

## OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN RELATION TO JOB SATISFACTION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF CALL CENTRE

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### ABSTRACT

*Getting the pulse of the present competitive environment, Human resource practitioners, councilors, professionals and managers are today realizing the fact that occupational stress is becoming inevitable in every organization. Occupational stress affects employee turnover, productivity and firm performance. Managers are in dilemma over what interventions need to be employed to minimize the cost associated with occupational stress. It is essential to understand the causes, symptoms and effects of occupational stress on employee satisfaction. The data used for the study was generated by convenience random sampling of employees working in the call centre located in Chandigarh. The findings of the study shows that occupational stress affects employees in several ways and a major source of employee turnover in many organizations.*

**Keywords:** Occupational Stress, Job Satisfaction, Call Centre.

### Introduction:

Job satisfaction in organizations is a favourite topic of discussion with academicians and management practitioners. In this age of intense inter-company rivalry, dynamics of such job dissatisfaction can make or break an organization. Intense competition is also on the rise in fast emerging industrialized countries such as India (Raman, 2000). How to manage the stress-job satisfaction relationship to serve an organization's best long-term interest is an open question? However, all agree that somehow the relationship has to be managed to provide superior performance and continued productivity.

This study investigates the impact of occupational stress, burnout on the employee job satisfaction. Previous studies have limitations on measurement and analysis. Moreover, findings of these studies cannot be generalized for BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) industry. This study utilizes a modified instrument that fits into the Call Centre and has been used to measure the occupational stress among the Call Centre Representatives. It is based on the response from approximately 100 employees in the call centre representatives engage in front desk operation and back desk operation comprised of 5 different call centre companies from Chandigarh in India. The number of employees in each of these companies ranges from 100 to 200.

Occupational stress and Burnout is the core of the employee job satisfaction. Several classifications of the occupational stress have been presented by researchers over a period of time. However, the bases of stress

taxonomy by Schuler (1982) there are seven categories of work stressors in organizations: job qualities, relationships, organizational structure, physical qualities, career development, change and role in the organization. Quick and Quick (1984) proposed **four** categories of Stressors: task demands, role demand, physical demands and interpersonal demands. In an organizational setting, a stress applies mechanism to increase the job satisfaction of the employees. How stress is emerged in the call centre? How it affects the call centre representative's job satisfaction used? Can the effect of the stress on job satisfaction can be decreased by controlling the burnout. The answer may seem immaterial as long as the mission is accomplished. However, in the call centre, the stress may be more central to influence the success. In the call centre, it is often found that the CCR's commitment to their jobs is weak, job satisfaction is low, turnover rates are high, and the CCR's stress influenced behavior is not positively reflecting the call centre's expectations, values, and cultures. These consequences happen when superiors do not or rather poorly understand the dynamics of the contextual basis of stress they use to face.

### Review of Literature:

Stress is becoming very serious occupational health hazard in these days. It has been resulted into substantial costs to the employees as well as to the organization. Consequently a large number of organizations are investing heavily in workplace health education, and almost every professional magazine, journal and newspaper is devoting special space

on the stress related factors. The increased stress related costs are fostering the organization to identify the various approaches to study stress at workplace. This approach views stress as a perceived forces or stimuli impinging upon the individual who may create demands on the individual. It suggests a mismatch between an individual's capabilities and her/his work environment in which either excessive demands are made from the individual or the individual is not fully equipped to handle a particular work situation (French, 1963). Whereas stressors refer to an employee's physiological or physical response to stress (Hurrell, Nelson and Simmons, 1998). A number of studies have been conducted which identify various organisational and work related stressors (Cooper and Marshall, 1976; Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980; Schular, 1982; Cummins, 1990; Summers et al., 1994). But hardly any study available which represent the relative importance of these stressors.

Beehr and Newman (1978) had defined stress as a situation which will force a person to deviate from normal functioning due to the change (i.e. disrupt or enhance) in his/her psychological and/or physiological condition, such that the person is forced to deviate from normal functioning.

Stress is generally associated with impaired employee's functioning in the organization. In daily life, copious work related factors are associated with the stress. Role stress consists of two important constructs, role ambiguity, role conflict (Kahn et al. 1964) and overload. Aspects of the work itself can be stressful for an employee, namely work overload (Defrank and Ivancevich, 1998; Spark and Cooper, 1999; Teylor et al., 2005) and role related factors such as role ambiguity and role conflict. Role ambiguity arises in the work environment when an employee lacks adequate information for effective performance of a given role (Senatra 1980). Alternatively, role conflict exists when an employee faces incompatible expectations such that compliance with one expectation would make it difficult or impossible to effectively comply with the other expectations (Kahn et al. 1964).

Stress and the negative outcomes of stress have been recognized as financially costly. Negative outcomes of job stress among individuals include illness, decline in overall quality of work, job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and staff turnover (Schwab, 1996).

Occupational stress can result in psychological, physical and behavioural consequences for individuals. These outcomes, in their various forms, can prove quite costly to individuals and organisations to which they belong. Researchers have indicated that psychological consequences include job dissatisfaction, reduced job commitment, anxiety, frustration, anger, and burnout (Aluja, Blanch & Garcia, 2005; Angerer, 2003; Borg, Riding & Falzon, 1991; Hanson & Sullivan, 2003; Luthans, 2002; Manthei & Gilmore, 1996; Maslach, 1982; Sarros & Sarros, 1992; Troman, 2000).

Researches has shown that role conflict and ambiguity have been linked to negative outcomes in

occupational settings, such as increases in perceived job tension, higher job dissatisfaction, greater propensity to leave the firm, and lower performance (Fisher and Gitelson 1983; Jackson and Schuler 1985; Van Sell et al. 1981).

Pareek (1983) has discussed that 10 type of role stress negatively affect the organization namely: Interrole Distance, Role Stagnation, Role Erosion, Role Conflict, Role Overload, Role Ambiguity, Self-Role Distance, Role Isolation, Resource Adequacy and Personal Inadequacy.

The existence of Group and Political pressure will influence the job satisfaction. Political and Group Pressure plays a vital role to increase the stress among the employees as well as the job dissatisfaction among the employees (Hasnain, Iram and Bano, 2010; Deb, Chakraborty, Chatterjee, & Srivastava, 2005a). An individual's stress level can be increased by such varied factors as his or her personality, role conflicts or job designs. Role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, group and political pressure, responsibility under participation, status incongruence, no profitability are so many dimensions of occupational stress (Hasnain, Iram and Bano, 2010). For women Group Political Pressure and Poor Peer Relations were reported to be important source of stress.

Lehal, (2007) described that to reduce the stress level in executives, along with work overload, role clarity, group and political pressure should be reduced, the jurisdiction of authority should not create any uncertainty and ambiguity of the role, the employee should not be politically pressurized, so that he can't fulfill his personal obligation and social responsibilities.

A source of stress that is employee job involvement was studied by Singh & Singh (1984) and was found to be positively related to occupational stress. The employee perception of insecurity in job was negatively related to occupational stress too. Caplan (1985) found that the characteristics of employees like need for high achievement or recognition can intervene and affect their well being. Sparks et al. (2001) found that compressed work time schedules, Flexible Work hours increase satisfaction with the work environment and work schedule itself.

### **Rationale of The Study:**

Numerous studies have shown that occupational stress predicts important variables, including absenteeism, employee performance, burnout, employee job satisfaction and turnover in their organization. Stress is closely parallel to the process of job satisfaction. Any job satisfaction calls for some new type of action: learning from others, looking for a better way, challenging current expectations and guts to convert the challenges to the opportunities. Satisfied people also have an active curiosity, a passion for learning, a willingness to challenge the status quo and an eagerness to experiment with new methods, strategies and procedures. However, there is dearth of studies in Indian context where these two have been explored together especially in call centre. So the present study is an attempt to fill this gap in the knowledge. It aims to explore the

relation between the three components of occupational stress and employee job satisfaction of executives in the call centre companies in India. The study proposes to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any relation between occupational stress and employee job satisfaction?
2. How the occupational stress and burnout is related to employee job satisfaction?

#### **Objective of The Study:**

1. To identify the role-related antecedents, viz., Role overload, Role ambiguity, Role conflict of employee occupational stress.
2. To study the role of Group and political pressure, Responsibility for persons, under participation, Powerlessness, Poor peer relations, Strenuous working environment, Low status, Intrinsic impoverishment, Unprofitable in occupational stress.
3. To study the correlation between occupational stress, burnout and job satisfaction among the call centre employees.
4. To identify the role of burnout on the job satisfaction of the call centre employees.

#### **Hypothesis of The Study:**

1. Occupational stress among call centre employees is caused by role-related factors.
2. There is a predictive relationship between burnout and job satisfaction.
3. There is an inverse relationship between job satisfaction (in the areas of all predicted variables) and occupational stress dimensions.

#### **Methodology:**

##### **Measures:**

##### **Occupational Stress Index:**

Srivastava and Singh Occupational Stress Index (SSOCI) have been used to measure the twelve type of occupational stress. In the current study, the instrument has been slightly modified. Questions that were irrelevant for the targeted call centre companies in India were dropped from the questionnaire and the questions those were relevant for the study were added. The remaining 46- item instrument used a 5-point Likert scale to measure the perceptions of subordinates regarding how much of occupational stress was possessed by them. The main components of the Occupational Stress Index were Role Overload, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Group and Political Pressure, Responsibility for Persons, Under Participation, Powerlessness, Poor Peer relations, Intrinsic Impoverishment, Low Status, Strenuous Working Environment and Profitability. A higher score indicates a high occupational stress base of a CCR.

##### **Job Satisfaction Index:**

Job satisfaction was measured with the Job Satisfaction index (Harris, 2000).

A scale contains a 40 items, comprised items belong to Salary, Job task, Work Environment, Colleagues, Sense of purpose, Career Path Options, Autonomy, Workload. The scoring of the scale ranges between 0 and 3. A higher score indicated greater satisfaction from work.

##### **Burnout:**

Burnout was measured with the short form of the organizational employee Burnout questionnaire (Raya and Verdick. 2000). In the current study, the instrument has been slightly modified. Questions that were irrelevant for the study in India were dropped from the questionnaire. This instrument contained five items; for the current study, each item was cast on a 4- point scale. The responses to the items were averaged to create a continuous scale of employee burnout. Raya and Verdick (2000) summarized a series of studies which present evidence of satisfactory retest reliabilities and predictive, convergent, and discriminant validities of the scale.

##### **Questionnaire and Procedure:**

A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and a self-addressed and post-paid envelope accompanied the questionnaire. The respondents were informed that for returning the completed questionnaires, they would be entitled to a token gift. The management of the participating companies was also promised a copy of the overall survey report for their internal evaluation and use. It was agreed by the managers of participating companies that the individual participants would fill out the forms on time and without any interference from the participants' supervisors or other employees. The participants were requested to return their questionnaires within two weeks from the day they were received. All 112 questionnaires were returned on time to a rented post office box in the Chandigarh. Twelve of them could not be used because of instructional violations in the response data. Data from the remaining 100 questionnaires were processed for output analysis.

##### **Analysis and Results:**

The number of items, mean, standard deviations, and internal consistency reliabilities of all the behavioural variables as assessed by Cronbach (1951) alpha are shown in Table 1. Table 1 shows the mean, S.D. and Cronbach alpha of job satisfaction, occupational stress and burnout, which are listed in the survey questionnaire. The reliability coefficients for all the variables were satisfactory (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 2 shows Pearson correlations between the one dependent and thirteen independent variables. Twenty eight of the 91 correlations were significant at 0.05 levels. The correlations between the dependent and independent variables were in the expected directions.

Table 1: Items, Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach Alpha of Independent and Dependent Variables

Variables	No. of items	Mean	S.D.	Standard Cranach Alpha
Role overload	4	8.76	2.97	0.79
Role ambiguity	4	9.26	2.54	0.84
Role conflict	2	4.47	1.35	0.86
Group and political pressure	5	14.18	2.38	0.92
Responsibility for persons	2	3.92	.98	.074
Under participation	7	14.80	3.82	0.86
Powerlessness	3	6.38	2.36	0.91
Poor peer relations	5	12.18	4.07	0.87
Strenuous working environment	4	13	4.21	0.88
Low status	2	4.17	1.31	0.91
Intrinsic impoverishment	6	12.37	2.78	0.93
Unprofitable	2	4.26	1.21	.094
Burnout	5	12.18	3.83	0.87
Job satisfaction	40	35.56	10.08	0.81

Table No. 2: Pearson Intercorrelation among the Job satisfaction, Occupational Stress and Burnout

Vari.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	1													
2	.173	1												
3	.2*	.89**	1											
4	.098	.113	.124	1										
5	.049	.46**	.501**	.037	1									
6	-.142	-.06	-.098	.096	-.17	1								
7	.101	.041	.140	-.03	.201*	-.33**	1							
8	.175	.146	.107	.146	.125	-.142	.11	1						
9	.288**	.27**	.270**	.068	.28**	-.26*	.22*	.067	1					
10	.192	.57**	.542**	.1	.30**	-.13	.172	.19	.46**	1				
11	-.074	.022	-.031	-.03	-.182	.63**	-.33**	-.09	-.11	-.017	1			
12	.197*	.64**	.65**	.071	.4**	-.14	.20*	.021	.38**	.532**	.010	1		
13	.162	.149	.116	.14	.138	-.16	.14	.99**	.07	.179	-.118	.025	1	
14	-.224*	-.21*	-.26*	.102	-.341**	.21*	-.36**	-.206*	-.21**	-.281**	.064	-.273**	-.215*	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

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

{1= Role overload, 2= Role ambiguity, 3= Role conflict, 4= Group and political pressure, 5= Responsibility for persons, 6= under participation, 7= Powerlessness, 8= Poor peer relations, 9= Strenuous working environment, 10= Low status, 11= Intrinsic impoverishment, 12=Unprofitable, 13= Burnout, 14= Job satisfaction}

### Regression:

Table No. 3 represents multiple correlations between stress and job satisfaction was found to be (.046). Whereas between and job satisfaction was (.096). In this table the beta value reveals that both burnout and stress emerged as the significant predictors of the job satisfaction. Burnout is negatively related ( $b = -.247$ ) with job satisfaction, whereas stress is also negatively related with job satisfaction ( $b = -.566$ ).

### Discussion:

The objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction. The validity of the results depends, to a great extent, on the psychometric adequacies of the measurement instruments and the nature of the sample used. Therefore, an attempt was made to select psychometrically sound measures of the independent and dependent variables and to collect data with these measures from a random sample of managers from the selected call centre in Punjab zone. This study indicated that group and political pressure, under participation,

Table No. 3 Multiple Liner regression of satisfaction, Occupational Stress and Burnout

Variables	R2	Df1	Df2	F	B1	Sig.
Burnout	.046	1	98	4.765**	-.247	.031*
Stress	.096	1	98	10.376**	-.566	.002**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

intrinsic impoverishment were more effective in influencing the CCR's job satisfaction. However, the correlations between the variables were found to be stronger in call centre.

Research on the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction presents not so much contradictory results. Very few studies have shown positive relationship, number of studies has shown no relationship, while the large number of studies has indicated the effect of moderator variables in influencing the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction.

Previous researches have been demonstrated that employees working in the helping professions are particularly vulnerable to the experience of burnout (Paton & Goddard, 2003) and to the emotional and behavioral sequelae of both burnout and lowered job satisfaction (Bingham, Valenstein, Blow, & Alexander, 2002). Research claims that such outcomes are, in part, a consequence of employment in jobs characterized by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations and being engaged in extensive face-to-face contact with people and their problems (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Pines & Aronson, 1988). Although the aforementioned characteristics describe the working environment of employees in the call centre in general, CCR's face additional and unique job demands that are likely to affect differentially the experiences of both burnout and job satisfaction.

Present study indicates that source of stress regularly encountered by most individuals in work settings is role stress. Role stress consists of two important constructs, role ambiguity and role conflict. Role ambiguity arises in the work environment when an employee lacks adequate information for effective performance of a given role (Senatra 1980). In this study, role conflict was operationalized in terms of conflict among the CCR's professional.

During the study it was found that the potential effects of conflict and ambiguity are costly, not only to the individual in terms of emotional consequences such as high job-related tension and low job satisfaction, but also to the organization in terms of lower quality of performance and higher turnover (Sanatra, 1980)

The possibility of role stress being associated with poor performance and job dissatisfaction should be a significant concern to the call centre profession. Lower levels of CCR's performance can lead to inefficient and ineffective calls which, in turn, unnecessarily expose call centre firms to legal liability, loss of revenue, and diminished credibility.

Results reveal that job dissatisfaction among employees might have been resulted from their occupying lower

status positions in call centre as a result of which they have minimal organizational power and little control over work demands. Under such circumstances it may be expected that, compared to the other organizations call centre jobs are found their jobs much more stressful.

The high mean scored of the call centre on unreasonable group and political pressures shows their intolerance of pressures which might create role ambiguity and role conflict in their work, since they are in a state of adjusting to both their work and personal lives. (Jamuna and Sujata Ramamurthi, 1984) described that political pressures that involved in several aspects of their job starting from supervision of their subordinates to the distribution of product, this might have caused them to feel more stressful on this factor.

Results states that impoverishment, poor peer relations and burnout have a more sever effect of the job satisfaction as compare to the role related factors, this seems to indicate that CCRs are willing to accept work pressure as part of the job and that they look to other factors as a source of job satisfaction.

Results discuss that environment in which individuals work has a tremendous effect on their level of pride in themselves and the work they do. New entrants in the call centre typically have high expectations as young executives, and coming from their educational institutions, but in reality they may find the call centre environment as too ill-designed and without much scope for applying their knowledge. Results shows that a work environment in call centre is associated with high burnout were those that required adherence to work through restriction of worker freedom and that deemphasized planning and efficiency. Higher levels of burnout were also associated with vague job expectations, extensive rules and regulations, and minimal support of new ideas and procedures. Conversely, low levels of burnout were associated with environments in which employees were dedicated to their work, co-worker relationships were encouraged, and supervisory relationships were supportive.

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