

Workplace Stress Management among Healthcare Employees

Nurul Nadia Zainal & Ku Suhaila Ku Johari

Faculty of Education, National University of Malaysia

Email: kusuhaila@ukm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i12/20296> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i12/20296

Published Date: 27 December 2023

Abstract

This study aims to explore stress management in the workplace among healthcare employees through a group counseling approach. Furthermore, the study also aims to identify the causes of stress and its effects on daily life while working. The study employs a qualitative method through field research. The study sample consists of five respondents who are healthcare staff from a health clinic. Sampling was done randomly. Interview results have been transcribed verbatim, and conclusions are drawn based on thematic analysis. The study findings indicate that the work-related stress of healthcare employees depends on their understanding of stress, their ability to identify the types of stress, awareness of understanding stress effects, and gaining insight into stress coping strategies. This study has implications for mental health and job performance among healthcare staff. The researcher suggests that management or human resources take proactive steps by providing exposure through various courses and appropriate training, especially related to job stress management, to cultivate productive and innovative staff.

Keywords: Stress Management, Group Counseling, Healthcare

Introduction

The development of the era of globalization highlights the need for healthcare organizations to be better prepared to face challenges in maintaining their competitive advantage. Various innovations and improvements are being introduced, requiring the commitment of all parties to address various issues. An organization may overlook its most valuable resource: its human capital. This oversight may have led to the existence of various problems within the organization.

The issues that exist among healthcare staff in the healthcare setting include problems related to shift work, punctuality when arriving for work, coworker absenteeism, and job dissatisfaction, which are common in contemporary organizations. These issues contribute to workplace stress. Workplace stress has an impact on the overall performance of the organization as it involves the performance of the staff.

Job stress is pressure that arises directly or indirectly from the nature of the job itself. This stress affects an individual mentally, physically, or emotionally and is a significant factor that can impact a person's overall quality of life. When facing stressors such as an unharmonious work environment, inadequate rewards, a hectic lifestyle, and significant responsibilities, individuals may experience negative reactions to the stress.

When an individual experiences workplace stress, it can lead to various symptoms that affect their physiology, psychology, and work-related behaviors. Stress is a job-related issue that should be addressed, as it can have detrimental effects on health and contribute to chronic conditions such as hypertension, heart problems, and other high-risk diseases.

Research Problems

Job stress can lead to changes in behavior, thinking, and emotions. According to Cooper and Robertson (1987), the more complex an organization, the higher the sources of stress. The sources of stress come from various aspects of work, such as job management characteristics, organizational relationships, workload, organizational structure and climate, job characteristics, and more.

According to Nadia (2021), for Kuala Lumpur Hospital (HKL), out of nearly 2,000 employees who underwent online or face-to-face mental health screenings from March 2020 to July 2021, approximately 45 to 50 percent of them experienced emotional disturbances, including mild to severe stress and extreme fatigue.

Various issues can be associated with the mental health problems faced by healthcare staff. These issues arise when they are required to work overtime, face high workloads, and have their vacations frozen due to staff shortages. This has a significant impact on their mental health.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to identify the factors that influence workplace stress among healthcare employees in Peringgit health clinics. The specific objectives formulated for this study are:

1. Identifying the types and exploring the causes of job stress
2. Exploring the effects of job stress
3. Exploring coping strategies for job stress among healthcare clinic staff

Problem Statement

Mental health issues have become the second-highest health concern in Malaysia after heart disease. A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that mental health disorders are poised to replace cardiovascular diseases as a leading determinant of an individual's ability to continue working or otherwise (Berita Harian, 2020).

Workplace stress, in general, often stems from responsibilities or task loads that do not align with an individual's knowledge or skills, making it challenging for them to cope. Various other issues can arise when dealing with the work environment. Stress can become even more severe when individuals lack support from coworkers or management, and they have no control over the sources of stress they encounter.

Literature Review

Based on the Oxford Dictionary definition, stress is the feeling of worry that comes from problems in a person's life. Stress is also a reaction to one's environment and surrounding

conditions. Sometimes, a person may experience stress due to overthinking, having too many problems in life, or needing to complete a task beyond their capabilities. Long-term worries, such as illness, daily hassles like traffic congestion, and individuals in one's surroundings, can also contribute to the causes of stress (Ishak & Syafruddin, 2021).

Workplace stress is a chronic issue that is frequently discussed in every organization. This problem exists in almost all organizations, including large ones in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan. The issue of workplace stress needs to be addressed effectively because it can impact an organization's performance and productivity. A report issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) predicts that workplace stress could become a major health problem for humans by the year 2021. In Malaysia, there were more than 21,000 employees who took early retirement due to workplace stress in 2018 (Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services, Cuepacs). The key point to emphasize is whether employees can address this issue before it worsens (Ishak & Syafruddin, 2021).

In organizational structures like the healthcare sector, stress is a significant psychological condition closely related to an individual's job performance, health, and productivity (Rohany & Fatimah, 2006). Essentially, job stress can impact the quality of an organization's performance and can have adverse effects on the well-being of the employees themselves.

According to research statistics from the National University of Malaysia Medical Center conducted between 2007 and 2009 in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, it was found that a significant number of civil servants experienced workplace stress. Police officers ranked first, firefighters second, teachers third, nurses fourth, and medical officers fifth in terms of the prevalence of workplace stress (Aris et al., 2012).

Various factors contribute to the stress and discomfort felt by public servants. Among the common triggers of stress among public servants are supervisors, colleagues, the home environment, and social relationships involving activities outside of office hours (Aris et al., 2012). These factors make them feel bored, lazy, demotivated, have low self-esteem, and struggle to perform their tasks effectively. As a result of the high levels of stress experienced by public servants, it can also affect their behavior, leading to antagonistic traits that can impact job performance within an organization (Amran et al., 2012).

Based on previous studies, the aspects of stress and an individual's well-being are associated with the development of an organization. According to Casey (2011), he states that the relationship between stress and well-being is positively correlated because the level of stress experienced by an individual affects their long-term well-being.

A conducive and positive work environment strongly contributes to individual well-being because this factor alone brings many benefits to all aspects (Casey, 2001). Furthermore, according to Aisyah et al. (2012), this condition is also linked to job satisfaction, which promotes psychological well-being. Good and clear relationships and communication have opened many advantages for an organization to develop positively in all aspects of life.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative approach, which is an approach aimed at understanding the experiences of the respondents. According to John (1999), the fundamental purpose of qualitative research is to uncover and provide a clear picture of the significance of a particular matter to individuals. Therefore, this study will focus on the stress experienced by healthcare

staff at Peringgit Health Clinic to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives and experiences related to workplace stress.

This study is conducted at the Peringgit Health Clinic, located in the Central District of Melaka, Malaysia. The rationale for selecting this clinic as the research site is that healthcare workers require attention in both emotional and physical aspects, given that they frequently interact with patients and a diverse range of individuals, along with facing various challenges in their daily lives.

The study sample comprises male and female healthcare personnel aged approximately 25 to 60 years at the Peringgit Health Clinic, Melaka. To obtain the study sample, the researcher employs a purposive sampling method. Through this method, the sample is identified by focusing on individuals who specifically face stress-related issues.

Findings

The research findings indicate that there are employees who are aware of the workplace stress issues they face. There are four themes, namely: i) having an understanding of stress, ii) being able to identify the types of stress, iii) awareness of understanding the effects of stress, and iv) gaining insight into coping strategies for stress. These themes were found to play a crucial role in contributing to the mental well-being of healthcare personnel.

- i. Types of Job Stress and Exploring the Causes of Job Stress

Table 1

Respondents' Ability to Define Stress and Causes of Job Stress

Respondents	Interview Excerpt
Respondent 1	<i>Work stress that I know of is related to dissatisfaction while on duty. Like when we have problems that we can't solve on our own. Senior staff members always get exceptions, and if there's overtime, they are the ones who get it. Even though other people also want to do overtime. The workplace is the same, but the seniors get light-duty roles, and us juniors have to do heavy work most of the time.</i>
Respondent 2	<i>For me, workplace stress during work is more about emotions because of the unfair management towards the staff. Staff members will keep their feelings to themselves, as they fear being transferred to another workplace if they complain. Task distribution is also not equal. If you want to give overtime to the staff, it should be distributed equally. That would be fair.</i>
Respondent 3	<i>I feel stressed because my colleagues are not satisfied with me, and they mock and insult me, showing a lack of respect. I have to endure all sorts of things, but I just stay patient.</i>
Respondent 4	<i>Workplace stress occurs when the boss delegates tasks to subordinates even though those tasks are originally their responsibility. It's stressful... bearing someone else's workload. While others can work at ease, we have to take on other people's tasks.</i>
Respondent 5	<i>Unequal task allocation, or in other words, favoritism towards certain employees. It's stressful because our names are the only ones that come up for extra duties. But we also have husbands and children at home.</i>

The feedback from the employees regarding job stress and its causes indicates that they have a basic understanding of job stress. All five respondents have shown that they comprehend the issues related to stress and the causes of workplace stress, which stem from various factors, whether related to tasks, colleagues or external factors.

ii. Effects of Job Stress

Respondents	Interview Excerpt
Respondent 1	<i>I'm usually okay, but I feel sorry for those who are not. When working, emotions tend to take over.</i>
Respondent 2	<i>The effect is that people become unwilling to help each other. We become more selfish when working. It's all because of the management.</i>
Respondent 3	<i>I'm very sad. But I know people don't like me, but I have to work to provide money for my children's education. Sometimes, I feel like I can't say anything, afraid that people will get angry with me.</i>
Respondent 4	<i>As long as I can endure it, I just do it. Sometimes, working at the clinic is busy, and I have to do wound care for patients, and then I have to deal with the supervisor. The burden is on me. I feel tired. I have no motivation to work.</i>
Respondent 5	<i>I really feel stressed, especially now that I'm pregnant. When I work under stress, I get easily irritated when talking to people. Everything just doesn't feel right, especially when there are many patients. It's getting on my nerves.</i>

Based on the interview findings, all the employees have different stress issues. This has an impact on their daily lives while at work. The research findings confirm that job stress affects the respondents.

iii. Coping Strategies for Job Stress Among Healthcare Personnel

Respondents	Interview Excerpt
Respondent 1	<i>It's a management problem. There's not much we can do. Management needs to change.</i>
Respondent 2	<i>If possible, management should distribute overtime equally. Task allocation should also be fair, without favoritism.</i>
Respondent 3	<i>My task issues are fine. I just feel like there should be someone who advises the person who likes to insult and ridicule me.</i>
Respondent 4	<i>I think we need to find new supervisors. Conduct courses for these supervisors so they understand their roles better and not just delegate work without involvement.</i>
Respondent 5	<i>Management should be fair to all employees. Make it mandatory for all staff to do overtime to avoid burdening other staff.</i>

Furthermore, the findings regarding coping strategies show that the majority of the respondents are hoping for changes in management. They hope for changes that would

alleviate the work-related stress. This indicates that the respondents are aware of the job stress issues they face.

Discussion and Recommendations

The aim of the initial counseling session is to focus on the exploration phase and identify the definition of stress, types of stress, and the causes of stress. The research findings have shown that the majority of the staff at the Peringggit Health Clinic, Melaka, have knowledge and awareness of job stress issues. These findings are in line with the research by Hassan (2018), which states that individuals experiencing stress at the workplace tend to have a higher tendency to face depression compared to individuals without stress issues.

Among the stressors faced by the staff are the stress from workload, the stress of having to work overtime, stress from superiors, and stress from colleagues. This is further reinforced by the researcher Sabuti (2011), who found that factors such as role ambiguity, role conflict, and workload were unrelated variables that had a connection in promoting job performance, but role ambiguity was the main factor of job stress on employee performance.

According to Groot and Brink (1999), job satisfaction decreases as working hours increase. This further strengthens the opinion of the respondents regarding their issues of taking on other people's tasks and frequently working overtime. Their emotions will fluctuate over time due to the workload they have to bear.

Furthermore, this opinion is also supported by Cooper and Marshall (1976, as cited in Rohany, 2003), who identified seven types of stressors in a career: intrinsic factors, organizational roles, career development, interpersonal relationships in the workplace, organizational climate and structure, external organizational factors, and individual factors themselves. This emphasizes the importance of a conducive work environment in providing job satisfaction and harmony.

The impact of the job stress faced by the respondents is that they feel demotivated but not to the extent of wanting to quit their jobs. This shows that their self-motivation and emotional intelligence are high. It does not have a negative influence on them to the point of succumbing to the stress they face.

Stress is a significant concern in the field of occupational safety and health, according to Zafir Mohd Makhbul, Nor Liza Abdullah, and Noor Azuan Hashim (2013). They revealed that workplace stress issues are often related to the organization's expenses and productivity. If employees frequently take sick leave, do not perform their duties effectively, or fail to meet the performance standards set by their superiors, it affects the organization as well because it is burdened with unfinished tasks.

The inability of employees to control their emotions and stress can lead to burnout with negative consequences (Saidi, et al., 2016). The results of this study show that the respondents are skilled at managing their emotions. They maintain a positive outlook on every problem they face.

Research Suggestions

Absolutely, promoting mental health awareness and taking steps to address workplace stress is crucial for the well-being of employees. Management at all levels should prioritize the mental health of their staff to prevent the risk of depression and burnout. By taking these measures, management can create a healthier, more supportive work environment that prioritizes the mental health and well-being of its employees. This, in turn, can lead to improved job satisfaction, productivity, and overall organizational success.

In 2017, there were 20,000 civil servants who retired early due to workplace stress. This is a rather concerning figure. In general, work-related stress affects productivity and organizational performance, and the number of those experiencing stress is quite high. Referring to this figure, it can be seen that a high workload can lead to employees feeling stressed about their situation.

If the issue is caused by management, try to have a face-to-face discussion and seek a solution. Many problems stem from superiors who burden subordinates with their work. They may exploit subordinates for personal gain. Report the issue to higher-ups if it cannot be resolved at the departmental level.

Every employee should practice work-life balance. Set life goals, prioritize, and separate work from home. Leave work-related matters at the workplace. Don't burden yourself with work issues that never seem to end.

In addition, try to identify your support system. It could be your partner, friends, or family members. They are the people you can turn to when you need to vent your stress. Besides sharing your problems, you can also exchange thoughts and learn from the experiences of others. Furthermore, try to change your perception of stress. Instead of viewing it as a burden, it's better to consider it as a challenge for yourself. Learn to accept criticism gracefully from others.

Therefore, employers should adopt an open and communicative approach with their employees when there are concerns or dissatisfactions. Provide incentives to those who deserve them to boost motivation and self-esteem. Foster a culture of mutual respect and effective communication in the workplace. This will have a positive impact on the working environment's harmony.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows that healthcare staff face various types of job-related stress and have a good awareness of workplace stress issues. They can identify various types of stress and the causes related to workload, unfair management, interactions with colleagues, and other factors. This awareness is crucial as it enables employees to take appropriate actions to manage job-related stress and maintain their mental well-being.

The study also demonstrates that job-related stress can affect employees' emotions and motivation. Even though they can manage their emotions well, stress still impacts their levels of enthusiasm and motivation at work.

The high workload and management issues have, to some extent, caused healthcare staff to be affected by job-related stress, which may potentially lead to depression. Besides waiting for changes to occur, healthcare staff should be aware of the potential effects they may face if they fail to cope with job-related stress.

Therefore, in summary, this study has addressed all research questions and achieved the research objectives that were set. The study's respondents essentially possess knowledge of job-related stress because they are the frontliners in the Ministry of Health of Malaysia who work in various situations. Therefore, the researcher believes that with high motivation, individuals or employees will be more positive in facing stress.

References

- Amran, H. (2012). Perwatakan Antagonis Dalam Organisasi Perkhidmatan Awam dan Implikasinya ke atas Prestasi Kerja. *Jurnal Psikologi dan kaunseling Perkhidmatan Awam Malaysia*, 7, 279-290.
- Casey, L. (2011). *Stress and Wellbeing in Australia in 2011: A state of the nation survey*. The Australian Psychological Society.
- Nadia, N. (2021). 70,000 Petugas Kesehatan Alami Gangguan Emosi Sejak Pandemi. *Berita Harian*, Retrieved From; <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2021/09/861302/70000-petugas-kesehatan-alami-gangguan-emosi-sejak-pandemik>
- Hassan, N. N. N. (2018). Kesan modul terapi realiti (MTR) terhadap penghargaan sendiri dan kemurungan mangsa buli. PhD Tesis. Universiti Sains Malaysia: Penang.
- Kasan, A., Hajari, F. H. M., Jaafar, J., & Yusoff, N. (2012). Stres dalam perkhidmatan awam: Impaknya kepada prestasi dan kesejahteraan pegawai awam. *Jurnal Psikologi dan Kaunseling Perkhidmatan Awam Malaysia*, 7, 1-34.
- Makhbul, Z. M., Abdullah, N. L., & Hashim, N. A. (2013). Stres di tempat kerja: isu global dalam melestarikan organisasi. *e-BANGI*, 8(1), 19.
- Nasir, R. (2003). *Isu-isu kaunseling & perkembangan kerjaya*. Utusan Pub. & Distributors Sdn Bhd.
- Nasir, R., & Omar, F. (2006). *Kesejahteraan Manusia: Perspektif Psikologi*. Kajian Tekanan Kerja Dan Kesehatan Pekerja. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor.
- Panatik, S., Rajab, A., Shaari, R., Shah, I. M., Rahman, H. A., & Badri, S. Z. (2012, September). Impact of work-related stress on well-being among academician in Malaysian Research University. In *International conference on education and management innovation* (Vol. 30, pp. 37-41).