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Nature of Employment and Psychosocial Stress

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Abstract:

Contractual employment has been on the rise for the last few decades. Traditionally, such practices were used only to manage the small or temporary fluctuations in workload. However, in present scenario some positions are staffed only with temporary employees. Contractual or temporary employment is expected to be associated with poor working conditions, negative health consequences, financial constraints, adversities, hardships etc. The objective of the present study is to examine and compare the level of psychosocial stress among regular and contract based employees, working in public sectors. Sample of 300 public sector employees from Himachal Pradesh, India were selected and divided into two groups i.e. regular and contract based (150 each). These subjects were further divided into sub-groups based on genders. The outcome was statistically analyzed using two-way analysis of variance to find out significant differences if any. The outcome of the present study revealed that contract based employees have experienced significantly higher level of psychosocial stress as compared to regular employees. Further, males have experienced higher level of stress than their female counterparts.

Keywords: Contractual employment, public sector, psychosocial stress.

1. Introduction

Contractualisation of job is recognized as one of the most challenging social problems. Use of employees in temporary, part-time, ad-hoc, and contract employment is widespread and has been on the rise in Public sector in India. Growth of contract based employment raises questions about the economic and social impact of contractual work arrangements. This development is considered as troublesome and stressful (Bhandari & Heshmati, 2006). Traditionally, temporary/contract employees were used to manage the fluctuations in demand, temporarily increasing the workload, or to replace permanent workers during the period they were absent due to sickness, vacation or pregnancy. However, in present scenario some positions are staffed only with temporary employees, and this practice has become one of organizations' personnel strategies (von Hippel et al., 1997), regardless of whether the purpose of these strategies is cost reduction or to gain additional expertise.

Temporary employment is expected to be associated with poor working conditions (low wages, negligible job security, little training, deprivation of fundamental benefits and no possibility of advancement) and negative health consequences (anxiety, stress, depression, etc.) (Kunda et al., 2002; Cheng & Chan, 2008; Probst, 2008). A number of studies (Rigotti et al, 2009; Aronsson et al., 2002; De Cuyper, Isaksson & Witte, 2008; Ehlert, & Schaffner, 2011; Raphahlelo, 2006) have found that temporary workers present higher insecurity, more psychosomatic complaints, lower psychological well-being and reduced performance than permanents. Permanent employees are generally protected in terms of job and promotional opportunity. On the other hand, contract based employees are unprotected and remain in that status despite working for many years in an organization. A permanent worker works under job protection legislation while a temporary or contract worker works under continual worry that his/her contract might not be extended (Bhandari & Heshmati, 2006). Teachers especially those who are appointed on temporary or contractual bases are always work under stress, because of their status of being temporary (Shakir & Zia, 2014).

Increasing unemployment, low economic status, changing government policies and diminishing opportunities for permanent employment force one to accept a contract based job. Further, contractual or temporary work might improve probabilities of finding regular employment and provides an opportunity to gain work experience. Some individuals that would otherwise not have been able to find a regular job might find work using temporary employment as a stepping-stone (Graaf-Zijl, 2005; Dessler, 2008).

To gain a better understanding of contract based employees and their work situation, the current investigation explores the relationship between contractual employment and levels of psychosocial stress.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

A sample of 300 subjects of age group 25-40 years were selected from different government organizations viz. educational institutes, hospitals, and various other organizations from the various districts of Himachal Pradesh.

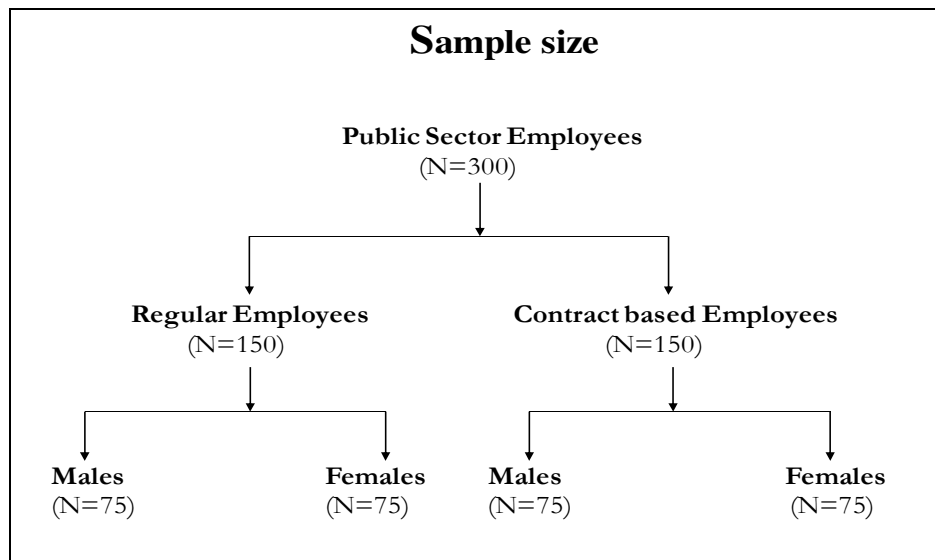


Figure 1

2.2. Tool Used

ICMR Psychosocial Stress Scale (Srivastava, 1991-92) was used, the scale was designed by “Indian council of medical research” “New Delhi” to assess the extent of the basic components of psychological stress resulting from perceived stress situations (such as hardships, adversities, threats, failures, constrains, excessive demands, conflicting roles etc.) in various spheres of social life. Section (A) consists of daily hassles and section (B) covers stressful life events (reduced income, loss of job, failures, heavy economic loss, divorce, and relationship break ups etc).

Reliability of measure of stress was estimated through Cronbach-alpha correlation, Split half (odd-even), Retest Methods with reliability index of .88, .81 and .72 respectively. Validity of the questionnaire was extensively examined through different methods of validity exclamation “content” and “predictive”, “concurrent” and “congruent” validity. All the methods yielded high validity.

The instrument was administrated to all the 300 subjects individually in face to face situations. Instructions given in the respective manual were followed while administering and scoring the test. The subjects had to give either of four responses (ratings) to each of the items in two measures of stress questionnaire (psychosocial stress and stressful life events). The responses were scored as given in the table 1. The total score was obtained by summing up all the individual scores.

Responses (ratings)	Score
Not at all	0
A little/mild/ sometimes	1
Moderate/many times	2
Severe/often	3

Table 1: Numerical values of responses

2.3. Statistical analysis

Results were statistically analysed using two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to verify if there were any significant differences among the variable under study.

3. Results

The result indicates that the level of stress due to daily hassles is quite higher in contract based employees as compared to regular employees (40.88 v/s 29.27). Contract based employees experiencing 28.4% higher level of stress due to daily hassles as compared to the later (Fig. 1). Further, the difference in stress level between the groups is found to be highly significant in ANOVA, with significant ‘F’- ratio i.e. 102.4 at p < .01 (Table 2).

In case of Gender (males’ and females’) the level of stress due to daily hassles is slightly higher in males than females’ (35.72 v/s 34.42). However, the difference is found to be insignificant (Table 2).

The two factor interaction effect has been found to be insignificant on the variable of stress due to daily hassles, which means that there is no interaction among groups and gender on the variable of stress due to daily hassles (Table 2).

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F
Group	10103.603	1	10103.603	102.456**
Gender	126.750	1	126.750	1.285
Group × Gender	187.230	1	187.230	1.899
Error	29189.653	296	98.614	
Total	39607.236	299		

Table 2: Summary of 2×2 ANOVA for stress due to daily hassles (**)=p< .01

The scores on level of stress due to stressful life events among contract based employees is comparatively higher than those of regular employees (13.86 v/s 11.49), which is significant in ANOVA, with significant ‘F’- ratio i.e. 23.61, p < .01 (Fig. 1, Table 3). The data indicates that the contract based employees are facing more stress due to stressful life events as compared to regular employees.

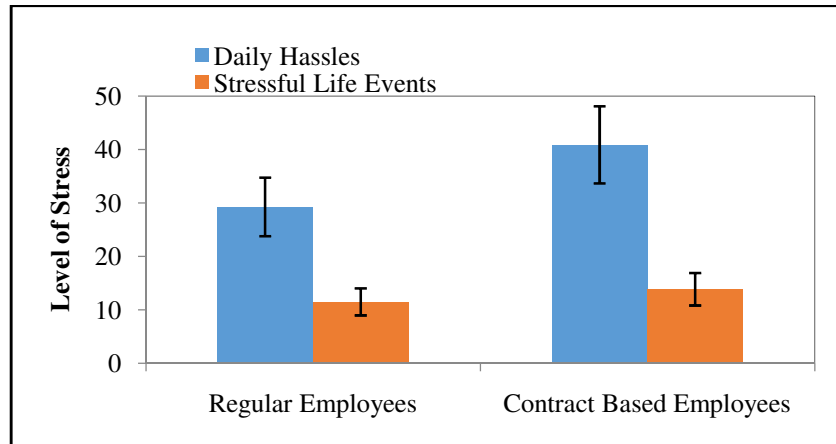


Figure 1: Showing level of stress due to daily hassles and stressful life events among regular and contract based employees.

In case of Gender, the males’ score of level of stress due to stressful life events is significantly higher than females’ (13.52 v/s 11.82) and this difference is significant in ANOVA with significant ‘F’- ratio 12.22, p < .01(Table 3). The interaction effect of group × gender is significant in ANOVA. The ‘F’- ratio is 10.38, which is significant at .01 level, indicating that scores of males and females differ significantly among different groups i.e. regular and contract based employees (Fig. 2, Table 3).

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Group	420.083	1	420.083	23.690**
Gender	216.750	1	216.750	12.224**
Group × Gender	184.083	1	184.083	10.381**
Error	5248.720	296	17.732	
Total	6069.636	299		

Table 3: Summary of 2×2 ANOVA for stress due to stressful life events (**)=p< .01

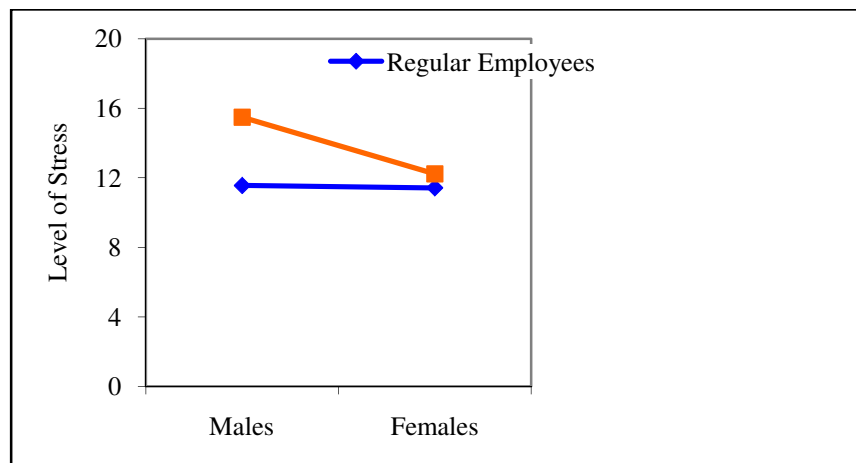


Figure 2: The interaction effect of group × gender on level of stress due to stressful life events.

4. Discussion

The use of contractual employment is increasingly becoming a significant feature of contemporary work. Traditionally, temporary/contract based employees were used to manage the fluctuations in demand, temporarily increasing the workload, or to replace permanent workers during the period they were absent due to sickness, vacation or pregnancy. However, in present scenario some positions are staffed only with temporary employees, and this practice has become one of organizations' personnel strategies (von Hippel et al., 1997), regardless of whether the purpose of these strategies is cost reduction or to gain additional expertise. Temporary employment is expected to be associated with poor working conditions and negative health consequences. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of contract based employees and their level of psychosocial stress, the present study was undertaken to examine and compare the level of psychosocial stress of contract based employees with regular employees, working in public sector.

Findings on the present study reveals that on the level of stress due to daily hassles, regular employees' group is scoring low as compared to contract based employees' group with means being 29.27 vs. 40.88, with significant F-ratio 102.456, $p < .01$, which indicates the significant impact of contractualisation on psychosocial stress. This may be due to rapid increase and increment of employment uncertainties in the public sector. There is a lot of pressure on contractual employees to perform and becoming regular. Every contract based employee would not become regular, so they are on the horns of dilemma. Waiting for extension of contract is very stressful for these employees. At the same time fear of being jobless does also contribute to stress. On the other hand, regular employees with secure income are seemed to be less affected with stress at least on financial front (Sharma, 2007). Temporary employees had higher level of occupational stress than their permanent counterparts Benavides et al., 2000; (Mazaheri, 2014).

The scores on level of stress due to stressful life events among contract based employees is comparatively higher than those of regular employees (13.86 v/s 11.49), which is significant in ANOVA, with significant 'F'- ratio i.e. 23.61, $p < .01$, showing that contract based employees are experiencing more stress because of various stressful life events (reduced income, loss of job, failures, heavy economic loss, divorce, and relationship break ups, etc.) than regular employees. The rationale could be offered in terms of that fact confounding effect of job and life stress is more significant for contract based employees. Stress from trying to balance the roles of an employees and a family member affects men as well as women working on contract basis. Problem may arise from the work stress (due to uncertainty on the job) spilling over into the family. So, it is apparently reasonable to think that this kind of employment i.e. contract based, affects work as well as family life. Moreover, lack of control over this stressful life event may also contribute to stress. While, regular employees are less stressed and strained by virtue of their sustained and stable job.

The main effect of gender on level of stress due to stressful life events was found to be significant in analysis of variance, with F ratio being 12.22, $p < .01$. Males' score was found to be significantly higher than females' (13.52 v/s 11.82). Traditional male role in our culture is that of wage earner and head of the family. Males are under great pressure on both social and economic front. Increased responsibilities from work and family are a source of strain. By virtue of feminism, women are referred to as the weaker gender, so males are more prone to giving into the pressure of work and family. Moreover, our culture discourages men from openly emoting and females are better equipped to handle the stress than their male counterparts because they expect men to take care of financial aspects. Hence, males are experiencing higher stress than females partly because of work and partly because of promotions and becoming regular. Dasgupta and Kumar (2009) examined the stress levels among Male and Female doctors working in the government hospital. Results revealed that Male doctors are more stressed than the female doctors.

Further, the results of the present study can be best quoted through the interaction effect of group \times gender, which is found to be significant with F ratio being 10.38, $p < .01$. The interaction depicts that, at females end i.e. regular and contract based females are scoring almost same on stress due to stressful life events. The main difference lies at the males' end, where contract based males are significantly higher on stress due to stressful life events than regular male employees. Family is mainly dependent on the financial income of male members. Contractual employees with less pay, very few benefits and incentives always worry about making both the ends meet. While regular males with higher salaries and good perks are able to fulfill all basic needs of the family. So, contract based males experience higher stress than regular males. But, in case of females, both regular and contract based females are almost same on stress levels. The reason being that for females, government job (whether regular or contractual) offer secure work, flexible working pattern and more opportunities to combine a proper career with caring responsibilities.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the results give a clear picture that contract based employees experience more psychosocial stress, job insecurity, and uncertainty regarding the future that further has a devastating impact on their physical health and overall stress level. Due to insecure job, contractual employees are under constant worry regarding regular position. Moreover, fear of becoming jobless is another factor leading to stress. At the same time there is bewildering effect of job and life stress for these employees. Stress arises due to challenge in balancing work and family life. Whereas, regular employees with secured job, balanced work-family life and an assured source of income, are seemed to be less affected with stress.

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