

Workplace Stress and Employee Wellbeing: Case of Health Care Staff in UAE

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Abstract

Workplace stress is a world-wide concern and has been a subject of researchers, academicians, authorities and decision makers' interest. It has evidently been considered to be causing poor performance, reduced employee morale, lack of autonomy, job insecurity and to greater extent the employee's wellbeing. Employees in healthcare and hospitality sector work in 24*7 work schedule due to the demanding nature of the industry. Empirical evidences have indicated that employee experience high stress on account of work overload and long working hours taking a toll on their mental and physical well-being. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of workplace stress on employee well-being among staff employees in the health care sector and hospitals in UAE. A total of 150 employees working at staff level in health care centers and hospitals in UAE were surveyed. The results showed that workplace has negative impact on employee well-being and the impact was found to be weak. The findings of the study suggest that an increase in workplace stresses will reduce well-being of employees. The researchers recommend that in order to reduce the impact of stress on employee well-being organizational support, family support and social support is essential.

Keywords: Workplace stress, employee well-being, health care sector, staff employee

Introduction

With an increase in workplace stress the organizations and decision makers are working towards understanding how the causes and outcomes of stress can be diagnosed and minimized. Workplace stress is the pressure or challenges which employees in the work environment face. Stress is caused by stressors that may originate from work domain and non-work domain, such as work overload, employee-employer relationship, lack of job

autonomy, work schedule, lack of organizational support, poor quality of work and family life, lack of family and social support etc. According to a survey conducted in 2013 by American Psychological Association for Organizational Excellence it was found that work-related stress is a serious issue. More than one-third of working Americans outline that they were experiencing chronic work stress and about 36 percent state that their organizations provide sufficient resources to help them manage that stress. A research study conducted by Towers Watson in 2012 concluded that employees in UAE have a higher level of stress as compared to other countries, as employees in UAE are more concerned over their improper job financial conditions, and concerns over job insecurity. The result of the study showed 56% employees were concerned about their future finances, 42% of employees felt excessive pressure from their work, Moreover, only 45% of employees feel that the levels of stress at work are manageable for them which are still 8% less than the global average (Watson, 2012). Majority of U.A.E employees want a good work/life balance but are under too much stress. According to results of the survey conducted by Bayt.com (2013) in various organizations it was found that on an average working day, 49% of respondents in the UAE feel either under stress or under severe stress. Their respective firm states that in the Middle East and North region 23% of employees always work overtime or take work to home. The reasons 44% of the respondents gave was that it was a part of their job requirements, and 36% said that they wanted to be ahead of their projects, the 30% of the respondents said that they want to finish their deadlines. Only 60% of employees claimed they get support from their firms to manage stressors (Clancy, 2013). A research study was conducted in 3 main hospitals affiliated to Dubai health authority and was found that stress among physicians is more associated to socio demographics and UAE physicians experience higher stress in which females showed a higher stress score because females are primarily involved in traditional family roles as well. The results further indicate that the mean total stress score (48.9) was highest among age 40 to 50. (Al Mazrouei, Al Faisal, Hussein, El Sawaf & Wasfy, 2015). Stress related studies in medical and other supporting industries have always been given critical importance. This is mainly because they are primarily responsible for lives of others and there is very little room for any mistake. At the same time it's not just the doctors, medical practitioners, nurses but the support staff also experiences stress on account of different demanding situations.

UAE health sector employed more than 13,500 people at various levels as per the statistics presented by UAE Health care Overview Q4 2013 report. Health care industry has been experiencing a lot of development including infrastructure, rise in number of specialty clinics and medical care

centers in the recent times. It is very well known that this industry requires employees to work round the clock and fulfill the demands that the jobs entail. The stress generated if not managed effectively will put many lives at risk and thus causing irreparable damages to the stakeholders. Few research studies have been conducted in the past on similar Al Rasasi A. et. al. (2015) investigated work related stress among nurses in Dubai and AM Al Mazrouei et al (2015) also examined determinants of stress among physicians in Dubai. Both the research studies concluded that physicians and nurses experience high levels of work related stress. This research study focuses on investigating the work related stress experienced by staff employees and how it impacts on employee well-being. This research study will help organizations identify the workplace stressors that their employees experience and how it affects the wellbeing of the employees such as their physical and mental health, how it affects relations with other employees and the social circle such as family and friends.

Workplace Stress and Employee Well Being

Stress occurs when employees are not able to meet the deadlines or when there is excessive work and the time is limited to complete the work and other different factors. Employee well-being is related to health and wellness of employee .It is employer's responsibility to create a work environment that promotes employee well-being. Physiological well-being leads to mental well-being and together they help individuals to achieve work life balance. If the employee is satisfied and happy with the organization he/she is committed towards the organization and can easily balance their work-life. Most widely studied work place stressors are lack of organizational support, work overload, stressors, non-standard work hours (including long work hours) etc.(Rowe,2011; Zohar, 1999; Ostraw, 2011&Shagvaliyeva&Yazdanifard, 2014). According to the past research findings, increasingly heightened expectations, lack of appropriate breaks and unrealistic deadlines, causes work related stress and it was found that different kind of people react to stress differently. (Shiamzu & Kosugi, 2003).Gender also plays a very important role in dealing with stressors like work overload. Females face severe stress when there is a conflict between organization and family life whereas males are stressed about roles in organization (Vagg, Spielberger, &Wasala, 2002). Employees who experience higher levels of self-reported "overwork" report a higher scale of stress and symptoms of depression, and poor health and self-care. Long working hours does not only affect personal life but it also has negative impact on employees' health. It evidently increases risks of accidents and affects work productivity and employees long term health in turn increasing cost to the organization. Ostraw (2011) reported that working for more than

11 hours can result into heart ailments thus negatively affecting employee's health and productivity levels. Many organizations have reduced their working hours and have implemented upon flexi work system in order to retain their talented employees. Research findings by Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard (2014) stated that employee well-being, mental & physical and personal well-being, affects employee productivity and performance. Mental well-being is an important sign of a healthy life. If an employee is mentally ill it will result in poor behavior both at work and personal domain. Stress generated from work or other sources causes anxiety and depression resulting in poor performance of employees. Long term and excessive stress can be a serious threat for the well-being of an employee. When stress level rises it leads to drop in the employee performance, such as loss of time, workplace safety concerns, accidents, absenteeism increasing costs for their organizations. Stress caused on account of different and difficult work schedules interfere in employee's family life. The employees don't get enough time to spend with their families, and the stress caused on account of challenging work schedule also makes them physically and psychologically exhausted. The relationship between number of hours worked and burnout depends on the extent to which work schedule meets the need of the employers, her or his partner, and their children.

Empirical evidences have suggested that stress at workplace negatively affects the physical health of the employee. Excessive stress results into burnout and thus eventually leads to individual and organizational losses. Job stressors not only have negative impact on the physical but psychological health and family life as well such that the person is deviated from normal functioning. Excessive stress can lead to sudden cardiac death, tuberculosis and diabetes, psychological diseases like anxiety and depression and behavioural outcomes such as poor academic and work performance (Mishra and Kumari, 2009). According to the researchers organisational commitment is the moderator of stress. It is not only related to physical outcomes but also acts as a moderator for stressor- health relationship (Ahmed Shaikh, 2013). Commitment towards the organisation enables the employees to see direction and add meaning to their work. It also provides employees with a feeling of belonging and stability (Memoona Akram, 2013). Some researchers argue that employee perceptions of their employer's commitment to them act as a buffer when they are challenged by stressful working conditions. The reality of working life is that employee tends to balance work life and personal life which can have positive or a negative spillover effect on their work and Wellbeing. A research study was conducted to investigate the relationship between perceived job stress, job pressure and job threat on the wellbeing of employees by Bell, Rajendran & Theiler (2012), it was found that perceived job stress was strongly and

negatively related to work life balance thus having a negative relationship to well-being to employees but had a weaker positive relationship to the ill-being of employees. When employees are faced with immediate perceived stress such as shorter deadlines, it affects their personal lives and anxiety levels at a short term level and not in the long term thereby not affecting their well –being in the long term (Bell, Rajendran &Theiler, 2012). Thus based upon the critical review of related literature in line with the purpose of the study the following hypotheses will be tested.

Ho: Workplace stress has no impact on employee wellbeing.

H1: Workplace stress has an impact on employee wellbeing

Methodology

Questionnaire was distributed among 240 respondents among hospitals and clinics in the Emirates of Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. A total of 150 respondents working in different health care centers and hospitals completed the survey. The survey was conducted among the support staff employees. The staff employees identified was mainly the administrative staff, helpers, cleaners, drivers, peons, security personnel, customer support executives' etc. The data was collected cross- sectional, through online and physical distribution of questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed using items from the following pre validated measures valid; work stress scale used by the American institute of stress (2011) and Stress in Workplace Scale by American Psychological Association (2011). The employee wellbeing scale and workplace stress scale will be taken from University and College Union (2013). The questionnaire consisted socio demographic questions namely the gender of the respondent, average hours worked per week, mode of employment, and years working at the position. The rest of the items were specific to the variables of research interest.

Results

Table 1 Demographics

	category	n	%
Gender	Male	83	55
	Female	67	45
Average hours worked (per week)	Less than 30	26	17
	31-40 hours	29	19
	41- 50 hours	42	28
	51 hours and above	53	36
Mode of Employment	Contractual	61	41
	Full Time	89	59
Years working at the position	0-2 years	44	29
	2 -4 years	36	24
	4 - 6 years	16	11
	6 years and above	54	36

Table 2 Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.224 ^a	0.05	0.044	0.53672

Table 3 ANOVA

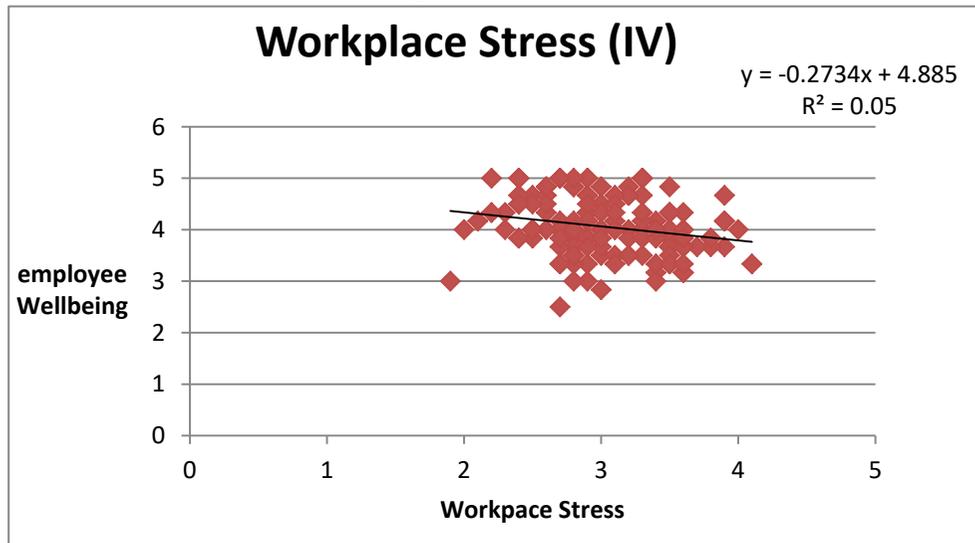
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2.245	1	2.245	7.794	.006 ^b
Residual	42.634	148	0.288		
Total	44.879	149			

Table 4 Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.885	.300		16.283	.000
	WS mean	-.274	.098	-.224	-2.792	.006

Table 1, represents the demographics descriptive statistics. Looking at it most of the respondents total 53 (36%) work for more than 51 hours and more per week. This indicates that many of them may be stressed because of long work hours and looking at the industry that they are working in, the employees will be required to work for extra hours. The model summary as presented in table 2 ,indicates that the correlation coefficient R value is 0.224.The coefficient of determination is 0.05 shows indicating very weak variance caused on employee well-being on account of work place stress. The adjusted R square is 0.044 which is close to R square and indicates minimal shrinkage in R square. Table 3 represents ANOVA results , the F value being 7.794 indicates acceptance of alternate hypothesis that is workplace stress has an impact in wellbeing but the impact is weak the findings are significant at $p=0.006$ which is less than 0.05 which further indicates acceptance of alternate hypothesis. Hence alternate hypothesis is accepted and the findings are statically significant. In table 4, the mean value **-.274** shows that responses of workplace stress are more towards disagree. The beta value is **-0.224** which indicates there is weak negative impact between workplace and employee wellbeing. Standardized coefficient shows that for 1unit change in workplace stress there is a **-.224** change in employee well-being. The unstandardized coefficients indicate that for a cross sectional data like this, 1raw unit change in the workplace stress has **-0.274** impacts on employee wellbeing. The scatter diagram indicates the relationship between the two variables. The slope value is **-0.274** moving negatively downwards from left to right. The trend line shows that workplace stress has a weak impact to employee well-being.

Fig.1 Scatter Plot



Discussion

Based on the results of the study, the researchers conclude that there is an impact between work place stress and employee well-being but the impact is weak. An increase in workplace stress will reduce well-being of employees. Bell, Rajendran & Theiler (2012) in their research study among Australian academicians have concluded that when employees are faced with immediate perceived stress such as shorter deadlines, it affects their personal lives and anxiety levels at a short term level and not in the long term thereby not affecting their well –being in the long term . Their research findings showed negative impact of workplace stress on employee well-being. Workplace stress is not the only predictor employee wellbeing; other factors such as changes in the organization, job insecurity, non-work related stress etc. may also affect employee well-being. The findings of this research study may not be conclusive but definitely the constructs of the study are of importance from personnel aspects. A bigger sample may be helpful in further strengthening the findings of the current research. At the same time socio demographic aspects have been evidently affecting perceived workplace stress as concluded by Al Mazrouei A. et al (2015). Flexible work schedules are important for employees to have a work life balance.in order to minimize it the individual as well as the organizational responsibility. Assistance and support from supervisors, coworkers help minimize workplace stress.it is the responsibility of organization to take care of the wellness of employees in order to ensure appropriate productivity and performance and work life balance. In order to improve employee wellbeing jobs need to be redesigned, such as flexibility in job, flexible work schedules

and provision of good rewards and compensation packages to employees. Growth and development of employees are also important in order to improve the psychological well-being of employees. This can be done by developing support and mentorship programs with senior supervisors (Zhang and Tan, 2012). Moreover celebration after completing a big project and team building activities add more purpose to life and improve psychological well-being of employees.

Implications

Working towards ensuring stress is not affecting employee well-being both in short and long term is a collective responsibility of employee-employer and authorities. Lot of measures have been recommended and to a considerable extent implemented include flexible work schedules, promoting employee involvement in work related decisions, organizational and supervisory support extended, training and counseling sessions to help in coping with stress etc. It is the responsibility of organization to take care of the wellness of employees in order to ensure appropriate productivity and performance and work life balance. Industry specific stress management strategies need to be developed by the decision makers. Researchers need to conduct investigations that will help in improving overall effectiveness of organizations by minimizing the negative outcomes.

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