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Work Stress among Managers of Business Organizations in Bangladesh

Md. Asadul Islam

Ph.D. Student, Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Economics and Management, UPM, Malaysia

Dr. Amer Hamzah Bin Jantan

Senior Lecturer, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Malaysia

Md. Abdul Bashir

Ph.D. Student, Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Economics and Management, UPM, Malaysia

Md. Sohel Masud

Ph.D. Student, Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Economics and Management, UPM, Malaysia

Banarupa Roy

Ph.D. Student, Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Economics and Management, UPM, Malaysia

Abstract:

This paper aims to identify the sources and levels of work stress experienced by frontline, middle and senior managers within business organizations in Bangladesh. Six factors are considered as the major antecedents of work stress namely role overload (qualitative), role overload (quantitative), role conflict, role ambiguity, responsibility for others and career development. Study has used a cross-sectional survey to collect quantitative data from 457 respondents in particular three managerial positions, frontline, middle and senior from 36 randomly selected business organizations operating in private sector of Bangladesh. Results have revealed that 80.40% of participants experience moderate levels of work stress in their workplace. Career development and responsibility for others are identified as the most significant sources of work stress in Bangladeshi business organizations. Role conflict and role ambiguity have been found as stressors causing reasonably least amount of work stress among the participants. Since there has been no study, previously, identifying the sources and levels of work stress in Bangladeshi business organisations, the significance of this research lies in its highlighting of the specific factors causing work stress among the business managers in this country.

Keywords: Stress, factors, managers, Bangladesh, responsibility

1. Introduction

Dynamic working condition and ever-increasing complexities in business organisations have given rise to higher levels of work stress for employees (Jetha, et al, 2017, Lindhom, 2006; Lin, et al, 2014). Work-related stress has been identified as one of the most significant problems at workplace in different countries. According to Parker and Decotiis, (1983), work stress is an undesirable and uncomfortable feeling that is experienced by employees due to constraints, conditional opportunities, and demands, all relating to gaining work-related outcomes. It is responsible for various negative outcomes for individuals and organisations, for example illness (Lange, et al, 2003), decreased individual performance (Rao, and Ramesh, 2015; Shankar and Famuyiwa, 1991), reduced effectiveness in terms of organisational performance, and increased costs relating to health care (Siu, 2003; Haq, 2008).

Jennings, (2008), Gray-Stanley, (2011), found that employees experience stress at workplace when the working procedure is ambiguous, complex or over-demanding. They also feel work stress due to lack of competencies and required resources at workplace to cope with demands of employers (Michie, 2002). Previous studies relating to work stress by a number of different researchers have identified some significant stressors. In particular, responsibility for others (Murphy et al, 1995; Sutherland and Cooper, 1990), role conflict, role overload, and role ambiguity (Michie, 2002, Ivancevich et al, 1982) and career development (Michie) are very important and common sources of work stress in a number of different organisations. In this study, the critical stressors presented by Ivancevich and Matteson (1980) will be used as a basis to evaluate both sources and level of work stress in the Bangladeshi work environment.

There have been numerous studies relating to the reasons for work stress (stressors) and their relationship with the different variables relating to the organizations. Most of these studies have been performed in relation to Western and other developed countries (Bhagat, et al, 2010). However, there has been no research so far relating to this issue conducted in Bangladesh, which is one of the developing countries in the world. The country has been experiencing significant growth due to increased export diversifications and foreign direct investment (FDI) in key sectors such as Ready-Made Garments (RMG), Agriculture, construction, shipbuilding industry. Moreover, the country is experiencing huge social, economic and technological transformations along with both national and international trade challenges. These challenges have created a great deal of pressure on managers of businesses to maintain

profitability and ensure a sustainable position in both domestic and global markets. However, it is uncovered that sources of work stress, which have been identified in organizations in Western countries, cause similar or different levels of stress among managers in Bangladeshi business organizations. According to Mackey, et al, (2004), since work stress results from interactions between environmental factors and the appraisal by the individual of those factors, differences in individual traits, contexts and culture may significantly impact this process.

Employees are considered as the most valuable and significant strategic resource in modern business organisations, therefore this key resource should be treated with the greatest care and consideration so that they, together, form a team, which is able to gain competitive advantage in competitive and challenging market environment. In this regard, work stress has been identified as a key issue, which must be taken seriously. Hence, higher management must understand the nature of stress in order that they can devise strategies and policies, which will protect employees from the negative impact of it. This study has been carried out with the aim of helping management to formulate customised and robust stress management strategies based on information relating to specific antecedents of work stress and the amount of stress which is caused by these in business organizations in Bangladesh.

1.1. Aims of the Study

In line with the above discussion, the aims of the study are:

- To identify the level of stress being experienced by managers in business organizations in Bangladesh.
- To recognise the sources of work stress in terms of their strengths (low vs. high) in relation to their ability to generate work stress among managers of business organizations in Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sources of Work Stress

Sources of stress are called stressors. According to Lazarus and Folkman, (1984), stressors are defined as factors, which threaten to individuals' psychological and physical well-being. Researches have identified more than 40 interacting factors as major sources of stress in business organizations. However, Murphy et al, (1995) and Michie (2002) have classified these different stressors into just five generic stressor categories. These categories were widely used in early research studies relating to stress in the workplace. These categories are as follows:

- i. Role in the organisation,
- ii. Relationships at work,
- iii. Factors intrinsic to the job,
- iv. Career development, and
- v. Organisational culture and climate.

2.1.1. Role in the Organisation

Role is identified as the expectation placed on employees in the workplace relating to output and behavioural patterns. Role conflict and role ambiguity have been identified as major sources of work stress in relation to organisational role of the employees. In this respect, when there is a lack of information relating to the role of an employee, role ambiguity emerges. Thus, this is identified as a predictor of low self-confidence, low motivation, strain, job dissatisfaction, and intentions to leave (Torrington et al, 2009; Mullins, 2010; O'Driscoll and Beer, 1994). On the other hand, when an employee is considered to perform specific roles but these are conflicting with others, role conflict arises (Tang and Chang, 2010) (Khan et al, 1964). This is also identified as a major predictor of increased anxiety and tension and extreme job dissatisfaction (Fisher, 1972; Rizzo, et al, 1970) (Honoubi, 2017).

Taking on other's Responsibilities and role overload are two other significant factors related to the role, which employees perform in organisation. When an employee has more than one role to perform simultaneously, they feel role overload and experience significant stress. As a result, a negative impact on the performance of the individual is felt, and this leads to negative work outcomes (Cartwright and Cooper, 1997). Role overload has been divided into two aspects, qualitative and quantitative role overload (David and Catherine, 2003; Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980). According to David and Catherine, (2003) a quantitative overload results from demands for work accomplishments, which are not consistent with the time available to perform necessary work. In contrast, they defined qualitative overload as organisational duties that exceed both perceived skills and capabilities of the employees. Glisson et al, (2006), Kuschel, et al, (2015), (Melan, and Cascino, 2014) found that both qualitative and quantitative role overloads are responsible for depression, reductions in self-confidence, problems with attention, frustration, anxiety and accidents in the workplace.

2.1.2. Factors Intrinsic to the Job

According to Raeve et al, (2007), Kempen et al, (2002) the stressor factors intrinsic to a job are poor work environment, potential danger in the workplace, work overload and lengthy working hours. When the working conditions are not safe or are generally poor, employees feel stress and this may also be implicated in poor mental health (Kahn, 1964). Indeed, the workloads imposed within the organisation can have a direct impact on the health of the employees. In fact, workload (qualitative and quantitative) has been responsible for many negative impacts on employees: for example, job tension, dissatisfaction with the organisation and the job, increased addiction to smoking, heart related problems etc.

2.1.3. Relationships at Work

The condition and extent of an individual's relationships with different employees at the workplace has also been identified as a significant source of work stress across different organizations (Cartwright and Cooper, 1997). According to Torrington, et al, (2007; Mullins, 2010), poor relationships between colleagues can create huge stress and for example mental and physical health conditions. This is also associated with low job satisfaction and low employee retention.

2.1.4. Career Development

Career development exposes how individual's career within an organisation and how organisation facilitates career progress of their employees. According to Parker and Decotiis (1983) when employees find difficulties in career progress in organisation, they feel career stress. As a result, high dissatisfaction, poor work performance, job mobility and low interpersonal relationship at workplace become common (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980).

2.1.5. Organisational Structure and Climate

Organisational culture, structure and management/leadership style are identified as significant sources of work stress at workplace (Cartwright and Cooper, 1997). For example, bureaucratic structure organisation controls freedom and autonomy of individuals that can cause work stress among employees. On the other hand, interaction between colleagues on personal issues and open working culture in organizations also play crucial role to create work stress. In addition, other factors, which are prominently related to this issue, include rapid technological advancements and establishments, more females in workplaces and changes social infrastructure etc. (Frone, et al, 1992).

3. Hypotheses of the Study

Based on literature review, found gap and objectives of the study following hypotheses have been framed to investigate:

- H₁: Role overload (qualitative) is a source of work stress in Bangladeshi business organizations.
- H_{1a}: Role overload (quantitative) is a source of work stress in Bangladeshi business organizations.
- H₂: Role conflict is a source of work stress in Bangladeshi business organizations.
- H₃: Role ambiguity is a source of work stress in Bangladeshi business organizations.
- H₄: Responsibility for others can be identified as a source of work stress in Bangladeshi business organizations.
- H₅: Career development is a source of work stress in Bangladeshi business organizations.

3. Methodology

To collect the data, a cross section survey method was used. The survey was conducted through a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 30 questions. The instrument to be used for the research was taken from Ivancevich and Matteson (1980), who exclusively made it to measure work stress relating to six factors, which are:

- Role overload quantitative,
- Role overload qualitative,
- Role ambiguity,
- Role conflict,
- Responsibility for others and
- Career development.

This instrument was mainly used to concurrently identify both the levels and the sources of work stress, based on the real experiences of employees. It was also used to measure work stress in relation to the frequency of occurrence of different stressors. It was recommended by the research studies produced by DeFrank and Ivancevich, (1998) and Dewe, (1989) that both the existence and the frequency of the stressors experienced by individuals should be included for the better understanding of stress experiences.

4.1. Sample Population

100 business organisations listed in the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce were randomly selected and invited to participate in the study. However, only 34 organisations responded to the survey. According to Daft and Marcic, (2008), managerial positions are divided into three categories: middle managers, frontline managers, and top-level managers. A number of different researchers have used this segregation in their researches. Therefore, the present study has followed this precedent. Only managerial participants were selected for this study because it was considered that employees in managerial roles experience higher work stress than employees in non-managerial roles (Rebele and Michaels, 1990; Ho, 2009; Baer and Oldham, 2006).

4.2. Instrument

This study has been completed based on the instrument adopted from the research work of Ivancevich and Matteson (1980). This instrument measures work stresses relating to six identified stressors/factors, which are role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, qualitative role overload, career development and responsibility for other employees. In line with this, five questions for each stressor of six identified stressors from Ivancevich and Matteson (1980) were asked. Sample questions for each factor are for example:

- The duties and objectives of work are not clear to me (role ambiguity);
- I am given conflicting tasks by two or more people (role conflict);
- I am given more work than I can do in the working hours available (quantitative workload);

- The organisation always expects more of me than my abilities and skills (qualitative overload);
- There are very few opportunities to develop my skills and to enhance my position (career development);
- I have to perform others' responsibilities frequently (taking on others' responsibilities).

In this study, the statements were rated by the respondents, in terms of their relevance to that employee, according to a 7-point semantic scale. In this regard, 1 denoted "condition is never a source of stress" while 7 denoted that "condition is always a source of stress." The questionnaire measures perceived stress of employees in terms of low, moderate or high. An explanation of the scores to low, moderate and high has been given in the following table:

1-15 denotes	16-25 denotes	26-35 denotes
Low	Moderate	High

Table 1: Explanation of the scores:

Furthermore, the accumulative mean scores relating to the factors were calculated in integrated form and also independently in order to evaluate the level of work stress. A higher score means a higher level of stress due to the related factor. The instrument has also been used and validated in different previous studies but in relation to different cultural contexts (i.e. see School and Barnard, 1995, Deluga1991).

5. Result

5.1. Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the data collected from the respondents through the survey. The scores from the Cronbach's Alpha tests for each factor are provided in the following table:

Factors	Score
Role overload (Quantitative)	0.74
Role overload (Qualitative)	0.73
Role ambiguity	0.79
Role conflict	0.78
Career development	0.68
Responsibility for others	0.73

Table 2: Reliability table

For the entire instrument, the reliability score was 0.94. According to reliability-score table, the scores of the factors were relatively high and also within the good range, therefore the high reliability of the data emphasis for further analyses.

5.2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Only 476 questionnaires were returned, and in the end only 457 returned questionnaires were found to be usable. The demographic profile of the respondents/participants is given below:

Variables	Values	%
Age	Below 20	0
	21-30	49%
	31-40	37.4%
	Above 40	13.6%
Gender	Male	83%
	Female	17%
Industries	Readymade Garments	39%
	Banking	12%
	Pharmaceutical	6%
	Education	3%
	Telecommunication	12%
	Consultancy	17%
	Electronics	7%
	Textile	4%
Education level	Undergraduate	17%
	Masters/MBA	79%
	MPhil/DBA/PhD	4%
Work experience	1 to 2 years	14%
	3 Year to 5 years	36%
	6 Years to 10 years	34%
	Above 10 years	16%

Table 3: Demographic table of respondents

Since the selected geographical area for data collection is mainly dominated by companies involved in the readymade garments market, the number of participants of this study from this sector is high.

5.3. Level of Work Stress

The level of work stress reported is shown in the following table:

Level of stress	Frequency	%
Low stress	47	10.30
Moderate stress	367	80.48
High stress	43	9.22
Total	457	100

Table 4: Frequency and percentage of level of work stress among participants:

5.4. Sources of Work Stress

The sources of work stress are shown in the following table:

Sources of work stress	Mean	Standard deviation	Level of the work stress			Pearson Chi-Squares
			Low	Moderate	High	
Role overload (qualitative)	3.5740	1.35	101 (22%)	297 (65%)	59 (13%)	.000*
Role overload (quantitative)	3.5930	1.36	95 (21%)	288 (63%)	73 (16%)	.000*
Role conflict	3.5670	1.34	114 (25%)	260 (57%)	82 (18%)	.000*
Role ambiguity	3.5624	1.37	145 (32%)	279 (61%)	31 (7%)	.000*
Taking others' Responsibilities	3.7843	1.47	71 (16%)	330 (72%)	54 (12%)	.000*
Career development	3.9578	1.40	62 (14%)	311 (68%)	82 (18%)	.000*

Table 5: Sources and levels of work stress

*Results are significant @ $P < 0.01$

According to the results in table 5, the highest source of stress is responsibility for others; this is followed by career development, role overload (quantitative), role overload (qualitative), role conflict, and role ambiguity.

Based on the literature review and the objectives of this study, the hypotheses have been developed and tested. The first hypothesis is "Role overload (qualitative) is a source of work stress in Bangladeshi business organizations." According to the results, 78% participants (moderate 65% + high 13%) have experienced role overload (qualitative). This means that employees in Bangladeshi business organizations are attempting to satisfy more than one of the requirements of their role in inadequate resources and time. Therefore, the first hypothesis must be accepted. Thus, it can be concluded that role overload (qualitative) is a source of stress within Bangladeshi business organizations.

The second hypothesis, concerning role overload (quantitative) must also be accepted because 79% participants (moderate 65% + high 13%) reported that they have experienced work stress due to this factor. Therefore, this result suggests that role overload (quantitative) is a source of work stress within Bangladeshi business organizations.

Similar results are found in the case of the third hypothesis, role conflict; this is also accepted because 75% participants (moderate 57% + high 18%) reported that it was a source of work stress. Further, the fourth hypothesis, concerning role ambiguity, also cannot be rejected because 68% (moderate 61% + high 7%) participants of the study reported it as a source of work stress in the organizations where they work.

Furthermore, in relation to the fifth hypothesis, concerning responsibility for others, 84% participants identified this as a source of work stress within their organizations. Therefore, this hypothesis is also accepted. Finally, sixth hypothesis on career development is accepted because 86% of participants identified this as a source of stress in their organization.

6. Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify both the sources and the levels of work stress among managers in Bangladeshi business organizations. The study found that 89.7% of participants felt moderate to high levels of stress. This evidences that working in business organizations in Bangladesh is stressful for managerial level employees. The most significant stressor was found in this study to be career development (i.e., 86% with the highest mean score of 3.9578). Thus, it established that career development opportunities available for managers become rarer and more difficult in Bangladesh. This could be due to the dynamic market environment, the economic downfall in relation to some industries and countries, strategies for organisational survival, internal competitiveness, etc.

(Hrishi and Jackson, 1996, Bispinck et al, 2010, Lenz, et, el. 2012, PWC, 2016). These factors are also common in Bangladeshi business organizations, therefore the managers in these organizations feel work stress, and this is confirmed by this study.

On the other hand, responsibility for others has been identified as the second most significant factor causing work stress among the managers of business organizations in Bangladesh. This is consistent with the results from the study by Jonson (1995). From this perspective, it is perceived that managers in these organizations have to perform colleagues' functions, which could be stressful.

Role overload quantitative (79%) and role overall qualitative (78%) were the third and fourth most important stressors respectively, based on the results of this study. In more detail, limited supportive equipment, a scarcity of raw materials or resources and too much organisational expectation in relation to employees performing different jobs seem always to impose stress on the managers in Bangladeshi business organizations. In addition, it can easily be seen that business organizations in Bangladesh always demand that multiple skills should be exercised by their employees, who must execute more than one job, in effect. The result also evidences that business organisations in Bangladesh do not provide the necessary resources to the employees for performing the tasks required of them. This result is consistent with the results of work by Ivancevich et al, (1982); Eldon and Abraham (1991).

Role conflict was being found to be the fifth most important source of stress in Bangladeshi business organizations. In fact, 75% participants reported that they experienced moderate to high-level stress at the workplace due to role conflict. This could be due to the situation whereby employees are incapable of protesting against conflicting demands from colleagues and the organisation as a whole. Moreover, an organisational structural problem can be one of the major causes of this stressor – role conflict stress.

According to the results of this study, role ambiguity was the factor causing least amount of work stress for managers, in comparison to the other factors. In this respect, 68% of participants in this study reported that they experienced moderate to high level of stress due to role ambiguity, and this is consistent with the research results of Eldon and Abraham (1991).

7. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to discover both the sources and the levels of work stress, which exists for middle managers, frontline managers, and top-level managers in Bangladeshi business organizations. The study found that managers face, in general, moderate levels of work stress. Now if this is the case across all the organizations of the developing countries, this is clearly detrimental to both employees at all levels and their employers. Based on the results of this study, it is established that work stress is an unavoidable factor in organizations within Bangladesh. Therefore, it is crucial to develop effective stress management strategies in order to tackle the factors causing work stress among the managers. Hence, this study should be very beneficial to such an effort since it has identified six significant stressors causing work stress among managers within business organizations in Bangladesh. Thus, these organisations should be able to customise strategies to alleviate work stress for managers or even for other employees and to safeguard them from detrimental impacts of work stress.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study was completed only in relation to variables directly involved in work stress. It was not possible for the researchers to include all the issues and variables, which might be responsible for work stress experiences in business organizations. However, future researches can be conducted to include more such variables. In this regard, the sources and levels of work stress due to the stressors relating to employee engagement, performance and productivity could be investigated in relation to Bangladeshi business organizations to determine whether the results obtained from Western organisations are relevant here or not.

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