

Impact of Work Stress on Employee Performance: A Study among the Executive Officers of State Universities in Sri Lanka

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Abstract - Stress is a one of the challenges that employees experience in a work place almost everywhere in the world. In the world today, work is the primary cause for stress in any kind of job since it is demanding and changing in the competitive world for its employees to perform their job effectively and efficient manner. Work stress may attribute to employee's life imbalance which may tend to depression and conflicts such as workplace conflict, role conflict, role ambiguity and workload. Main purpose of the present study was to explore the impact of work stress on employee performance among executive officers of State Universities in Sri Lanka. Five (5) stress factors; such as role ambiguity, underutilization of skills, work overload, organizational climate and relationships in organization and personality factors were identified as the independent variables as per literature review. Selected method for conducting the research was survey method. All the executive officers attached to state universities (17 conventional universities functioning under University Grants Commission) comprised the population for the study and convenient sampling technique was used. Primary data was gathered through self-administered questionnaire with 5 point Likert scale range of strongly agree (5) as highest range and strongly disagree (1) as lowest range and the questionnaire was distributed as a google form via WhatsApp groups and emails. 77 responses from executive officers were collected and analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, logistic regression analysis (with ANOVA) and Cronbach Alpha. As per reliability statistics, it indicates that data set is more reliable (Cronbach alpha value = 0.9292) in the study. The level of stress on employee performance as per respondents' feedback was identified that the almost all the respondents expressed their view as neutral (neither agree nor disagree). It interprets that stress is somewhat ordinary fact and executive officers in the State Universities in Sri Lanka may not consider the stress as an influencing factor that affect their work performance. Correlation Analysis results of the study shows strong correlation ($r=0.891$) between work stress and employee performance at significance level of 0.05. As per regression analysis, stress factors of role ambiguity ($p=0.036$) and personality factors ($p=0.002$) have significant impact on employee performance while there is no significant relationship between other 3 work stress factors: underutilization of skills ($p=0.941$), work overload ($p=0.668$) and organizational climate and relationships in organization (0.500) and employee performance.

Keywords: Work Stress, Employee Performance, Role Ambiguity, Work Overload, Personality Factors, Underutilization of Skills, Organizational Climate and Relationships in Organization

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is a universal element which individuals in every walk of life have to face (Shahid *et al.*, 2011). In the world today, work is the primary cause for stress in any kind of job since it is demanding and changing in the competitive world. According to Ratnawat and Jha (2014) stress is resulting into avoidable problems as it is misunderstood and misinterpreted everywhere and therefore, it is needed to understand what stress is before managing it.

Stress has been defined in different ways over the years in the world. According to Ratnawat and Jha (2014) stress is a "psychological and physical state that results when the resources of the individual are not sufficient to cope with the demands and pressures of the situation". Therefore, stress can be simply defined as it is a condition where a person experiences a gap between the present and desired state.

Sengupta (2007) briefed that stress is not always negative and it depends on how we take it even though negative side of the stress is much emphasized in the research. The stress of creative, exciting, successful work is valuable while failure, humiliation/infection is harmful. According to Lawrence (1995) occupational stress is a striking and costly issue and which become a challenge for the organizations in managing work stress in order to reduce health-care costs and improve productivity. Work stress may lead to increased health problems which may tend to increase rate of employee turnover, absenteeism, more accidents and poor job satisfaction and poor performance. Accordingly, work stress has become a burning issue in an organization to be addressed by the management in order for its employees to perform their job effectively and efficient manner.

Work stress may attribute to employee's life imbalance which may tend to depression and conflicts such as workplace conflict, role conflict, role ambiguity and workload (Jalagat, 2017). Meneze (2005) emphasized that work stress has become a challenge for an organization which results in employee performance in the form of low productivity, increased absenteeism, and other employee related problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse, hypertension and multitude of circulatory problems. Stress

is salient feature among employees and which could be reduced by improving its working conditions and the quality of benefits in the organizations (Seibt *et al.*, 2008). Robbins and Sanghi (2006) mentioned that even though stress is typically discussed in the negative context, however, it has a positive impact which may offers potential gain to the organization too. According to Rubina *et al.*, (2008) the absence of stress is death, however it still has disparaging impact on employee performance.

In previous studies, the impact of work stress on employee performance has been broadly investigated with special reference to banking sector, health sector, private sector companies/universities and academic staff in universities. Therefore, present study was aimed at executive officers of State Universities in Sri Lanka since they are highly coping with stressful situations as of the nature of their job. Accordingly main purpose of the present study was to explore the impact of work stress on employee performance among executive officers of State Universities in Sri Lanka.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Work Stress

Stress is defined by Robbins and Sanghi (2006) as it is a vigorous condition in which an individual is encountered with an opportunity, constraints, or demand related to what he or she wishes and the outcome received are both uncertain and important. Stress is a rising issue in organizations and frequently causes adverse effects on performance. Beehr (1976) expressed stress as “anything about an organizational role that produces adverse consequences for the individual”. Kahn and Quinn (1970) elaborated that stress as the outcome of disguise of the assigned work role that triggered detrimental effect on individual and it is a harmful factor in the work environment. Work stress makes harmful effects on health of an individual. David (1998) found that work stress is a harmful and emotional response which may occur at the time of requirements of the job unmatched with the capabilities, resources or needs of the employees.

B. Stress Factors/Causes

Lazarus (1991) emphasized that stress occurs when the extent of the stressor exceeds the individual’s capacity to cope. According to Sengupta (2007), stress may create physiological, behavioural or psychological effects. Physiologically, prolonged stress increases the tension and affects the immune system. Behaviourally, effects of stress may cause some people to drink even at work place or outside or heavily smoking, neglecting exercises or taking proper nutrition or addicted to television or computer. Psychologically, stress may decrease the ability to work or cooperate with other people, inability of making good decisions and it’s a part of anxiety and depression. According to Anderson (2003) stress occurs in employees of an organization due to work to family conflicts.

According to Franch and Caplan (1972); Margolis *et al.*, (1974), eleven (11) factors have been identified as the stress causes such as overload, role vagueness, role conflict, responsibility for people, participation, lack of feedback, keeping up with sudden technological change, career growth, recent episodic events, being an innovative role and organizational structure and environment. Work Overload means works in excess or workload beyond one’s capability; Role conflict-subordinates/supervisors create contradictory demand on individuals; Role ambiguity-role insufficient information to perform worker’s role (power, authority and duties related to the job); Responsibility for people-responsibility towards people, job security, Participation - extent to which one’s influence over decisions relevant to one’s professional development; job well-being - lack of information on job performance, Lack of feedback; Career development - Impact of job insecurity, let down ambition and status dissimilarity; Keeping up with rapid technological change, Being an innovative role - making changes in the organization in an innovative way; Recent episodic events - some stressful life events, such as divorce and bereavement.

According to study of Wilkes *et al.*, (1998) time constraints and work overload are the main factors that cause stress among community nurses. Role ambiguity is one of the trigger aspects that affect job performance (Beehr *et al.*, 2000). Role ambiguity arises when an employee is having lack of information to perform his/her role in the job successfully and it may lead to negative outcomes such as a sense of hopelessness, a sense of hopelessness, anxiety and depression and reducing confidence which ultimately negatively affect to his/her job performance.

Work conflicts, resource inadequacy, work overload and work ambiguity has been identified by Khan *et al.*, (1964) as stress factors. This measure describes the employee perception of job stress using 15 items on stressful occurrences and role burden and this evaluates psychological interactions of stress such as; feeling of overburdened with work, not having adequate resources and tools to complete assigned tasks and incapable of handling all the assigned works.

In the study of Parikh *et al.*, (2004), it has identified four (4) stress factors which negatively affects the performance in the workplace such as relationships in work (quality of relationships with subordinates, colleagues and supervisors), work environment (inadequate holiday pay, hours of taste, work & safety in the work environment) and the role conflict and the organizational structure and climate (communication policy, organizational culture, lack of input in the decision making).

Jalagat (2017) in his study identified three (3) stress factors such as role ambiguity, underutilization of skills and work overload. Role ambiguity arises when an employee is asked to perform a duty without clear instructions and no clear responsibility assigned to the employee. Underutilization of

skills refers to skills of an employee which do not utilize at optimum level and in other terms it is underemployment of workers who is having high skills but working in a low skilled and low wage jobs. Work overload refers to incapability of an employee to perform the job due to excessive responsibilities and unbearable work load beyond the capacity of the employee.

Ratnawat (2014) proposed a model to study the relationship between job stress and job performance of employees by taking 35 variables under mainly seven (7) stress factor categories identified as "Occupational stress inducers (OSI)". Such as OSI I - Intrinsic to job/contextual factors (too much work, too less work, time pressures, poor working conditions, long working hours, rewards and too many decisions), OSI II - Role in the organizations (role ambiguity, role conflict, job insecurity and lack of managerial support), OSI III - Career factors (under promotion, fear of retirement, over promotion, sense of trapped), OSI IV - Organizational climate (organizational structure, lack of communication, uncertainty, office politics and loss of identity) OSI V - Relationships in organization (poor relations with boss and colleagues, personality conflict), OSI VI - Intrinsic to individuals/Personality factors (inability to cope with change, interpersonal problems) and OSI VII - Miscellaneous factors (if any).

C. Employee Performance

Performance of an employee at a workplace is utmost important for an organization irrespective of all the other factors and conditions. Major asset of each and every organization is its employees. According to Armstrong & Baron (1998), good performance of the employees has an advantage towards its organizational performance in a good way in an organization. Ultimate success or failure of an institution is mostly determined by the performance of their employees.

According to Scullen *et al.*, (2000), he describes job performance in four phases, such as general performance, technical performance, human performance and administrative performance. Rubina *et al.*, (2008) explained job performance in relation to three factors such as, effort, skill and the nature of work conditions. Skills are associated with the knowledge, competencies and abilities of the employees in an organization; efforts refer to the degree of motivation of the employee towards completing the job; and the nature of job conditions refer to the degree of lodging of work conditions in enabling the employee's performance. Jalagat (2016) states that "employee job performance is referred with output that a person contributed to the organization and the organization may perceive it as productive or counterproductive".

Deshinger (2003) identified different aspects of employee performance such as productivity, job satisfaction, absenteeism, decision making abilities, creativity,

organizational skills, reliability and alertness which is affected by work stress.

D. Impact of Work Stress on Employee Performance

Shah *et al.*, (2012) in their study found that stress has significant impact on company and its employee's performance and terribly affects on health of employees. Whether big or small the size of the organization, stress exists in every organization and workplace stress has significant impact on its employee's performance (Anderson, 2003). Work for long hours reduces employees urge for performing better since employees feel high level of stress about time (Rose, 2003). According to Stamper & Johlke (2003) management support helps to decrease work related stress in employees.

Jamal (1984) studied the relationship between job stress and job performance between managers and blue-collar employees in a Canadian firm and he found a negative linear relationship between job stress and job performance. In the study of Ahmed & Ramzan (2013) which was conducted among employees of banking sector in Pakistan, it was found that both job stress and job performance is negatively correlated. In this study job stress had a negative relation with job performance and when stress arises it affects the performance of employees negatively that is lower the stress it increases the performance. Stress is necessary for increasing the performance of employees however, it is up to a certain level and after that level it is starting to decrease the performance due to high level of work stress.

According to Treven (2005) the loss of focus, enthusiasm in the works and the tension are the main cause of stress and which increase the level of risk and affects negatively on employee's work performance and the accomplishment of organizational goals. Imrab *et al.*, (2013) in their study confirmed that in the banking sector, job stress significantly decreased the performance of employees and therefore, there is negative correlation between work stress and employee performance. Most of the researchers have found negative relationship between work stress and employee performance in their research studies.

In the study of Jalagat (2017) conducted in the Petroleum Development Oman, it has found strong correlation of job stress on employee performance while there is significant relationship between work stress factors of underutilization of skills and work overload and employee performance. However, role ambiguity has no significant relationship with employee performance even though it is contradictory with research literature. Employee stress up to some extent is having positive impact on productivity and alertness in the workplace. However, high level of stress may cause insomnia and depression and ultimately stress may be ended up with tremendous health issues to the employee and it will affect on both employee and organizational performance to decline (Huff *et al.*, 1992).

E. Conceptual Framework

Present study investigates the level impact of work stress on employee performance. In the research literature, many factors have been identified as the causes of stress by many

researchers. Accordingly, for the present study, following factors were identified as the work stress factors (as per literature review) as the independent variables which cause stress to investigate the impact of work stress on job performance.

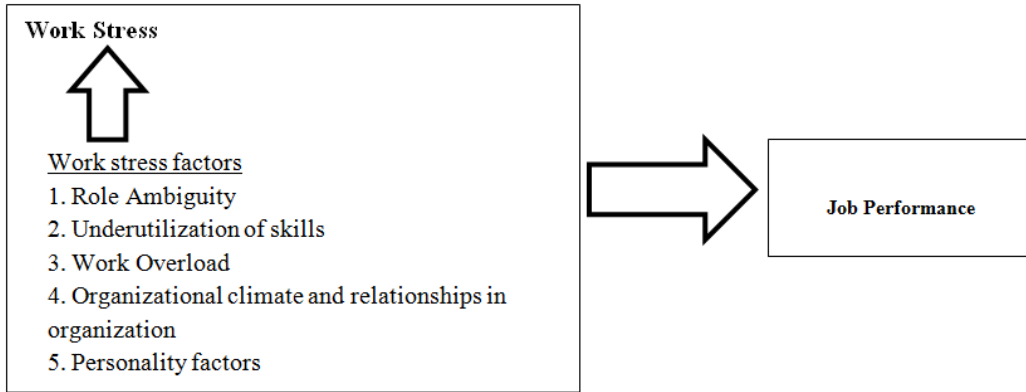


Fig. 1 Impact of Work Stress on Job Performance

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

Selected method for conducting the research was survey method to determine the impact of work stress on employee performance among Executive officers of the state universities in Sri Lanka.

B. Sampling

In Sri Lanka, there are 17 conventional universities (state universities) as per University Grants Commission website. All the executive officers attached to state universities comprised the population for the study. Convenient sampling technique was used for this study.

C. Data Collection

Primary data was gathered through self-administered questionnaire with 5 point Likert scale range of strongly agree (5) as highest range and strongly disagree (1) as lowest range. The questionnaire comprises 3 sections, section 1 represents statements for demographic variables; section 2 for work stress determinants as per research literature and section 3 for employee performance. Questionnaire was prepared as a google form and shared with the WhatsApp group of executive officers and via their official emails.

D. Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics which is grand mean, correlation analysis, logistic regression analysis (with ANOVA) and Cronbach Alpha.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of information gathered through survey questionnaire (77 responses collected) is presented below using the SPSS statistical tools.

A. Descriptive Analysis

TABLE I LEVEL OF WORK STRESS ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

S. No.	Stress Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Role Ambiguity	2.9033	.85181
2	Underutilization of skills	3.0087	.86514
3	Work Overload	3.4968	.80754
4	Organizational climate and relationships in organization	3.0965	.40169
5	Personality factors	2.5584	.75535

1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree

Above Table I shows the level of stress on employee performance as per respondents' feedback in terms of five (5) stress factors of role ambiguity, underutilization of skills, work overload, organizational climate and relationships in organization and personality factors as per the present study. As per the overall results of descriptive analysis, weighted mean for all the stress factors is closed to 3.00 which is reflected those respondents neither agree nor disagree that above stress factors affect their work performance. This result interprets that stress is somewhat ordinary fact and Executive officers in the State Universities in Sri Lanka may not consider the stress as an influencing factor that affect their work performance. This research finding is supported with the previous research study of Jalagat (2017).

B. Correlation and Regression Analysis

To determine the relationship between work stress and employee performance Pearson correlation coefficient was used in this study (r=0 – no relationship, r=0.3 – weak relationship, r=0.5 – moderate relationship, r=0.7 or above – strong relationship).

TABLE II CORRELATION BETWEEN WORK STRESS AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Stress	Correlation	Employee Performance
Job Stress	Pearson Correlation	0.891
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	77

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As per table II, r=0.891 and it shows strong correlation between work stress and employee performance at significance level of 0.05. Since P value is 0.000 (p<0.05) it indicates significant relationship between work stress and job performance. Finding of the present study (there is significant relationship between variables) is supported by previous research studies conducted by Jalagat (2017), Jamal (1984), Mead (2000), Ornelas *et al.*, (2003), Rose (2003), Stamper *et al.*, (2003).

TABLE III RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK STRESS FACTORS AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	3.197 ^a	0.795	0.792	0.150706

TABLE V COEFFICIENTS ANALYSIS

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Term	B	Std. Error	T	Sig.
(Constant)		3.1729	0.0208	152.20	0.000
	Role Ambiguity	-0.0270	0.0145	-1.87	0.036
	Underutilization of skills	-0.00049	0.00658	-0.07	0.941
	Work Overload	0.00331	0.00767	0.43	0.668
	Organizational climate and relationships in organization	-0.0078	0.0116	-0.68	0.500
	Personality factors	0.1148	0.0354	3.24	0.002

- a. *Work Stress Factors:* (Constant), Role Ambiguity, Work Overload, Underutilization of skills, Organizational climate and relationships in organization, Personality factors.
- b. *Dependant Variable:* Employee Performance.

Table V above coefficient analysis shows that work stress factors (independent variables) of role ambiguity (p=0.036) and personality factors (p=0.002) are having significant impact on employee performance. However, there is no significant relationship between other 3 work stress factors: underutilization of skills (p=0.941), work overload (p=0.668) and organizational climate and relationships in organization (0.500) and employee performance. Finding of

- a. *Work Stress Factors:* (Constant), Role Ambiguity, Work Overload, Underutilization of skills, Organizational climate and relationships in organization, Personality factors.
- b. *Dependant Variable:* Employee Performance.

Table III depicts the results of regression analysis of the work stress variables (role ambiguity, underutilization of skills, work overload, organizational climate and relationships in organization and personality factors) and the employee performance. As per R² = 0.795, it shows good fit of the data set used for the study and strong relationship of variables. It is further interpreted that 79.5% of the variation of the employee performance could be explained by five work stress factors.

TABLE IV ANOVA ANALYSIS

ANOVA ^b					
Particulars	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P
Regression	5	0.150706	0.150706	286.57	0.000 ^a
Residual	71	0.038917	0.000526		
Total	76	0.189622			

As per Table IV, results of ANOVA analysis are evident that use of regression ANOVA is statistical with F value of 286.57 and its P value (significance) of 0.000. Similar results of regression found in the previous research studies of Shahid *et al.*, (2011), Jalagat (2017), Ahmed & Ramzan (2013) to support the results of present study.

having significant impact of role ambiguity on employee performance is supported by the previous research studies (Lankau *et al.*, 2006 and Michie & Williams, 2003).

TABLE VI RELIABILITY STATISTICS

Cronbach Alpha	0.9292
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As per table VI, value of the Cronbach Alpha is above 0.8 and it shows high level of internal consistency and questionnaire is more reliable to measure both independent (role ambiguity, underutilization of skills, work overload, organizational climate and relationships in organization and personality factors) and dependant variable (Employee performance) of the study.

V. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to determine the impact of work stress on employee performance among executive officers of State Universities in Sri Lanka. Five (5) stress factors; such as role ambiguity, underutilization of skills, work overload, organizational climate and relationships in organization and personality factors were identified for the present study as per literature review. As per reliability statistics, it indicates that data set is more reliable (Cronbach alpha value = 0.9292) in the study. As per respondents' feedback, the level of stress on employee performance was identified that the almost all the respondents expressed their view as neutral (neither agree nor disagree). It interprets that stress is somewhat ordinary fact and executive officers in the State Universities in Sri Lanka may not consider the stress as an influencing factor that affect their work performance. Correlation Analysis results of the study shows strong correlation ($r=0.891$) between work stress and employee performance at significance level of 0.05. As per results of regression analysis, the stress factors of role ambiguity ($p=0.036$) and personality factors ($p=0.002$) have significant impact on employee performance while there is no significant relationship found in other 3 work stress factors of underutilization of skills ($p=0.941$), work overload ($p=0.668$) and organizational climate and relationships in organization (0.500) and employee performance.

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