

A Framework for the Study of Workplace Stress

William Makumbe

Department of Management Studies
Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Abstract : *This paper sought to develop a framework for studying work place stress. From the Journal articles, dissertations and textbooks that were reviewed, several factors lead to the development of workplace stress chief among them being job insecurity, work overload, High Job demands and lack of co-worker support. A stressed labour force negatively affect the performance & effectiveness of business organisations through high accident rates, absenteeism, presenteeism & high employee turnover.*

Keywords: *Work place stress, Work overload, Co-worker support, Job demands, Presenteeism*

INTRODUCTION

The alarming spike in the incidence of reported stress among employees in recent years and its impact on the bottom line has made the management of stress an urgent business strategy. Work stress is fast becoming a major challenge across all organisations and impacts on performance of employees including managers and executives (Khuong and Yen, 2016). It has become prevalent in the workplace for a long time and has emerged as a worldwide phenomenon affecting employees, stakeholders and the organisation in its entirety, in various ways (Sajuyidbe et al., 2015). It is therefore critical for organisations to be cognisance of stress at work in order to improve chances of achieving sustainable productivity and performance levels.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this article was to analyse the vast literature on work place stress with the ultimate objective of coming up with a framework for the study of the concept.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, this article is an integrated literature review because it reviewed, criticised and synthesized representative literature on key variables that influences stress levels amongst employees at the workplace. At the end of the article, the research integrated significant findings in literature and developed a new framework on the topic that can be tested empirically in future researches. The article is therefore underpinned by an extensive literature review in order to establish key variables critical influencing workplace stress. The sources that were consulted included:

1. Web-based articles.
2. Search engines such as *EbscoHost*, *ScienceDirect*, *Jstor* and *Google Scholar*.
3. Scientific journals included: *Journal Of Organisational Behaviour*, *Journal of Management Development and the African Journal of*
4. *Organisational Behaviour Textbooks*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section looks at the variables that result in stress at the work place. The various factors which severally result in stress are shown below:

JOB RELATED FACTORS

Work overload

Work overload refers to the work that creates pressure when it exceeds and individual's capacity (Khuong and Yen, 2016). It is a situation where the work to be done is far exceeds the capacity to process the work requirements. If this disequilibrium persists for a long time then several physical, behavioural and mental problems may occur and in some instances can even lead to death. Work overload is often associated with imposition of unrealistic deadline timeframes for completion of tasks. If the volume of work mismatches or surpasses the skills, knowledge and abilities of a worker, this causes stress (Bickford, 2005). However it can be concluded that workload is not an isolated source of work stress but tends to be combined with other factors in the prediction of stress (Kendall et al, 2000). Examining work-related stress among University of Education academic staff, at the Winneba Campus in Ghana, Kusi et al. (2014) found out that workload was the leading source of stress and this was attributed to the large student population the Lecturers were handling. Coetzee and Rothmann (2005) researched on occupational stress, organisational commitment and employees' ill-health at the Central University of Technology in South Africa and discovered that 63% of respondents stated that work overload stressed them.

Job insecurity

According to Cranwell and Abbey (2005), job insecurity is an overall fear by an employee that he/she may lose his/her job or the job will be discontinued. When an employee feels uncertain over his/her stay at an organisation, stress levels

will be so high, notes the same authors. Job insecurity can come in the form of reduction in one's job features for example promotions, increments or threat of retrenchments from management. Ali et al (2014) notes that job insecurity negatively affects employee morale, motivation, organisational citizenship and this will lead to reduced performance

Job Demands

A highly demanding job always puts workers under pressure and the inability to manage work pressure results in varying degrees of stress.

An investigation into the experience of work-related stress across 26 occupations in the United Kingdom by Johnson et al. (2005), found that ambulance workers, teachers, social services employees, customer services/call centre employees, prison and police officers experienced high emotional labour because their jobs involves face-to-face interaction with different types of people and was very demanding. It was noted that the employees follow strict rules in the way they execute their work and this impacts on their level of commitment and job satisfaction.

WORK ENVIRONMENT FACTORS

Skill Discretion

According to Cranwell and Abbey (2005), organizations which deploy employees in jobs for which they are not well trained or skilled will experience wastage of resources, increased levels of stress, high turnover levels and poor performance and productivity. When employees are exposed to tasks for which they are ill suited in terms of skills set, stress can occur. If an employee lacks the necessary skills to execute a task this results in the person being "a square peg in a round hole", notes Cranwell and Abbey (2005)

Decision Authority

According to Manzoor, Awan and Mariam (2012), the stress level at the work place is affected by the level at which an employee participates in decision making process. Perceptions of decision making authority and control are closely linked to work stress (Cranwell and Abbey, 2005). Where there is greater interdependence between one's tasks and that of others, further notes Cranwell and Abbey (2005), the individual is likely to experience work stress.

Co-worker / Supervisor Support

Relations at work can be subdivided into two: co-worker relationships and worker-superior relationships, according to Ali et al (2014). Work stress arises as a result of poor or unsupportive relationships with colleagues or superiors include isolation and unfair treatment. This is because most employees spend most of their active life at the workplace and poor working relationships will adversely affect them, notes Cranwell and Abbey (2005). Lack of support and feedback from

superiors and colleagues triggers stress in an individual. This lack of support results in an employee feeling deserted and alone which reduces his/her pace of work and performance.

Pay and Benefits

A study on occupational stress and its consequences on employees' attitudes in Iranian Hospitals including two Medical Staff Training Hospitals by Mosadeghrad (2014), showed that remuneration was a major source of distress. The lack of benefit and reward was stressing employees and impacted on their commitment and this was contributing to staff turnover as well. Dhar (2014)'s study on employee work stress and organisational commitment among 600 public employees in India, found that respondents with high stress levels due to low income had very low commitment to their jobs and those earning high income having low stress levels and high commitment to the organisation. The income included salary, bonuses, dearness allowances, commission and all monetary incentives.

Ekienabor (2016)'s study at Igbinedion University in Okada Nigeria academic staff considered lack of financial rewards as one of the stressors that led to productivity decline and was the chief contributor to lack of commitment. 90% of the respondents indicated the stress was impacting on their commitment with 10% of the respondents indicating that their commitment was not affected. Employees felt that the Institution lacked a proper reward system and that this should be put in place to motivate staff.

Awadh et al. (2015) studied the effects of stress on performance of employees in Kilifi County Government in Kenya and results of this study reflected that most employees had continuance commitment because only 9% of respondents sought to find better paying jobs with 91% of respondents indicating that despite inadequate pay and benefits that was stressing them, they considered the stress manageable and were content with staying with their employers.

Organizational Related Practices

How the organization operates and what it believes in towards the work which may have come to be organization traditions can be a source of occupational stress. Some of the facets such as lack of career development and growth within the organisational can be a source of workplace stress. For the example, the feeling of being in a stagnant place with the progression of one's career can be a source of stress at work. According to Leka et al (2003), having too much or too little to do, limited opportunity for further study and training, scant promotion prospects, under and over promotion

and all the other factors that affect job security can be a source of occupational stress (Michie, 2002). According to Bickford (2005), interpersonal relationships that are poor, relationships with subordinates, superiors and co-workers at work may cause job related stress. This is because of the uncertainty and fear which may result from such which compromises the worker to handle stressors. Further on interpersonal relationships, Leka et al (2003) believe unclear procedures for dealing with work issues as well as inadequate, inconsiderate and unsupportive supervision at work may result in occupational stress (Michie, 2002). Scholars also added on the notion of working in solitude as a major source of job stress as chances of getting support during work hours from colleagues.

The external environment

This refers to all the forces that emanate from outside the organisation environment that have an impact on the operations of the organisation. Managers do not control the external variables but rather, they react and make their organisations adaptable to the dictates of the external

environment. Poor performing economies impact negatively on business organisations putting pressure on managers and employees to think outside the box so that their organisations survive. Hostile government policies like threats of nationalisation have an effecting of stressing employees at the workplace.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework below validates what has been explained above:

Karasek Job Demand-Control Model

In a widely cited paper, Karasek (1979) proposed and tested a new model of job stress. His core hypothesis was that high job demands were not harmful in themselves, but when accompanied by low decision latitude would result in psychological strain. The impact on strain was predicted to be evident in terms of both immediate affective reactions (e.g. job satisfaction and depression) and, given long-term exposure, stress-related illnesses (e.g. cardiovascular disease).His model is presented below:

	LOW DEMAND	HIGH DEMAND
HIGH CONTROL	<i>Low strain</i>	<i>Active</i>
LOW CONTROL	<i>Passive</i>	<i>High strain</i>

Figure 1: Karasek Job Control Model
 Source: Karasek et al 1990)

Karasek et al (1990) hypothesised that employees with low control can become frustrated and feel underappreciated, thus a combination of high demand and low job control result in “High strain”. The negative consequence of psychological strain is generated amongst employees when there is an increase in job demand (high job demand) and low job control or in other words, they do not have full control of their work (Karasek, 1979).

It is imperative that organisations should thrive to equate a combination of high control and high demand which result in the ‘active’ as shown above, the combination is thought to be highly motivating & fulfilling to workers (Karasek, 1990).

Person-Environment Fit Theory

The person-environment fit theory put emphasis on how an employee fits into the organisation environment or workplace environment. It discusses the relationship that exists between workplace environment, stress and the individual. Thus it is hypothesised that stress arises when there is a mismatch between an employee or individual and the workplace environment. Furthermore if an individual’s motives are not at par with other

workplace co-worker’s it may also result in stress (Edwards, Caplan and Van Harrison, 1998).

Cartwright and Cooper’s Model of Occupational Stress

Cartwright and Cooper (2002) developed this model comprising of seven occupational stressors namely work relationships, work-life balance, overload, job security, control, resources and communication and pay and benefits.

THE OUTCOMES OF WORK PLACE STRESS

The Health Advocate publication in the USA confirmed that stress results in high accident rate, absenteeism & presenteeism. The three outcomes are explained below:

Accidents

Stress-related distraction or sleepiness account for an estimated 60 to 80 percent of accidents on the job, according to the American Institute of Stress. Workers’ compensation claims for stress have increased substantially every year, threatening to bankrupt the system in several states.

Absenteeism

Absenteeism as defined by Martocchio and Harrison (1993) refers to the lack of an individual physical presence at given location and time when there is a social expectation for him or her to be there. The Health advocate USA stated that an estimated one million workers miss work each day because of stress, costing companies an estimated \$602 per employee per year. The same report stated that absenteeism is to blame for 26 percent of health-related lost productivity in business. A study by the World Health Organisation in 2003 stated that work stress is a global epidemic phenomenon that can adversely affect employees in an organisation and it has a huge impact on absenteeism. Absenteeism as defined by Martocchio and Harrison (1993) as the lack of an individual physical presence at given location and time when there is a social expectation for him or her to be there. Mathis and Jackson (2000) pointed out that absenteeism epitomise forms of withdrawal behaviour from an extremely stressful occupation

Presenteeism

As the term used to describe the opposite of absenteeism, "presenteeism" is the phenomenon of employees coming to work yet not functioning up to their capabilities on the job. In one survey, 60 percent of workers reported losing productivity due to stress while at work during the past month. Presenteeism manifests in a host of ways, including making mistakes, more time spent on tasks, poor quality work, impaired social functioning, burnout, anger, resentment, low morale and other detrimental factors. Overall, the price tag related to presenteeism adds up to nearly \$150 billion a year in lost productivity, according to the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans. The cost may be even higher if the stress underlying presenteeism is not addressed, as absenteeism, job resignations, chronic illness, and disability may be the result.

Organisation Commitment

Work stress should be comprehensively managed so as to circumvent the adverse effects it has on worker's commitment and their withdrawal behaviours to the organisation (Dajani, 2015).

Several researchers have shown conclusive results that there is a negative relationship between job stress and organisation commitment (Khatibi, Asadi and Hamidi, 2009; Jamal, 2011; Sanjeev and Rathore, 2014). Bhatti et al (2016) stated that stress has a negative relationship with organisational commitment. If work stress levels increase then the employee commitment with the organisation will decrease (Bashir and Ramay, 2010).

A study conducted by Jamal (2011) on job stress, job performance and organisation commitment confirmed that there is an inverse relationship between job stress and employee performance in companies located in Pakistan and Malaysia. Furthermore, a study in India of the IT sector showed a similar revealing relationship between organisational stress and employee commitment (Sanjeev and Rathore, 2014). Thus the research showed that, as organisation stress increased among the IT professional specialists organisation commitment declines causing high rampant attrition rates.

Job Satisfaction

Studies that investigated on the relationship between stress and satisfaction across a variety of professions show an inverse relationship between them (Sen, 2008). Ahmady et al (2007) investigated role stress in Iran among faculty medical school members and the results showed that, role stress was experienced comparatively in higher degree amongst faculty members and that affected their satisfaction levels. A study by Boudreaux, Mandry and Brantley (1997) on stress, job satisfaction, coping and psychological distress in emergency service providers revealed that, job related stressors were significant predictors for more severe symptoms of anxiety and psychological distress and that stress had negative correlations with job satisfaction.

A FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING WORKPLACE STRESS

From the literature analysis above, a framework for studying workplace stress was developed as shown below:

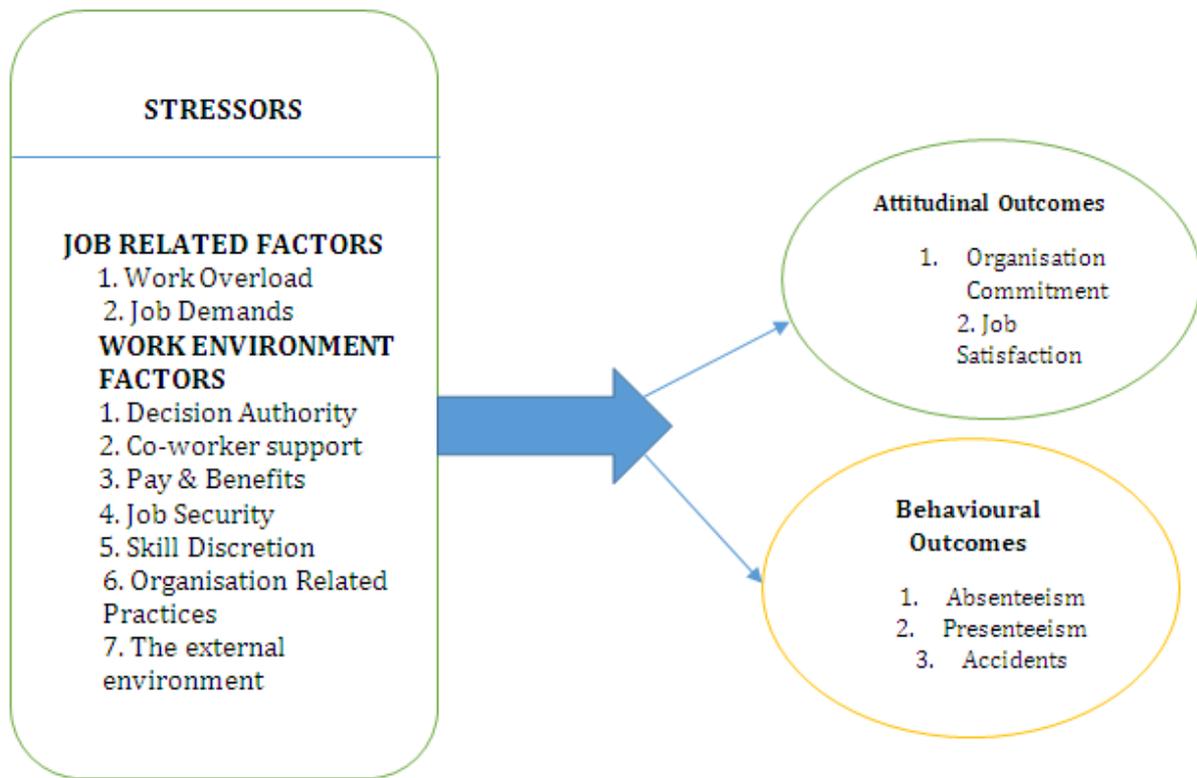


Figure 2.0: A framework for studying workplace stress

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This paper serves to inform managers on the critical variables that lead to stress development amongst employees in organisations. A total understanding of these variables through the empirical evidence in this review will help managers to become decision makers thus reducing the level of stress incidences at the work place.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This paper acts as a basis for further research in different parts of the world. It will be interesting to test empirically the variables shown in figure 2.0 above in order to establish the relationship between the independent & dependent variables.

REFERENCES

Ahmady, S., Changiz, T., Masiello, I., and Brommels, M. (2007). *Organisational Role Stress Among Medical School Faculty Members in Iran: Dealing with Role Conflict*. BMC Medical Education, Vol. 7, no.14, pp. 1-10.
 Ali et al (2014), Impact of stress on job performance: An Empirical study of the Employees of private sector Universities of Karachi, Pakistan, *Research Journal of Management Sciences*, Vol 3(7), pp 14-17.

Awadh I.M.; Gichinga L. and Ahmed A.H.; (2015) 'Effects of Workplace Stress on Employee Performance in the County Governments in Kenya: A Case Study of Kilifi County Government' *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications* 5(10) pp. 1-8

Bickford, M. (2005). *Stress in The Workplace: A General Overview of the Causes, The Effects and The Solutions*. Canadian Mental Health Association.

Boswell, C. A. (1992). *Work Stress and Job Satisfaction for The Community Health Nurse*. *Journal of Community Health Nursing*, Vol. 9, no.4, pp. 221-227.

Boudreaux, E., Mandry, C., and Brantly, P. J. (1997). *Stress, Job Satisfaction, Coping and Psychological Distress Among Emergency Medical Technicians*. *Prehospital Disaster Med*, Vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 9-16.

Cartwright, S. & Cooper, C.L. (2002), *Asset: An Organisational Stress Screening Tool: The Management Guide*. Manchester.

Cranwell, J.W and Abbey. A, (2005), *organizational stress*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Coetzee S.E. and Rothmann S.; (2005) 'Occupational Stress, Organisational Commitment and Ill-Health of Employees at a Higher Education Institution in South Africa' *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* 31(1), pp.47-54

Dajani, M. A. Z. (2015). The Impact of Employee Engagement On Job Performance and Organisational Commitment in The Egyptian Banking Sector. *Journal of Business Management Sciences*, Vol. 3, no. 5, pp. 138-147.

Edwards J.R. and Cooper C.L.; (1990) 'The Person-Environment Fit Approach to Stress: Recurring Problems and Some Suggested Solutions' *Journal of Organisational Behaviour* 11, pp.293-307

Ekienabor E.E.; (2016) 'Impact of Job Stress on Employees Productivity and Commitment' *International Journal for Research in Business Management and Accounting* ISSN: 2455-6114, pp.124-133

Jamal,M. (2007). Job stress and job performance controversy revisited an empirical examination in two countries. *International journal of stress management*, vol .14, No. 2,175-187

Karasek, R. A. (1979). Job Demands, Job Decision Latitude and Mental Strain: Implications for Job Redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol 24, no. 2: 285-307.

Karasek, R. A. and Theorell, T. (1990). *Healthy Work: Stress, Productivity and The Reconstruction of Working Life*. Basic Books. New York.

Khatibi, A., Asad, H., and Hamidi, M. (2009). The Relationship Between Job Stress and Organisational Commitment in National Olympic and Paralympic Academy. *World Journal of Sports Science*, Vol. 2, pp. 272-278

Khuong, M.N. & Yen, V.H, (2016), Investigate the effects of Job stress on Employee Job Performance – A Case Study at Dong Xuyen Industrial Zone, Vietnam, *International Journal of Trade, Economics and Finance*, Vol. 7, No.2, pages 31-37

Kusi H.; Mensa D.K.D. and Gyaki E.; (2014) 'Work-related Stress Among the Academic Staff of the University of Education, Winneba Campus, Ghana' *Journal of Education and Practice* 5(13), pp.15-23

Manzoor, A., Awan, H. and Mariam, S. (2012). Investigating The Impact of Work Stress On Job Performance: A Study On Textile Sector of Faisalabad. *Asian Journal of Business and Management Science*, Vol 2 no. 1, pp. 20-28.

Mosadeghrad A.M.; 'Occupational stress and its consequences: Implications for health policy and management' *Leadership in Health Services Journal* 27(3) pp.224-239

Sajuyigbe A.S.; Madu-Igwe C.O. and Babalola D.Y.; (2015) 'Influence of Job-Stress on Job Performance Among Academic Staff of University of Ibadan, Nigeria' *International Journal in Management and Social Science* 3(4), pp.424-434