



A REVIEW ON AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE OF CAUSATIVE FACTORS LEADING TO STRESS AMONG INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT

Being a public health oriented medical science, Ayurveda has high responsibility in addressing job related health problems in different sectors. Stress has become an important aetiopathological factor in a good number of psychosomatic diseases. Stress, in general, is a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation. In other words, stress is defined as the disruption of internal biological equilibrium triggered by external physical, mental or other types of stimuli. IT professionals are prone to develop stress and related health issues because of their high pressure job culture. Stress is never a single pathogenesis, but a wide spectrum of interconnected events, which may result in specific diseases affecting different systems. Ayurveda has a unique tool of *Nidanapanchaka* to unveil the aetiopathogenesis of any clinical condition. Ayurveda considers *Nidana* - causative factors as very important in the development of a disease. The nature and strength of *Nidana* determine the severity of every health problem. Here in the case of stress among IT professionals, multidimensional causative factors have defined role in different stages of pathogenesis. As per Ayurveda, treatment itself is avoiding the *Nidana*. A detailed understanding of these causative factors in Ayurvedic language will help to explore the stress related diseases in a better way. Classical Ayurvedic understanding of various causative factors related with stress among IT professionals will help to derive specific preventive and management protocols against stress and related clinical conditions.

KEYWORDS: Stress, *Nidana* (causative factor), *Asatmyendriyardha Samyoga* (improper contact between sense organs and objects), *Vegadharana* (Suppression of physiological urges).

INTRODUCTION

Ayurvedic science explains any disease or syndrome on the basis of *Nidanapanchaka*. *Nidanapanchaka* include *Nidana* (causative factors), *Purvarupa* (Prodromal symptoms), *Rupa* (signs and symptoms), *Upasaya* (trial and error method) and *Samprapti* (pathogenesis)^[1]. *Nidanapanchaka* of different stress related diseases are different. But, since the factors causing the stress and their manifestations are almost common in all cases, a generalized *Nidanapanchaka* of stress can be formulated by scientific analysis. Among the *Nidanapanchaka*, *Nidana* is the initiating factor and hence it is considered to be very important. Any attempt to derive the *Nidana* of stress should start from the close analysis of the lifestyle of the stressed individuals. IT professionals have a challenged work style due to the high level competition in their job sector. Various life style factors are often disturbed in their daily life. Multidimensional factors in physical and mental domains have strong impact in the manifestation of stress among IT professionals. *Nidanas* of stress associated with IT professionals come under the category of *Bahya* (external) and *Abhyanthara* (internal) groups. They can be considered under the titles of *Sareerika* (physical) and *Manasika* (mental) factors again. For creative scientific discussion, they could be further discussed under the titles of *Utpadaka* (primary) and *Vyanjaka* (precipitating) causes.

Basic Understanding of Different *Nidana*

Ayurvedic scientific understanding of various types of *Nidana* with special emphasis on stress among IT professionals is very much relevant in addressing the computer related stress. *Bahya Nidanas* are the causes which are coming from outside. Ayurveda explains *Agantu Nidanas* in detail^[2]. These *Nidans* cause specific *Dosha* vitiation in the body and mind. *Agantu Nidana* include infections, toxic substances, environmental factors, physical strain or trauma and emotional factors. *Agantu* factors behave as physical and mental causes of stress. *Abhyantara Nidana* cause specific pathological mechanisms in the body and mind through internal biological factors. *Sareerika* and *Manasika doshas* belong to this category. *Sareerika Nidana* are related with improper physical activities like postural strain, excessive strain of joints, lack of exercise etc. *Sareerika Nidanas* causes specific *Dosha* - *Dushya Sammurchana* in vitiated *Srotases*. *Manasika Nidanas* are directly related with emotional factors. Various emotional challenges in terms of anger, grief, anxiety etc behaves as *Manasika Nidana*. *Utpadaka Nidana* are the primary causes which initiates a new pathological event. Initial *Doshakopa* is the primary cause or *Utpadaka Nidana*. *Vynjaka Nidana* are the precipitating or aggravating factors which triggers an existing pathology. Exposure to specific environmental factors like dust, toxins and smoke or exposure to sudden unexpected

emotional trauma can aggravate an existing event and are considered as *Vynjaka Nidana*.

General Aetiological Factors of Stress Among Computer Profession

Computer is the magic machine of current professional domain. But ergonomically, studies have proven that there is also a dark side to this modern wonder of technology. IT professionals experience both physical and mental stress due to various causes. Physical stress factors like continuous work, continuous sitting, overuse of joints etc. lead to different physical conditions like low back pain and neck pain. Psychological or emotional stress factors aggravate physical conditions and lead to mental ill health.

IT professionals experience stress from 2 causes

1. Physical stress factors
2. Psychological stress factors

Physical and Psychological stress can arise from personal and professional frames of one's life. As for as IT professionals are concerned the stress factors are mainly related with their tensed and mechanical job culture. This job related stress may lead to personal, familial and social problems. Physical and psychological stress has a mutual dependence.

The causes of stress among IT professionals can be considered under the following headings

- A. Computer work related
- B. Job culture related
- C. Personal habits related

The most important causes related with the above three factors are summarized below.

1. Continuous working hours before computer
2. Improper postures and strains to different joints while working with computer
3. Improper height of the monitor may add more strain to neck and shoulder
4. Prolonged key board and mouse usage and improper heights of key board may result in elbow and wrist joint strain
5. Sitting with flexed spine while typing for long time will result in low back strain.
6. Reduced blood circulation when sitting with bent joints for long time in air conditioned cabins.
7. Continuous exposure to computer screen and related eye strain
8. Time management issues
9. Criticisms from higher authorities.
10. Feeling of insecurity in job
11. Emotional upsets due to pressure of the works
12. Disturbances of sleep due to shift pattern of job
13. Untimely food and disturbed life style
14. Addictions taken to face the work load and stress
15. Lack of exercise and leisure activities due to lack of time.

Ayurvedic Perspective of Causative Factors of Stress Among it Professionals

Ayurveda, the science of life states that a disease process can only be initiated by *Nidana* (causes). In the

current scenario, job and job related environment plays a significant role in the aetiopathogenesis of many diseases. Thus while discussing the various possibilities of causes in the context of stress in IT professionals, individual and social factors should be included. IT profession is fast developing with so many challenges and hurdles within it. As a result of this ever increasing complexities and pace, persons employed in this field are prone to develop stress and stress related diseases. Information technology profession demands high rate of performance input without much flexibility of time. The complexity of projects, the demand for perfection and severe rate of competition increases the possibility of stress response among IT professionals.

Here, based on Ayurvedic fundamentals, the following factors can be considered as *Nidanas* of physical and mental stress seen among IT professionals.

1. *Asatmyendriyardha samyoga* (improper contact between sense organs and objects)

Asatmyendriyardha samyoga is one among the three basic *Nidana* of disease^[3]. It denotes the improper contact of *Indriya and Ardha*. *Asatmyendriyardha samyoga* will lead to different clinical conditions by *Heenayoga* (under manifestation), *Athyoga* (over manifestation) and *Midhyayoga* (wrong manifestation) of *Indriyas*. The *Heenayoga*, *Atiyoga* and *Midhyayoga* of *Jnanendriyas* especially *Netra* are very much relevant among IT professionals. *Karmendriyas*^[4] (organs of work /motor organs) including *Hasta* (*Hand*) also suffer from *Asatmyendriyardha Samyoga*. *Mana* which is also an *Indriya* with *Ubhayathmaka*^[5] nature is also affected with *Asatmyendriyardha Samyoga* in IT professionals. Excessive work in front of the computer monitor, prolonged sitting in front of the monitor are examples of *Asatmyendriyardha Samyoga* of eye. Working in the dim light of computer cabin is also relevant here. Mostly all who work continuously in front of computers without any protection for their eyes are vulnerable to develop visual problems including dryness of the eyes. Other sense organs are also subjected to stress responses due to *Asatmendriyartha Samyoga*. Continuous usage of keyboard and mouse leads to *Asatmyendriyardha Samyoga* of hand. Other *Jnane-driyas* (sense organs) like *Twak* (*Skin*) which is affected by continuous *Sheeta Guna* (cold) of air conditioner, *Srotra* (ear) which is affected by usage of headsets, *Jihwa* (tongue) influenced by improper food habits and addictions during working hours are also important. The *Mana* which is equally associated with *Jnanendriya* and *Karmendriya* is vitiated by both physical and mental factors seen in IT profession.

2. *Prajnaparadha* (Intellectual blasphemy)

Ayurveda considers *Prajnaparadha* as one of the significant causative factor of diseases^[6]. While we consider about stress also, *Prajnaparadha* is found to be very much relevant. Charaka mentions that *Dhivibramsas* (impairment of intellect), *Dhrtivibramsas* (impairment of will) and *Smrtivibramsas* (impairment of memory) are the main causative factors of mental disorders, which lead to evil actions and this stage is defined as a *Prajnaparadha*^[7]. It causes various types of physical and mental disorders i.e.

Irshya (malice), *Mana* (vanity), *Krodha* (Anger), *Bhaya* (fear), *Moha* (greed), *Shoka* (sadness) *Udwega* (anxiety) etc^[8]. The evil acts caused by *Prajnaparadha* leads to the vitiation of physical and mental *Dosha* and manifested as following features:

- Forcible stimulation of natural urges and suppression of the manifested ones.
- Exhibition of undue strength.
- Over indulgence in sexual act.
- Negligence of time of treatment or care of the body.
- Initiation of action in improper time.
- Loss of modesty and good conduct.
- Disrespect for respectable persons.
- Enjoyment of harmful objects and substances.
- Resorting to the factors, which are responsible for the causation of mental ailments
- Friendship with people indulged in evil actions.

These evil actions can be included under *Sareerika* and *Manasika Nidanas*, which lead to many types of mental disorders. These factors aetiopathologically resemble to the important stress related causes among IT professionals mentioned earlier in the article. Hence it can be concluded that some of the causative factors responsible for stress among IT professionals come under *Prajnaparadha*. Avoidance of the *Prajnaparadha* is nothing other than *Sadvrita*^[9]. *Sadvrita* represents ideal behaviour which ultimately leads to happiness in the individual and society.

3. *Parinama*

Advent of the maturity as a result of time has been explained by Charaka regarding *Sareera dosha*. Similarly time factor is also considered as a cause of mental disorders. Ayurveda explains that the result of all improper deeds (*Kukarma*) will mature in time and when it matures, the person will be afflicted with particular disorders. This is seen in some physical disorders and mostly all mental disorders. Moreover the word *DAIVA* (God) is equated with the *KARMA* (action) done by one self^[10]. This *Karma* in due course of time will lead to health and ill health. Here also Ayurveda highlights the importance of time factor and *Parinama*. *Parinama* denotes the changes occurring in the due course of time. The heavy workload combined with unhealthy competition among IT professionals cause enormous amount of stress due to improper *Karma*. General stress responses have a strong relation with the *Sareerika* and *Manasika Karma* done by an individual.

4. Suppression of *Adharaneeya Vega* (natural urges)

Ayurveda describes physical and psychic urges which directly influence the health and ill health of an individual. *Vega* is defined as- *Vega pravarthyunmukhathwam moothrapureeshadeenam* by Chakrapanidatta. The normal physiological reflex actions are included under the category of *Vega*. *Vegas* are classified into *Sareera* and *Manasika*. The main *Dosha* controlling the *Vegapravruthi* is *Vata*. *Vegadharana* is the physiological suppression and *Vegodheerana* is the forceful operation of urges. Both of which will lead to pathological conditions in the body and the mind.

Vegodheerana and *Vegadharana* are equally responsible for various diseases^[11]. Due to the peculiar

work style and job environment, IT professionals are subjected to some of the following *Vegadharanas*.

A. *Nidra Vegadharana*

Nidra is mentioned as *Bhoothadhathri*^[12] as it is an absolute necessity of all living beings. Ayurveda gives high importance to sleep. Sound sleep provides *Sukha* (happiness), *Pushti* (nourishment), *Bala* (strength), *Vrishata* (virility), *Jnana* (knowledge) and above all a good life^[13]. Hence if sleep is altered the above modalities will not be achieved. Ayurveda gives high importance to sleep. *Acharya* Susrutha explains *Nidra* as *Sleshma – Tama* combination.^[14]

Most of the professionals have shift pattern in their work which disturbs their normal night sleep. In other words they are forced to do *Nidra Vegadharana*. Continuous *Nidra vegadharana* leads *Gourava* of head and eye, *Aalasya*, *Jrimbha* and *Angamarda*^[15] Lack of sound sleep during night time leads to *Vata Dosha*^[16] vitiation and this in turn affects the normal physical and mental functions. Thus, lack of sleep during night and compensatory daytime sleep make unwanted changes in their daily life. IT professionals seriously suffer from problems of suppression of sleep. Most of the computer professionals are not able to adjust with their shift pattern of work. Often they have to work continuously during night hours without even a break. Especially those who work in call centers have serious stress problems due to lack of sleep during night time. Since all the higher mental functions are controlled by *Vata Dosha*, *Vata* vitiation will aggravate the effects of stress. The effects of lack of night sleep are also reflected in *Koshta* and *Agni*. Thus most of the IT professionals who have night time work suffer from diseases of Gastro intestinal system.

B. *Kshuth Vegadharana* (Suppression of appetite)

Due to the varying timings and tight work schedule most of the IT professionals are not able to follow a normal pattern of food habit. Food taken untimely often leads to disturbances in *Koshta* and *Agni* leading to various clinical manifestations in *Annavahasrotas*^[17] Suppression of appetite leads to hypo activity of digestive fire and this in turn will lead to other systemic manifestations. Diseases like *Amlapitha*, *Parinamasoola*, *Udavartha* which are commonly seen in IT professionals support this view. Suppression of physical urges will aggravate the stress in IT people because *Vegadharana* will lead to *Vatakopa*. *Vatakopa* will definitely produce stress or aggravate the existing stress. Untimely food which is equivalent to *Kshuth Vegadharana* leads to various clinical manifestations related to GIT^[18] Since *Vata* is the main *Dosha* provoked by *Vegadharana* which controls body and mind, the effect of *Vegadharana* will be very significant in the stress manifestation of IT professionals.

5. Practice of *Dharaneeya Vegas*

Ayurveda very well explains the importance of *Adharaneeya Manasikavegas*^[19] Psychological responses which are to be controlled) in physical and mental health. The heavy load of work, high level expectation from the firms, professional competitions, project deadlines, and tensed working atmosphere leads to the vitiation of *Tridoshas* and *Raja* and *Tama*. *Raga*, *Lobha*, *Eershya*,

Dvesha, *Matsarya* which are the *Manasikavegas* to be controlled, and are more prevalent among IT professionals due to their professional competition and life style^[20]. The above emotional factors lead to the vitiation of *Tridoshas* and *Manasika Doshas*. Moreover when one person is emotionally disturbed the normal food taken also will not be properly digested^[21] This leads to *Agni* related clinical conditions and formation of *Ama*. *Ama* in turn will lead to *Srotorodha* and *Aalasya*. Vitiation of *Manasika Doshas* by the above said factors, along with vitiation of *Tridoshas* and *Agni* leads to various types of psycho-somatic disturbances in IT professionals.

6. Ahita Aharas

Ayurveda considers man as the product of *Ahara*. *Roga* are also caused by *Ahara*. Improper *Ahara* leads to different pathologies in the body. Some of the *Ahara* related pathologies aggravate stress responses and leads to ill health. Contaminated food items, artificial food, fast foods, non vegetarian foods etc come under the category of *Rajasika* and *Tamasika Aharas* and lead to vitiation of *Manasika Doshas* leading to stress related pathologies. *Virudha Ahara* behaves as *Visha* and causes gradual *Ojakshaya*. In *Ojakshaya*, the person will suffer from physical and mental problems. *Ojakshaya* aggravates stress responses as it brings down the normal activity of *Indriyas*^[22]. Usage of *Madakari Dravyas* also aggravates stress responses as most of them are *Tama Guna* dominant. *Madakari Dravyas* leads to improper functioning of *Budhi*^[23]. *Vidahi Ahara*, *Vishtambhi Ahara* also leads to disturbances in the normal functioning of *Agni* thereby leading to *Ama* formation. As said earlier *Ama* causes inhibition to different systems and finally leading to *Balabhramsa* and *Anilamootatha*. Both these factors will aggravate stress responses.

7. Ahita viharas

Apart from *Asatmyendriyarthasamyoga* and *Vegadharana*, other daily regimen also have significant role in the aetiopathogenesis of stress among IT professionals. *Avyayama*^[24] (lack of exercise) leads to *Medodushti* (Vitiation of lipid component). Lack of exercise contribute to physical and mental stress as *Vyayama* is essential for *Karmasamarthyas* (Functional excellence) and *Agnideepti* (Normal digestive fire)^[25], *Eka asana* (continuous sitting in the same posture for long time), *Vishamastiti* (improper positioning of limbs and joints) are the important etiological factors which vitiate *Doshas* and leads to related physical stress conditions like repetitive stress injury. Working in air conditioned atmosphere will vitiate *Vata* and *Kapha Doshas* thereby leading to further pathologies.

8. Ahita Acharas

Acharas when executed properly maintains health and happiness. When *Sadvritas* are not followed *Manasika Doshas* will be vitiated leading to stress. Well practiced *Sadvritas* make a work place a happier location. But sometimes conflict of interests in the tensed and competitive job culture leads to abnormal observations of *Sadvritas*. According to Charaka, improper *Sheela*, *Cheshta* and *Achara* etc. are related with the pathogenesis of

Unmada^[26] Lack of time for other activities, absence of true friendships, unhealthy competitions, professional jealousy, less social contact etc. come under the above frame of *Unmada* definition and contributes to stress among IT professionals.

DISCUSSION

Causative factors of stress among IT professionals can be systematically categorized under eight domains. *Asatmyendriyarthasamyoga* leads to specific *Dosha* vitiation through improper contact between *Indriya* and related objects. *Jnanendriya*, *Karmendriya* and *Mana* all are affected here. *Vatakopa* is the main factor to be considered here because *Vata* controls *Mana* and *Mana* is related with *Indriyas*. *Prajnaparadha* is quite common due to compromises in *Dhee*, *Dhriti* and *Smriti* due to high pressure job culture among IT professionals. *Prajnaparadha* causes *Sarvadoshaprakaopa* leading to physical and mental stress. *Parinama* is the time factor associated with once own improper activities. *Vegadharana* especially *Nidra Vegadharanana* and *Kshut Vegadharana* are relevant among IT professionals. Here also *Vata* dominant *Sampraptis* are initiated leading to stress responses. There are certain behavioral restrictions described for maintaining better inter personal relationships. Control over certain emotional factors is mentioned as *Dharaneeya Vegas* in Ayurveda. Lack of control over *Dharaneeya Vegas* like anger, jealous, ego etc leads to stress. Nature of food and food culture also influences stress pathology. Certain food items and food culture lead to abnormal physiological reactions in the digestive system and nervous system thereby aggravating stress. *Ahita Viharas* like lack of exercise, continuous sitting without a break etc also initiate negative events in the body and mind. Continuous practice of *Ahita Acharas* lead to *Unmada* related *Sampraptis* in the individuals which are similar to common stress related mental conditions.

CONCLUSION

Better understood problems can be better solved. Understanding and unveiling *Nidanas* behind the *Samprapti* of stress opens new paths of solutions in stress management. According to Ayurveda stress can be defined as any *Nija* or *Agantu* factor making either a *Satmya* or *Asatmya* type of response in biological factors like *Tridoshas*, *Manasika Doshas*, *Dhatus*, *Malas* and *Srotases* and may lead to various *Sareerika* or *Manasika* problems. Computer related, Work related and personal factors behave as important *Nidanas* in the *Samprapti* of Stress among IT professionals. Scientifically these *Nidanas* can be comfortably placed under following classical domains. *Asatmyendriyarthasamyoga*, *Prajnaparadha*, *Parinama*, Suppression of *Adharaneeya Vegas*, practice of *Adharaneeya Vegas*, *Ahita Aharas*, *Ahita Viharas* and *Ahita Acharas* are the common causative domains of stress among IT professionals. A more scientific stress prevention and management can be formulated by addressing the above mentioned *Nidanas* because avoiding of *Nidanas* itself is the treatment.

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