

Effects of Job Stress on Employee Performance Level in the Health Sector of South Africa

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ABSTRACT: *The study investigates the effects of job stress on employee job performance. Quantitative design was employed for the study. The target population comprised of all employees in the selected health institution namely South Rand hospital and Nelson Mandela Children's hospital in South Africa. A sample size of 250 respondents was used to gather data. Simple linear regression and descriptive statistics were used as the main data analysis tool. Findings from the study revealed varied causes of stress among health workers in South Africa. Poor working conditions, new technology, work overload and role conflict were the causes revealed by the study. The study indicated a direct effect of job stress on job performance. It revealed a significant negative relationship which means as job stress increases as a result of the workload, employees (health workers and administrators) performance decreases significantly. The study recommended that management must identify the possible causes of work-related stress employees' face in the process of performing their duties to help reduce stress level significantly. Also, proper mechanism from both the individual and organizational approach to help manage stress related job like frequent leave, flexible work schedules, reduced working hours and frequent breaks to relax employees*

KEYWORDS: job stress, employee performance, health, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

The recent business environment is characterized by high completion compelling employers to demand high productivity from employees to survive the competition (Dodanwala, 2020). This demand coupled with some factors facing employees such as increasing competition for jobs, change in culture, globalization, new technology, annual performance appraisals, among others tend to exact stress on employees. Job stress or workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when there is a poor match between job demands and the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker (Newman, 2023). The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (2010) defined work stress as 'pressure and extreme demands placed on a person beyond

his ability to cope.’ In 2015, the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) stated that ‘stress is the reaction that people have to excessive pressure or other type of demands placed upon them. According to Wu et al. (2021), work place pressure is growing day by day in that, employees face changing economic and business situations, changing customer expectations and changing expectations from their own role and position in the organization. Work place pressure affects the performance at a greater extent and, it needs to be dealt with carefully. Stress at a greater level on the other hand is harmful and has a negative effect on performance of employees over the long term as it wears down an individual and underutilizes his or her energy resources. High levels of stress can cause, low morale at work, fatigue, late comings, absenteeism and trouble in getting along with other team members or co-workers (Wu et al., 2021). Therefore, organizations must endeavour to eschew tendencies which might cause job stress in that, the cost of replacing an employee who is underperforming owing to stress is between 50 to 90 % of his salary (Personnel Management, Factsheet 7, July 2018). Job stress is as much a corporate business issue as it is a health issue for organizations. The American Psychological Association estimates that 60 percent of all absences and late comings are because of issues related to stress, costing American companies about \$57 billion in a year. Under severe stress, an individual fails to take clear-cut decisions, re-evaluate and re-assess the priorities and lifestyles, and ultimately, tend to fall into unproductive distractions. A survey of over a million employees in the UK found that over fifty percent of them experienced health problems due to stress (Penconek et al., 2021). More and more employees appear to be suffering from ill health, often attributed to stress. According to Ornek & Esin (2020), stress is a significant and increasing problem in many countries.

In South Africa, the need to provide quality healthcare and good patient care often mounts incessant pressure on health professionals leading to job stress. Professional health workers are often confronted with situations such as intensified-interpersonal and inter-professional situations and conflicts in the workplace while trying to make appropriate and safe decisions for their patients. Also, only a few of the medical facilities are equipped with modern gadgets as majority of the health facilities continue to operate with obsolete equipment exacting mental stress on health workers. It is in this regard the study is being conducted to investigate job stress on employee performance level in the South African health sector

Objectives

The general objective of the study is to investigate job stress on employee performance level in the health sector of South Africa. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the causes of job stress
2. Investigate the effects of job stress on employee performance
3. Determine how job stress are managed by health workers in the selected hospitals

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Stress Defined

The word stress was taken from one of the renowned stress researcher, Hans Selye, (Institutuniversitaireen santé mentale de Montréal 2012). Ever since, various definitions have emerged on the subject. For instance, Park (2017) defines stress as “emotional disruption, physically injurious that happens when the job does not require or connect with the worker’s skills, resources and needs, is defined as ‘work stress’. O'Connor et al. (2021) describes stress “as a response of an organism to environmental demands or pressures” Job stress is an unpleasant emotional situation that an individual experiences when the requirements of job are not counter balanced with his ability to cope the situation (Basit & Hassan, 2017)..

Causes of Stress

A myriad of factors have been identified as causes of job stress. major ones are: poor working conditions, shift work, long hours, risk and danger, new technology, work under-load, work overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, and responsibility (Dodanwala et al., 2023). However, this study will delineate on only four of them. These are: poor working conditions, new technology, work overload and role conflict

Poor Working Conditions: This focuses on the physical surroundings of the job which include high level of noise, high or low lighting, fumes, heat, poor ventilation systems, smells and all the stimuli which bombard a worker’s senses and can affect his moods and overall mental state. Also, the physical design of the workplace comes under poor working condition. If an office is poorly designed, with personnel who require frequent contact spread throughout, it creates poor communication networks and develops in poor working relationships which can cause stress to employees.

New Technology: The introduction of new technology into the work environment has required workers to adapt continually to new equipment, systems, and ways of working. This is a great source of pressure at work on the worker. For instance, a boss trained in the latest methods may be extra burden for an employee trained in the old ways and this may increase his stress level.

Work – Overload: This is where the employee has too much work to do because of imposition of datelines which often causes stress in employees. **Role in the Organisation:** When a person’s role in an organization is clearly defined and understood, and expectations placed upon are clear stress can be kept to a minimum. However, this is not the case in many work sites. Arnold, Robertson and Cooper (2003) continued to explain Role in the organization to include:

Role Conflict: Employees experience a high rate of stress when two superiors are demanding conflicting things and when attending to one will mean they are disobeying the other superior. This makes employees confused and frustrated. For example, workers may often feel themselves torn between two groups of who demand different types of behaviour or who believe the job entails different functions. Luthans (2002) differentiates three major types of role conflict. One type is the conflict between the person and the role. A second type of intra-role conflict creates contradictory expectations about how a given role should be played. Finally, inter role conflict results from differing requirements of two or more roles that must be played at the same time. For example, work roles and non-work roles are often in such conflict.

Job Performance

Job performance is work behaviors relevant to organizational goals, within the individual's control, and measurable, observable, scorable, etc (Deng et al., 2023). It is the sum of opportunities, abilities, and motivation. Zreb et al. (2023) intimated that organizations pay a lot of attention on job performance due to the importance of high productivity. In the views of Qaralleh et al. (2023), job performance is something an individual does, and it has its own level variable. Hence, it can be separated from others terms such as national performance or organizational performance which are higher level variables.

Empirical Review on Job Stress and Performance

Plethora of studies has been carried out on the impact or influence that job stress has on employees' job performance by authors from different perspectives.

For instance, Sari et al. (2021) conducted a study on the effect of job stress to employee performance on manufacturing industry in Indonesia. The results showed that work stress and work environment has a significant impact on employee performance with the value of $R = 0.972$. Basit & Hassan (2022) conducted a study on the impact of job stress on employee performance. The study adopted the causal research design. Employees from various sectors were chosen. A questionnaire with 26 items with Likert Scale (1: Strongly Disagree to 5: Strongly Disagree) were developed and tested for its reliability and validity prior to the distribution of questionnaire via social media. 310 respondents were selected from various sectors in Malaysia using convenient sampling technique. The survey questionnaire was sent via Facebook inbox requesting to complete it. The questionnaire includes demographic information's and statements to measure four (4) independent variables of time pressure, workload, lack of motivation, and role ambiguity to measure level of stress. The dependent variable is employee performance. Only 136 completed questionnaires were returned (usable sample). Regression analysis was carried out to examine the impact of stress on employee performance using SPSS21. The study found that job stress factors such time pressure and role ambiguity have significant and negative influence on employee performance.

In the study of Jalagat (2021) entitled: Determinants of job stress and its relationship on employee job performance., the study employed the descriptive research design using the survey questionnaires as its instruments and utilized the purposive sampling to obtain the sample. Questionnaires were distributed to 80 respondents but only 65 questionnaires were retrieved and analyzed. Highlights of the findings indicated that, there is significant relationship between job stress and employee performance with $r=0.955$. However, when analyzed the independent variables individually using regression analysis, results revealed that both independent variables: underutilization of skills and work overload significantly correlates to employee performance with p-values 0.000 ($p=0.0000.05$) and employee performance. Inferring from the literature, it was hypothesized that

H1: There will be a significant negative relationship between job stress and performance among employees

Managing Stress

Van Den Tooren & De Jonge (2018) shared that stress can be managed in two approaches; the individual and organizational approaches. The authors stressed that, the individual approach include exercise. That is the employees can manage stress by walking, riding bicycles, attending aerobic classes, practicing yoga, jogging, swimming, playing tennis and swatting squash balls. Most runners and fitness addicts admit that, it is very hard to focus on job stress when one is trying to complete vigorous workout. Again, he said individuals can manage stress through relaxation. This is because, when employees relax the response for stress will be reserved in the human mind-body system. Individuals can reduce tension through relaxation techniques such as meditation, hypnosis and biofeedback. The objective is to reach a state of deep relaxation in which the employee feels physically relaxed, somewhat detached from the immediate environment and detached from body sensations. Relaxation exercises reduce employee's heart rates, blood pressure and other physiological indicators of stress. Van Den Tooren & De Jonge (2018) also posited that stress can be managed in an organization through increasing employees autonomy in their job, increase or decrease personal responsibility, allow more flexible working hours – by the used of flexi – time, job rotation and transfers, provide better working conditions, including social/fitness clubs etc., and institute a counselling service. Further, Kofoworola & Alayode (2020) suggested that in order to manage work stress effectively, management should consider doing the following: provide work which allows some personal choice in the way it is carried out and the sequence in which it is carried out, encourage employees participation in decisions which affect them, set clear goals and targets and provide adequate feedback on performance, induct new recruits thoroughly etc

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the quantitative study as the design Justification for the use of quantitative was to ensure that large data would be retrieved without any interference, it less expensive and for generalization purposes. The target population for this study comprised of employees (health staff) in the two main selected hospitals namely South Rand hospital and Nelson Mandela Children's' hospital in South Africa. A sample size of 250 respondents was used to obtain enough data to undertake the study since it a quantitative study. A simple random sampling was employed to ensure an equal chance for all individuals in the population to have an equal chance of been selected. The main source of data in this study was primary data with some amount of secondary data from journals and books. Questionnaires were used to obtain relevant data from respondents within the time frame of the study. A four-point Likert response ranging from not most favourable=1 to least favourable =4 was employed. Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to statistically analyze data collected from respondents through the use of well-structured questionnaires. The data on the questionnaire collected from the respondents were coded and inputted into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software for statistical analysis. The Cronbach alpha was used to ascertain the internal analysis whilst respondents' confidentiality and anonymity was ensured.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive Characteristics of Respondents

This section provides a summary of the preliminary descriptive analysis of respondents socio-demographic characteristics in terms of gender, age, and educational level, length of service as well as job position occupied. Both male and female health workers were involved in this study. This was to ensure gender equity. The statistic above showed female respondents (66.67%) as against male respondents (33.33%) in the health sector. Obviously, the findings revealed female dominance in South Africa health sector. The health worker and administrators were of varied ages. Those who were aged between 21 and 30 were (16.70%) of total respondents. Those who were aged between 31 and 40 were the most populous (50%) of total respondents. Also, those who were aged between 41 and 50 were (26.70%) 50 and above years accounted for (6.60%) of total respondents. Degree holders were the highest respondents (53.34%), followed by diploma holders (25.00%), professional certificate holders (15.06%) and master degree holders (6.60%) respectively. The findings revealed that most of the respondents were health workers. Majority of the respondents were nurses which are predominantly general nurses and midwifery nurses. This was followed by health assistants in the two health institutions, next was doctors. Also, the highest group of job title was the general administrators in the OPD sections and accounts department constituting whilst the least group were the lab technicians comprising of 4 employees.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS**Causes of Job Stress****Reliability Statistics**

The internal consistency of the responses received regarding the causes of stress among health employees in South African was established with the use of alpha coefficient. Cortina (1993) proposed that the higher the Cronbach's alpha value, the higher the internal consistency is. If a value was higher than 0.70, then it showed that the reliability of measurement was high. Therefore, the internal consistency of the responses received from the respondents was said to be high since they are above 0.70. The findings of the analysis are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Reliable Value on Causes of Job Stress

SN	Variables	Alpha
1	Poor working conditions	0.884
2	New technology	0.822
3	Work overload	0.826
4	Role conflict	0.782

Source: Fieldwork 2024

The Table 2 presents the ranking of causes of job stress among health employees in South African. A parameter in the scale of 1 to 4 was used where 1 is strongly agree, 2-agree, 3 fairly agree and 4-somehow agree. In the sample of 250 respondents, the data demonstrates poor working condition as strongly agree of the cause of job stress among health workers in South Africa, as it has the lowest mean rank of 1.44. respondents agreed to new technology as the cause of job stress among health workers in South Africa with a mean rank of 1.62, work overload was fairly agreed by staff as the cause of job stress with a mean rank of 1.68 and role conflict was somehow agreed as the cause of job stress among health workers with mean rank of 2.28. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Ranking of Causes of Stress among Health Employees

Causes of Job Stress	Mean Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation
Poor working condition	1.44	3.0234	1.022
New technology	1.62	3.0228	1.024
Work overload	1.68	3.0164	1.036
Role conflict	2.28	3.0126	1.040

Source: Fieldwork 2024**Testing of Research Hypotheses**

The study sought to address one main hypothesis and analyses was done using a statistical test that is simple linear regression.

Table 3: Summary of Simple regression Analysis of the relationship between Job stress and Job Performance

Variables	B	R ²	T	F	P-value
JS-> JP	-.522	.201	-5.066	25.664	.000**

Note: N=250, Adjusted R²= .193, p <.05. JS represents job stress and JP represents job performance.

The result indicated a direct effect of job stress on job performance. It revealed a significant negative relationship which means as job stress increases as a result of the workload, employees (health workers and administrators) performance decreases significantly ($\beta = -.522$, $t=-5.066$, $p =0.00$). This means that stress level decreases employees' job performance. Thus, the predicted hypothesis "*there will be a significant negative relationship between job stress and job performance* was supported. The findings of the study corroborate the findings of prior studies. For instance, Sari et al. (2021) conducted a study on the effect of job stress to employee performance on manufacturing industry in Indonesia. The results showed that work stress and work environment has a significant impact on employee performance.

Similarly, the study of Basit & Hassan (2022) found that job stress factors such time pressure and role ambiguity have significant and negative influence on employee performance. Notwithstanding, other findings such as (Ojo et al., 2021) have been in variance with the findings of the study. There is, therefore, the need for management of all organizations to find appropriate means of alleviating employees of work-related stress in order to increase their performance level to help attain the firm's goals and objectives.

Managing Job Stress by Employees Workers in the Selected Hospitals

Reliability Statistics

In finding the internal consistency of the responses received regarding managing stress, the alpha coefficient of reliability was performed. Cortina (1993) proposed that the higher the Cronbach's alpha value, the higher the internal consistency is. If a value was higher than 0.70, then it showed that the reliability of measurement was high. Therefore, the internal consistency of the responses received from the respondents was said to be high since they are above 0.70. The findings of the analysis are presented in Table 4

Table 4: Reliable Value on Methods of Stress Management

SN	Variables	Alpha
1	Relaxation	0.804
2	Exercise	0.786
3	Spending time with family	0.882
4	Reduce work load	0.748

Source: Fieldwork 2024

The statistics provides ranking for employees' means of managing stress. The table 3 shows ranking of the parameters in the scale of 1 to 4 where 1 is the most favourable method adopted by employees in the South African health sector to reduce stress, and 4 is the least favourable. In the sample of 250 respondents, the data demonstrates relaxation as the most favourably means of managing stress among health workers in South Africa, as it has the lowest mean rank of 1.24. The favourable method is exercise with a mean rank of 1.26, the less favourable is the spending of time with family with mean rank of 1.34 and the least favourable is reduce workload with a mean rank of 1.488 The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Ranking of Methods of Stress Management Employed by Health Staff

Methods of Stress Management	Mean Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation
Relaxation	1.24	3.0234	1.022
Exercise	1.26	3.0228	1.024
Spending time with family	1.34	3.0164	1.036
Reduce workload	1.48	3.0126	1.040

Source: Fieldwork 2024

CONCLUSION

Job-related stress continues to be an issue in the health sector. The effects of stress experienced by health staff impacts job performance, which, in turn, can affect the quality of patient care.

The findings revealed varied causes of stress among health workers in South Africa. Poor working conditions, new technology, work overload and role conflict were the causes revealed by the study. The study indicated a direct effect of job stress on job performance. It revealed a significant negative relationship which means as job stress increases as a result of the workload, employees (health workers and administrators) performance decreases significantly. The study also concluded on relaxation, exercise, spending time with family and reduction of workload as means of reducing job stress by health workers in South Africa

Managerial Implication

First, management must identify the possible causes of work-related stress employees' face in the process of performing their duties to help reduce stress level significantly.

Secondly, there is a need for proper mechanism form both the individual and organizational approach to help manage stress related job like frequent exercise, spending time with family, flexible work schedules, reduced working hours and frequent breaks for employees' relaxation Proper training for employees must be done to help employees feel at easy to carry out their responsibility with ease as well as enhance their performance level. Also, constant role ambiguity and conflict must be reduced by ensuring proper job clarity and scope of authority. Additionally,

leadership style of management must be beneficial to help employees open up with their frustration at work to help improve as well as achieve the core goals of the organization.

Direction for Future Studies

The study is with limitations and such, future studies are recommended. First, the number of hospitals can be increased in future studies with larger sample size. Also, more hypotheses could be formulated than the current study

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