

Work Stress Prevalence among the Management Staff in an International Tobacco Company in Malaysia

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ABSTRAK

Satu kajian prevalens stres pekerjaan telah dilakukan dikalangan 185 eksekutif dan pengurus di ibu pejabat syarikat tembakau antarabangsa. Objektif kajian ialah untuk mengenalpasti prevalens stres pekerjaan dan faktor-faktor penyebab stres yang dialami pekerja ini. Soal-selidik daripada 'Personal Stress Inventory' oleh O' D Donell (1984) telah digunakan. Data berkaitan faktor sosiodemografi, simptom stres dan faktor stres berkaitan dengan polisi organisasi, stuktur organisasi dan sekitaran kerja telah dikumpulkan. Hasil kajian mendapati prevalens stress dikalangan eksekutif sebanyak 68.1% dan pengurus eksekutif sebanyak 67.9%, perbezaan ini tidak bererti secara statistiks. Faktor sosioekonomi yang bererti secara statistik berkait dengan stres ialah pendapatan, bilangan anak dan faktor personal. Faktor stres tempat pekerjaan yang bererti secara statistik ialah kurang penghargaan kerja, terlalu fokus kepada kualiti kerja, beban kerja yang banyak dan bekerja jangkamasa yang panjang.

Kata kunci: stres, eksekutif, pengurus syarikat tembakau

ABSTRACTS

A cross sectional study on work stress prevalence was carried out among 185 executives and managers in the head quarter of an international tobacco company. The aim of the study was to identify work stress prevalence in this company and work stressors that were associated with stress experienced by the workers. A questionnaire based on the Personal Stress Inventory by O'Donell (1984) was used. Data collected from participants included sociodemography factors, symptoms of stress and work stressors related to organizational policy, organizational structure, organizational process, and work environment. The study showed that the prevalence of stress among executives was 68.1% and managers were 67.9%. There was no significant difference in the level of stress between the executives and the managers in the company. The sociodemographic factors that were significantly associated with stress were salary, number of children and personal factors. The significant stressors in the workplace were lack of job recognition, over focusing on quality of work, heavy workload and long working hours.

Keywords: stress, executives, managers, tobacco company

INTRODUCTION

In this high technology and modern era, where high performance is expected to be the norm, many organizations demand a high level of quality, service and overall business success. Therefore, the pressure is felt on individuals at all levels of organization. Performance targets are becoming tougher to meet with each succeeding year and the management staff is experiencing difficulty in fulfilling the challenge. Work stress is common among staff and there are grave concerns on how it may affect health.

The demand and pressure in the workplace place is an important source of stress. The factors in the workplace that have been to be associated with stress and health risks can be categorized into those related to the content of work and those related to social and organizational context of work (Michie, 2002). The factors that are intrinsic to the job include long hours, work overload, time pressure, difficult or complex tasks, lack of breaks, lack of variety, and poor working environment.

Ivancevich and Matteson (1980) suggested that the increase in mental health problems reported by workers in industrialized countries was a result of psychological stress and excessive job demands in the workplace. Karasek (1980) reported that job stress could be divided into two factors, job demand and job decision latitude or job control. He explained that a high job demand and a low decision latitude state were the most stressful. Much of the research regarding work stress was based on the model developed and refined by Karasek. He proposed that work-related mental strain and the associated psychiatric disorder may result from combinations of, and interactions between, four different employment factors: heavy job demands, limited input to decision making processes, lack of skill discretion within the job and poor work-based social support (Mausner-Dorsch & Eaton, 2000). These factors, in

particular those concerning decision making and lack of social support have been found to be most challenging for those in the lower grades of employment and to be less common among employees in higher ranking positions (Cropley et al, 1999).

Persistent stress had been linked to many physiological problems. Initially, the effects may be psychosomatic, but with continued stress, the symptoms can present as actual organic disease for example gastric or duodenal ulcers and coronary heart disease. Fraser (1997) grouped human reactions to workplace stress into 5 categories: (i) subjective or emotional, for example anxiety and aggression; (ii) behavioral, for example trembling sleep problems; (iii) cognitive, for example lack of concentration and inability to make decisions; (iv) physiological, for example increased heart rate and blood pressure; (v) organizational, for example absenteeism and poor productivity.

The international tobacco company in the study is one of the largest tobacco companies in Malaysia. At the time of study, this company had 1,200 employees - 340 management employees and 860 employees who are involved in the full spectrum of the tobacco industry, from leaf buying, processing and manufacturing, marketing and distribution. There are nine management departments in the company, i.e. human resources and security affairs, finance, trade marketing, brand marketing, information technology, production, supply chain, corporate and regulatory affairs, legal and leaf departments.

The objectives of the study were to examine the prevalence of work stress among the management staff in the international tobacco company and to investigate the factors contributing to work stress. The justification of the study was to find out the prevalence of stress because of the stressful nature of work, and secondly, no similar study has ever been done in a tobacco company in Malaysia before.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted in May 2004. Self-administered questionnaires were used in the study, involving 185 management staff. The inclusion criteria were all permanent management executives and managers. The exclusion criteria were directors, expatriates, contract staff, and temporary staff. The sampling method was universal sampling. The subjects were given a questionnaire based on the Personal Stress Inventory by O'Donnell (1984). The questionnaire comprised of 4 parts. The first part consisted of socio-demographic data and job history. Socio-demographic measurements included gender, age, marital status, number of children, medical illness and smoking habits. The job data included occupation, department, salary, length of service and job promotion. The second part of the questionnaire measured stress level based on reported symptoms.

It comprised of 52 items, which are the symptoms of stress. The third part consisted of 12 items which were questions on the perception of personal stressors. The last part of the questionnaire were questions on stressors at workplace relating organizational policy, organizational structure, organizational process, work environment, recognition and appreciation and work process. It also included two questions that gauge stress at work which require the respondents to write down their work stress factors and their personal methods for relieving stress.

Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed with SPSS version 11.5. The significant level was set at 0.05.

RESULTS

From 185 questionnaires distributed, 150 questionnaires were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 81%. In this study, 78 (52%) respondents were

managers and 72 (48%) were executives. The age group of 31-40 years old consisted 44 (29%) of respondents while 16 respondents (10.7%) were in age group of 21-25 years. There were 99 (66%) male and 51 (34%) female respondents in the study. A total of 93 (62%) of the respondents were married and 55 (36.7%) were single, and 2(1.3%) were divorced or separated. The demographic data for the subjects in the survey are shown in Table 1.

The prevalence of stress among managers was 67.9% and executives were

Table 1 : Demographic characteristics of study population

Variable	n (%)
Age	
21-25	16 (10.7)
26-30	38 (25.3)
31-40	44 (29.3)
>40	52 (34.7)
Gender	
Male	99 (66)
Female	51 (34)
Job	
Managers	78 (52)
Executives	72 (48)
Marital status	
Married	93 (62.0)
Single	55 (36.7)
Divorced	2 (1.3)
Number of Children	
0-2	110 (73.3)
3-4	35 (35.0)
5 and above	5 (3.3)
Salary (1N1)	
3000-3500	18 (12.0)
3501-4500	25 (16.7)
4501-8500	57 (38.0)
8501 and above	50 (33.3)
Length of Service (years)	
1-3	15 (76.6)
4-10	30 (20.0)
11-15	2 (1.3)
16 and above	3 (2.0)

68.1%. There was no significant difference in the level of stress between the executives and the managers in the company. There was a significant relationship between stress and salary, number of children ($p < 0.05$).

The stressors at workplace (working environment, work process, organizational structure, organizational policy, organizational process and acknowledgement) have statistical significant relationship with stress. Table 3 lists the mean stress score

for work stressors. A bivariate correlation was done to test the correlation between perceptions of stress at work with stress symptoms and felt like resign. The results showed that there was significant correlation ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5 illustrates the work pressure factors for the respondents' major source of stress. The three highest work pressure factors are work overload (28.6%), lack of job recognition (10.4%) and long working hours (9.5%).

Table 2 : Prevalence of Stress among respondents

Variables	Stress (%)	No Stress (%)	χ^2	p
Job title			0.000	0.989
Manager	49 (68.1)	25 (32.1)		
Executives	53(67.9)	23 (31.8)		
Length of Service			1.056	0.788
1-3 years	77 (66.9)	38 (33)		
4-10 years	21 (70)	21 (70)		
11-15 years	2 (100)	0 (0)		
>16 years	2 (66.7)	(33.3)		
Sex			2.548	0.812
Male	63 (63.6)	36 (36.4)		
Female	39 (76.5)	12 (23.5)		
Marital Status			0.957	0.620
Married	63 (67.7)	30 (32.3)		
Single	37 (67.3)	12 (32.7)		
Divorced	2 (100)	0 (0)		
Number of Children			8.384	0.015
0	3(5.0)	57(95.0)		
1-2	42(84.0)	8(16)		
3-5	35(51.4)	17(35)		
5 and above	2(40)	11(24.4)		

Table 3 : Work stressors among respondents

	Mean ± standard deviation		t value	p value
Working environment	17.22 ± 4.87	13.9 ± 6.21	4.21	0.00*
Work process	13.33 ± 4.49	9.39 ± 5.26	5.68	0.00*
Organization Structure	9.53 ± 3.05	7.76 ± 3.71	3.69	0.00*
Organization Policy	9.17 ± 3.92	6.65 ± 4.07	4.41	0.00*
Organization process	5.09 ± 2.66	3.06 ± 2.27	5.67	0.00*
Acknowledgement	344 ± 2.40	1.73 ± 1.82	5.50	0.00*

Table 4 : Correlation between Work Stress and Stress Symptoms

	Stress Symptoms	Feel like resign
Perception of having stress at work	r= 0.403 ($p < 0.05$)	r= 0.605 ($p < 0.05$)

Table 5 : Distribution of six work stressors

Work stressors	Mean \pm standard deviation	
	Stressful n (%)	No stress n (%)
Work load	30 (28.6)	15 (14.3)
Lack of job recognition	11 (10.4)	2 (0.9)
Long working hours	10 (9.5)	7 (6.7)
Work too rigid	9 (8.6)	3 (2.8)
Work over defined	8 (7.6)	1 (0.9)
Over focus on work quality	7 (7.0)	2 (1.2)

DISCUSSION

In the study, the prevalence of work stress among managers was 67.9% and executives were 68.1%. The prevalence of stress in this organization is higher compared to reported prevalence in other sectors. Fazil (2004) reported a prevalence of stress of 46.8% among factory workers in an electronic firm in Shah Alam, Selangor. Harmy et al (2001) reported a prevalence of stress of 36.8% among nurses working in the Intensive Ward in Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia.

The study also showed that significant sociodemographic factors which had significant relationship were salary, number of children, and personal factors. The reasons of significant stress in relation to salary could be link to work stressors. For example, staff need to stay back to complete their work because of uncompleted task. The workers may feel that the salary earned may not be proportionate to the workload and long working hours put in by them.

The significant relationship between stress and number of children in this study is most likely due to the fact that having to support the children financially and they have to organize the heavy working schedules to allocate time to attend the children's need. There is a significant relationship between stress and work stressors in this study. The heavy work overload could probably due to the need to carry out their jobs for supporting duties in the organization, meetings and presentation. Sometimes the

time pressures and many datelines to meet making work too rigid. In order to meet the expectations, staff would have work extended hours. This finding is supported by a research done by Hasan (2002). The study evaluated job stress factors among heads of physical education organizations in Tehran University, Iran. The results indicate that a significant relationship between organizational job stress with pressure for work quality, job importance and time pressure.

This study is limited as it is a cross-sectional data, therefore time- causal relationship is less certain. The second limitation is the stress symptoms are self reported and thus information bias can occur.

CONCLUSION

In the study the prevalence of stress among the management staff in an international tobacco company has been determined. There was no significant difference in the level of stress between the executives and the managers in the company. The study highlights the need for intervention of stress.

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