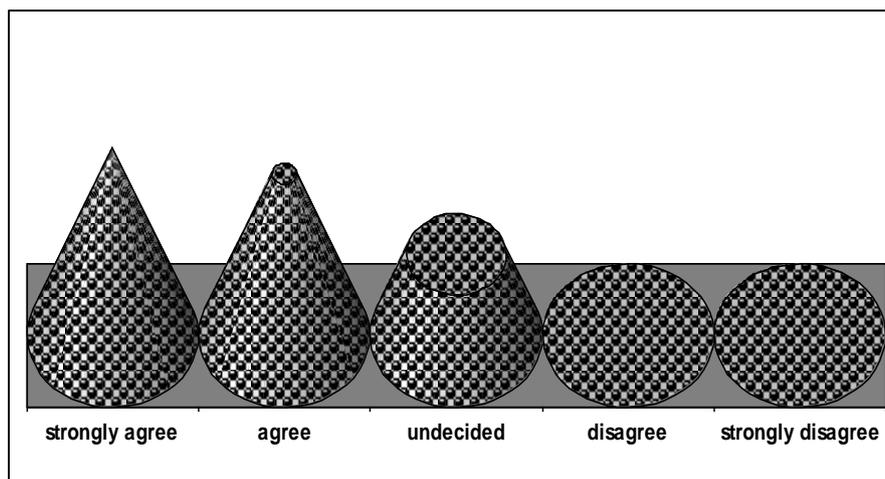


Figure 2: Percentage of participants feeling relaxed after dance movement therapy.

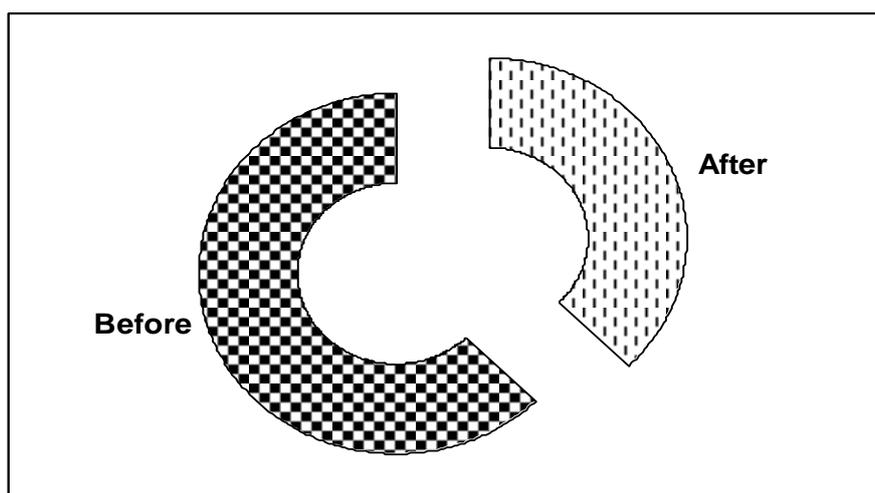


Figure 3: Cumulative stress among participants before and after dance therapy.

## DISCUSSION

Stress is a part of our daily lives. Stress becomes unhealthy when it begins to make us less able to manage our physical or psychological health, or other factors in our lives such as our work and relationships. When confronted by a threat, hormones are released that help us get ready to either fight the threat or fuel a quick escape. There is an increase in glucose for energy, increased blood pressure to take fresh oxygen to working muscles, and the release of adrenalin for heightened vigilance and alertness. Each person will have a somewhat different response to stress. When we experience stress our body tends to respond as if it were under attack. This can be regardless of whether the stress is physical (like an injury or infection) or psychological (like an argument, a marriage break up, bereavement, or financial problems). The body responds to stress by preparing itself to take action. This is called the 'fight-or-flight' response. In the fight-or-flight response, the levels of many hormones rise. These hormones (which are sometimes called stress hormones) include adrenaline, growth hormone and gluco-corticosteroids. Specifically, the body reacts with the fight or flight response triggered by the sudden release of the cortisol and adrenaline

hormones. These hormones keep the body and mind alert and ready for reaction to the threat. This reaction served as a useful, protective response when faced with primitive threats such as a saber tooth tiger.<sup>[8]</sup>

The alarming spike in the incidence of reported stress among employees in recent years and its impact on the bottom line has made the management of stress an urgent business strategy for American companies.<sup>[9]</sup> Nearly three-quarters of American workers surveyed in 2007 reported experiencing physical symptoms of stress due to work. According to statistics from the American Psychological Association, a startling two-thirds of Americans say that work is a main source of stress in their lives, up nearly 15% from those who ranked work stress at the top just a year before. Roughly 30% of workers surveyed reported 'extreme' stress levels.<sup>[10,11]</sup> Stressed workers tend to be fatigued, prone to mistakes and injuries, and are more likely to be absent. Most significantly, they incur healthcare costs twice as high than for other employees. The consequences of stress-related illnesses, from depression to heart disease, costs businesses an estimated \$200 to \$300 billion a year in lost productivity.<sup>[12]</sup>

In one survey, 60% of workers reported losing productivity due to stress while at work during the past month.<sup>[11]</sup> The cost may be even higher if the stress underlying presenteeism is not addressed, as absenteeism, job resignations, chronic illness, and disability may be the result.<sup>[13]</sup> Workers who report that they are stressed incur healthcare costs that are 46% higher than for non-stressed employees, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. The 60-90% percent of doctor visits are attributed to stress-related illnesses and symptoms.<sup>[3,4]</sup> In fact, an survey of American Psychological Association found that 53% of workers reported fatigue due to work stress.<sup>[11]</sup> Stress can also lower the immune system and play a role in a person's susceptibility to more colds, flu and other infectious diseases. Additionally, people who are stressed are more likely to experience pain-related conditions, and a host of other ailments, from teeth grinding, chest tightness to fatigue and diabetes.<sup>[8,14]</sup>

There are a number of ways to alleviate the feelings of stress. These include taking regular exercise or joining a sports team, going on holiday, listening to music, practicing yoga and breathing exercises and mindfulness meditation. The ultimate aim of these exercises or activities is relaxation, which is the key to controlling stress. The practical things such as learning relaxation techniques, learning different ways to respond to stress, identifying situations that cause stress and choosing to avoid them and making changes to life that increase enjoyment level can reduce stress. Developing a positive coping style and consciously replacing bad thoughts with good ones may help to deal more effectively with stress. But practice of dance movements is the best way to avoid stress in any situation.<sup>[15,16]</sup>

Considering the seriousness of stress on human health the general guidelines for managing stress includes long term therapies as well as situations that may bring immediate success and satisfaction. For this purpose dance movement can be regarded as a best approach in this direction.<sup>[17,18]</sup> It is more beneficial for its aesthetic value which is absent in other movement therapies like yoga.<sup>[19,20]</sup> Dance movement therapy is based on the idea that body and mind are co-relational, that the physical state of the body can affect the emotional and mental wellbeing both positively and negatively. That means if dance therapy is used correctly, it will help to improve a person's emotional and mental state to avoid the effect of stress.<sup>[21,22]</sup> Breathing with specific movements helps to release stress and also to unwind, and sharpens thinking and reflexes in order to respond better to work pressure. The dance games are equally beneficial for the management of stress.

## CONCLUSION

Stress is an unavoidable situation in modern day life. To cope up with a stressful life daily practice of dance movements is very useful and it also helps to manage the stressed condition in all. Dance movements are not only

helpful for the physical exercise but it also has aesthetic value, which help to reduce stress, physically and mentally, in the studied population. It also enhances self-confidence.

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