

The Impact of Occupational Stress on the Performance of Employees: Systematic Review

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Abstract

The research investigates different levels of stress and anxiety caused by organizational factors and their impact on employee performance. The study reviews three scientific papers on employee stress and workplace performance. Various methods, theory tests, and approaches employed in the research papers are evaluated and compared to form the basis for the report's hypothesis. The report reviews and tests five hypotheses based on the underlying theme of the impact of organizational stress on employee performance.

Based on secondary research, organizational stress is found to have a significant impact on employee performance. Time pressure is identified as a factor affecting employee performance, leading to negative productivity. A heavy workload and lack of motivation among employees are highlighted as factors influencing performance negatively. Job stress, particularly due to overworking, significantly affects employee wellness, with 97% reporting an impact. A substantial 99% of employees reported that job stress affected their performance during working hours. Time pressure is identified as a major issue significantly and adversely affecting employee performance. Factors like work-related stress and a lack of clarity regarding work responsibilities influence employee performance in the occupational setting. The research finds that organizational stress, influenced by factors such as time pressure, workload, and motivation, has a considerable impact on employee performance. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing these stressors to enhance employee wellness and productivity in the workplace.

Keywords: Occupational stress, employee performance, time pressure, negative productivity, motivation, overwork, stress, work-related stress, lack of clarity

JEL Classification: L20, L29, M10, M15

1. Introduction

In contemporary organizations, effective management is crucial for addressing occupational stress and enhancing employee performance. Prolonged working hours often subject employees to pressure, exacerbated by factors like a demanding environment, tight deadlines, and unclear instructions from managers. This research aims to analyze various levels of occupational stress stemming from organizational factors and their impact on employee performance.

Organizational culture plays a pivotal role in the growth and development of an organization, encompassing employee attitudes, beliefs, and customs, as well as the established rules and regulations. Establishing a positive organizational culture is essential in today's world, focusing on effective communication, motivation, and fostering well-behaved conduct among employees during working hours. Challenges during the implementation of organizational culture include employee boredom, overly supervisory behavior from managers, conflicts, and tension between management and staff, often stemming from communication gaps (Ryan, 2016).

To address these challenges, Sumitani (2020) and Yamoah & Haque (2024) propose prompt solutions for organizational growth. These solutions include creating core values in the workplace, conducting employee surveys, promoting positivity through notes, and regularly consulting with employees. Utilizing proficient communication teams for brainstorming sessions, defining distinct

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roles and responsibilities, and aligning employees with suitable tasks are recommended. Incorporating questionnaires for managerial positions to gauge employees' beliefs and passion, emphasizing their roles, utilizing soft skills and personality tests during interviews, and implementing reward systems contribute positively to the organizational culture. Regular assessments of the cultural health using controlled organizational standards are essential.

Sokolova (2015) and Yamoah & Haque (2024) argue that diversifying the workforce in response to the changing global marketplace provides competitive advantages. Workforce diversity enhances productivity and quality by bringing together talented individuals globally with varied skill sets. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is highlighted as a means to attract global talent, create organizational value, and build a strong brand with equal employment opportunities. It fosters creativity, improves decision-making, and expands the organization's reach in diverse markets, enhancing client satisfaction and loyalty.

While there is no conclusive evidence on the impact of occupational stress and related factors on employee performance, this study aims to explore opportunities and challenges associated with organizational culture and diversity. By advancing knowledge about the effects of occupational stress on employee performance, this research provides valuable insights for academics and practitioners. The study serves as a reference for future literature reviews in this field.

2. Literature Review

The literature review delves into the characteristics of work-related stress and its impact on employee performance, exploring the relationship between stress and various factors affecting individual and organizational performance.

Stress is identified as both a cause and an effect, with Quick and Cooper (2003) highlighting its direct linkage to major causes of death globally, particularly cardiovascular disease. Haque (2022) and Haque (2023) emphasize that stress is a response to new or hostile situations in the workplace, manifesting as specific stressful behaviors when individuals encounter unique experiences that do not align with their capabilities or resources. This incongruence between job demands and individual capacity results in dangerous physiological and emotional reactions, indicative of job stress (Haque et al., 2021; Faizan et al., 2019; Faizan and Haque, 2019; Haque et al., 2020).

Selye (1979) categorizes stress as a disease of maladaptation, demonstrating its role as a risk factor for various health disorders and conditions (Haque et al., 2018). Work-related stress manifests in diverse forms, impacting individuals in unique ways. Despite acknowledging the relationship between well-being and stress, limited detailed work has explored the effects of specific stressors on employee performance (Haque & Aston, 2016).

The literature draws on relevant theories to comprehend the fundamental processes of work-related stress and its implications for work performance. Notable theories include person-environment fit, stimulus-based, interactional, and role theory. Ghadially and Kumar (1989) propose three distinct orientations—stimulus-based—for organizing the main theories, and response literature supports three different theoretical approaches to the concept of stress (Richard and Krieshok, 1989; Weinstein and Ryan, 2011; Trivette, 1993; Haque, 2020).

Person-Environment Fit theory posits a relationship between stress, the individual, and their environment (Ajayi, 2018). According to this theory, work stress occurs when there is an inaccurate fit between the individual and their environment (French, Caplan, and Harrison, 1982). In other words, optimal work performance and reduced stress are expected when there is a good fit between the individual and their occupational environment. The theory predicts that the degree of stress

experienced by an individual is proportionate to the level of misfit between the individual and their occupation (Pithers & Soden, 1999).

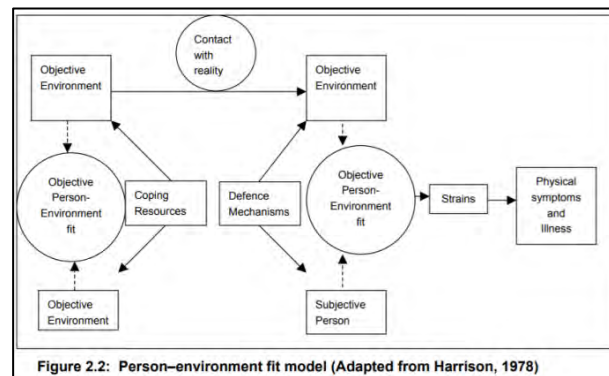


Figure 1: Person–environment fit model (Cope, 2003).

Stimulus-Based Stress

Kahn and Cooper (1986) characterize stimulus-based stress as an external factor that exhibits negative effects, causing damage and incapacitation within the organization. In essence, stressors originating externally from the environment trigger a stress reaction or strain (Cox, 1987).

Various classes of stimulus stressors exist, each with its capacity to induce stress. Examples include:

- (a) Acute, time-limited stressors
- (b) Chronic intermittent stressors
- (c) Stressor sequences
- (d) Chronic stressors (Derogatis and Coons, 1993)

Interactional Approach to Stress

This approach combines both stimulus-based and response-based strategies for handling stress (Cox, 1987; Richard and Krieschok, 1989). Also known as the stimulus-response interaction (Greenberg, 1999), this theory suggests that situational variables interact with personal variables, leading to stress outcomes (Weinstein and Ryan, 2011).

It is also recognized as the transactional theory (Greenberg, 1999). This perspective encompasses stimulus, response, cognitive appraisal of stressors, coping style of the individual, emotional resistance, and the communal environment (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988).

Role Theory

One fundamental premise of role theory is that various job roles individuals undertake may be stressful, irrespective of their actual occupation. This implies that stress found across multiple work roles can be universally stressful for all workers (Ajayi, 2018). Six work roles have been identified as stressful, regardless of an individual's specific aptitude. These are: (a) Role ambiguity, (b) Role insufficiency, (c) Role overload, (d) Role boundary, (e) Role responsibility, and (f) Physical environment (Osipow and Spokane, 1987; Osipow, 1998).

Examples within the organizational setting

Different organizations employ various strategies to manage employee stress in the workplace. Recognizing the impact of stress on employee productivity, motivation, and commitment, these organizations take proactive measures to address stressors and maintain a positive work environment. If stress is not addressed in its early stages, it can lead to more severe negative effects

from repeated stressors (SAMSHA, 2020).

Several stress management techniques adopted by organizations include:

Supervision and Peer Support: Providing adequate supervision and fostering peer support to create a supportive work environment.

Clear Roles and Responsibilities: Ensuring employees have clearly defined roles and responsibilities to reduce ambiguity and stress.

Training: Offering training programs to equip employees with the necessary skills and resources to handle their roles effectively.

Stress Management Programs: Implementing specific stress management programs to help employees cope with stress.

Some notable organizations approach stress management:

Microsoft: Emphasizes creating an inclusive culture by fostering a work environment that encourages a growth mindset. The company promotes programs, resources, and support systems for its employees (Microsoft, 2020).

Appster: A US-based app development agency that minimizes stress by offering perks like free meals, rides to work, and having a pet husky named Howl in the office for stress relief (Porter, 2015).

Google: Recognizes the importance of stress management beyond perks and offers specific classes like Meditation 101, Search Inside Yourself, and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. They also created a community called gPause to support meditation practices (Porter, 2015).

BambooHR: Supports employee well-being by helping pay for their vacations and offering financial management classes through "Financial Peace University" (Davis, 2018).

Talking Rain Beverage Co.: Prioritizes wellness as a pillar of success, leveraging its location in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains to create a positive work environment (Davis, 2018).

NOMATIC: Encourages employees to prioritize family needs over work, fostering a family-first policy (Davis, 2018).

Research in this field has identified various gaps, which serve as the basis for further investigation. However, existing studies often focus on specific regions, industries, or one-dimensional approaches. For a more comprehensive understanding, future research could explore the impact of organizational stress on employee performance from the perspective of group-grid cultural theory, considering factors such as seniority levels and cultural variations on an international scale (Haque, 2018). This would contribute to a broader and more nuanced understanding of the relationship between organizational stress and employee performance.

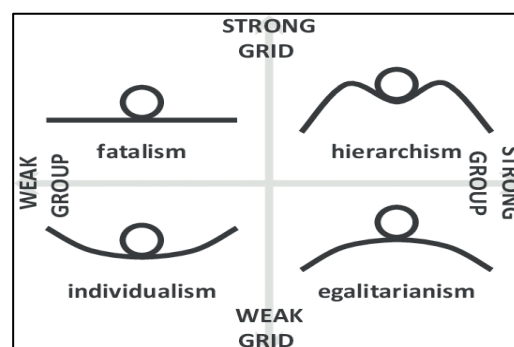


Figure 2: The rationalities of Cultural Theory (Schmitt and Hartmann, 2016).

Based on identified gaps within the literature review, the framework of this research covers the following hypotheses:

H1: Time pressure significantly and adversely influences employee performance.

H2: Workload pressure significantly and adversely influences employee performance.

H3: Stress significantly and adversely influences employee performance.

H4: Work-related stress significantly and adversely influences individual decision-making.

H5: Lack of clarity on work responsibility significantly and adversely influences employee performance.

This research involved an extensive review of literature, highlighting the crucial connection between employee well-being and organizational performance. Stress, a significant factor affecting employee behavior, emerges from inherent qualities and the misalignment between personal expectations and the external environment.

The literature underscores the diversity in employee commitment across cultural groups, occupations, seniority levels, gender, business sectors, and economies. Notably, the level of stress, ranging from little to none, is considered favorable. Prolonged stress, however, consistently emerges as a detrimental factor impacting employee performance, commitment, health, well-being, and overall organizational welfare, as supported by various research findings (Haque et al., 2016; Haque, 2018).

Individuals exhibit distinct and systemic stress responses, influenced by minor gender differences and personal variations. These individual differences contribute either to heightened vulnerability to work-related stress or act as protective factors against associated risks. The literature thus emphasizes the need for organizations to understand and manage stress effectively, considering the unique characteristics and responses of each employee.

3. Research Methodology

As per Remenyi et al. (1998), the research methodology elucidates the rationale guiding the progression of the cycle employed to formulate a hypothesis, representing the procedural framework within which the investigation is carried out (Mohajan, 2017). This section comprehensively outlines all the tools and procedures employed in the thesis. It encompasses the research strategies, design, type, instruments, and techniques utilized for data collection.

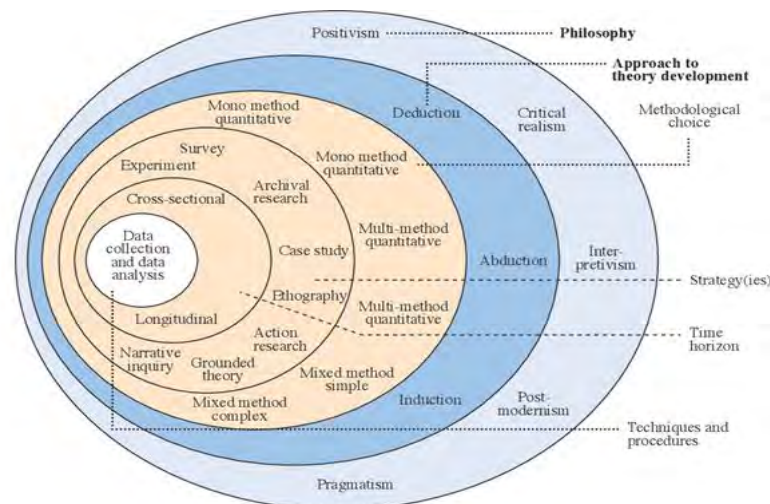


Figure 3: *Research onion* (Saunders et al. 2013)

Research observation involves techniques used to gather information by monitoring behavior (Max

Koh, 2016). It encompasses both qualitative and quantitative aspects. Reading documents, such as analyzing tables, figures, and photographs, is an essential tool for observing data (Munir et al., 2017). In this research process, qualitative techniques and personal observation were employed.

Various research approaches exist, with primary and secondary research being commonly used. Primary research involves collecting data firsthand through methods like personal interviews, emails, and surveys. Secondary research involves analyzing, interpreting, and summarizing existing information, encompassing books, journals, and research papers (Brown, 2021). This research utilized secondary data to identify knowledge gaps between research papers.

Research design, as defined by Kerlinger, is the plan, structure, and strategy conceived to obtain answers to research questions and control variance (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). The total time taken to complete research is independent of the chosen methodology (Saunders et al., 2009). Two types of research design based on time horizons are longitudinal and cross-sectional. Longitudinal studies track specific individuals over extended periods, while cross-sectional studies, used in this research, involve no set time dimension and examine variations between subjects at a specific point in time.

Research instruments are tools for collecting, measuring, and analyzing data. They include interviews, surveys, emails, observations, case studies, questionnaires, and transcribing (Munir et al., 2017). Personal observation and internet research were employed as research instruments, along with three research papers on employee stress and the workplace as a research base. Extensive secondary resources, both academic and non-academic, were used to understand employee behavior and the impact of occupational stress on performance.

Sampling involves selecting a subset representative of the entire population to obtain desired results (Sekaran and Bougie, 2012). For this research, three open-access research papers were used as a sample population:

- <https://repository.uwtsd.ac.uk/id/eprint/1570/>
- https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3160620
- https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3125336

These papers were thoroughly studied to comprehend various patterns of employee stress levels.

Inclusion and exclusion are the criteria that set the boundary of data collection. Inclusion highlights data used for research, whereas exclusion highlights the data or instruments that are avoided for some reasons (Farnum, 2017).

Inclusion	Exclusion
• Library research-	• Statistical tools
• Internet search- Research paper, journal articles, ebooks	• Primary data
• Peer-reviewed literature, case studies	• Survey- Biases of data
• Qualitative research methods	• Interview- Limited period

Figure 4: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Ethical considerations are essential standards of behavior to uphold when collecting data from participants (Adnan, 2018). Adhering to the principles and guidelines of the university, the following ethical considerations were observed in conducting research using a subjective approach:

Ethical Norms and Values: The research aimed to promote social and moral values, upholding ethical standards such as avoiding misrepresentation and providing accurate information.

Informed Consent: Participants were fully informed about the nature of the questionnaires, and verbal explanations were provided to ensure they were well aware of the research procedures (Bhasin, 2020).

Confidentiality and Privacy: Participants were assured that their information would be treated with confidentiality, and their responses would only be discussed with supervisors, ensuring their privacy is maintained (Resnik, 2020).

Anonymity: The principle of anonymity was observed, meaning that the identity of participants, including their names, was not disclosed to anyone (Bhasin, 2020).

Other ethical considerations included:

Autonomy: Participants were given the freedom to participate voluntarily without any coercion.

Equality: The research treated all participants with fairness and impartiality, irrespective of any personal characteristics.

Avoidance of Technological Advances: The research refrained from using intrusive technologies such as microphones or mini cameras to protect participants' privacy.

Conflicts of Interest: Steps were taken to identify and manage any potential conflicts of interest that could compromise the integrity of the research.

These ethical considerations ensured that the research was conducted with integrity, respect for participants' rights, and a commitment to ethical standards.

Findings and Discussion

a) Results of the Survey Conducted and its Findings:

The study examined the impact of job stress on employee performance, and the findings indicated significant correlations between various stressors and employee outcomes. The survey identified that stressors such as time pressure, workload, and lack of motivation were linked to negative productivity. Notably, a considerable percentage of respondents reported a negative impact on their wellness (97%) and performance during working hours (99%) due to overworking stress. Time pressure emerged as a major stressor affecting employee performance, suggesting that tight deadlines can contribute to reduced productivity. The research also highlighted the adverse effects of work-related stress and a lack of clarity regarding work responsibilities on employee performance in the occupational setting.

b) The Hypothesis Used and its Outcome:

The hypothesis tested in this study was centered around the idea that organizational stress has a direct impact on employee performance. The findings supported this hypothesis, revealing a clear connection between job stressors and negative outcomes on employee wellness and performance.

The specific stressors identified, such as time pressure and workload, were consistent with the literature on occupational stress. The study provided empirical evidence that supported the theoretical framework linking stress to reduced employee performance.

In summary, the research findings align with the hypothesis, substantiating the notion that organizational stressors can significantly influence employee performance, wellness, and overall job satisfaction.

Table 1: Hypothesis acceptance and rejection

Hypotheses	Beta Coefficient	Significant (P<0.05)	Result
H ¹ : Influence of Time Pressure towards Employee Performance	-0.257	0.014	Accepted
H ² : Influence of Workload towards Employee Performance	-0.126	0.147	Rejected
H ³ : Influence of Lack of Motivation towards Employee Performance	0.029	0.777	Rejected
H ⁴ : Influence of Role Ambiguity towards Employee Performance	-0.370	0.000	Accepted

a) Hypothesis Testing from Murali et al. (2017b):

The research conducted by Murali et al. (2017b) tested four hypotheses, and the illustration from the paper indicates that two out of the four hypotheses yielded positive results based on the findings. The hypotheses related to the influence of time pressure and ambiguity toward employee performance showed a negative impact, as supported by regression analysis and statistical analysis.

Influence of Time Pressure: The findings suggest that time pressure is a significant stressor negatively affecting employee performance. This aligns with the broader understanding that tight deadlines and a sense of urgency can lead to decreased productivity and job satisfaction.

Role Ambiguity: The hypothesis related to role ambiguity also showed a negative impact on employee performance. When employees face uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities, it can contribute to stress and hinder their ability to perform optimally.

However, it's worth noting that the hypotheses related to workload and lack of motivation affecting employee performance did show an impact, but the level of impact was not considered satisfactory.

The second set of findings comes from research that explored varying occupational stress and organizational commitment within university staff of contrasting economies. This research, conducted by various authors, presented data using a bar diagram. Number of authors including Haque and Aston (2016), Haque et al. (2017), Nair et al. (2017), Zehra and Faizan (2017), and Haque et al., (2018) in their research paper confirmed it.

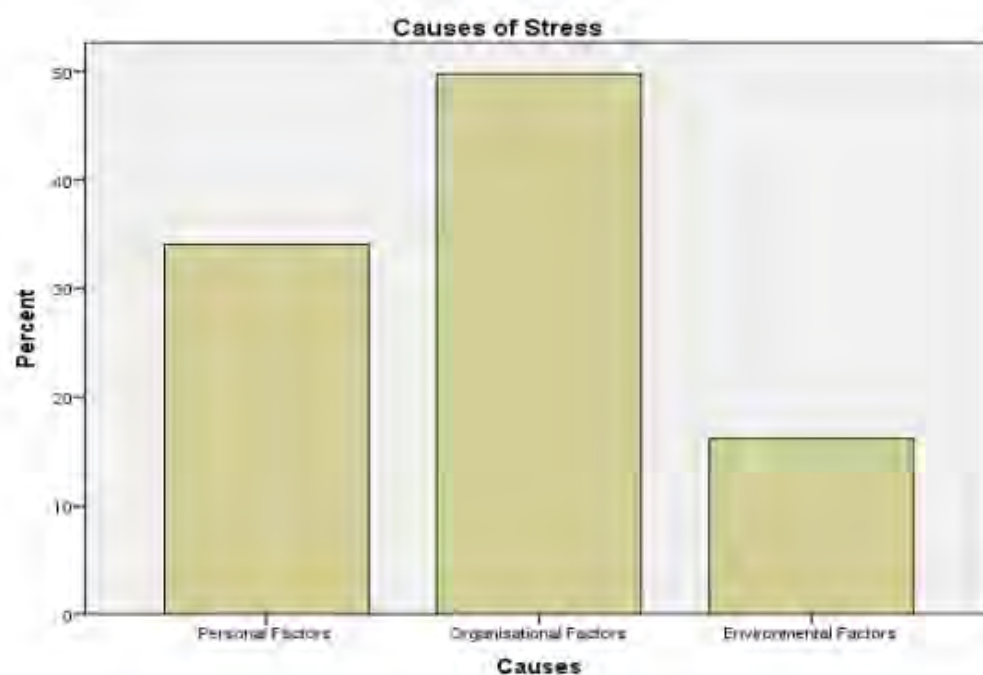


Figure 5: Causes of Stress (Haque, 2020).

The basis for their study was middle-range public universities in Pakistan and the UK. The finding shows that among the common factors, Organizational factors had the highest percentage of effect on the employees (teachers in this case) (Haque 2020).

Table 2: Causes of stress

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Personal Factors	139	34.1	34.1	34.1
	Organisational Factors	203	49.8	49.8	83.8
	Environmental Factors	66	16.2	16.2	100.0
	Total	408	100.0	100.0	

Source: Causes of stress (Haque, 2020).

What is the effect of job related stress on employees' performance in Nigerian Banks?

Table 3: Variables and remarks

S/N	Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Remarks
1.	I understand what is meant by job stress as a worker in Nigerian Banking sector.	0 (0%)	2 (1.33%)	20 (13.33)	56 (37.33%)	72 (48%)	150 (100%)	85.33% understand what job stress means.
2.	Job stress exists among the workers in Nigerian Banking sector.	2 (1.33%)	3 (2%)	13 (8.67%)	37 (24.67%)	95 (63.33%)	150 (100%)	88% believe that job stress exist among Nigerian Bankers.
3.	Job Stress does affect the wellness of Nigerian Banking employees.	0 (0%)	2 (1.33%)	3 (2%)	43 (28.67%)	102 (68%)	150 (100%)	97% agree that job stress does affect the wellness of Nigerian bankers.
4.	Job stress does negatively affect the performance of Nigerian Banking sector workers generally	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	28 (18.67)	122 (81.33%)	150 (100%)	99% agree that job stress does affect negatively the performance of Nigerian Bankers at work.

Source: Variables and Remarks (Ajayi, 2018)

The research found out that about 85.33% were about job stress. About 88% of the participants believe that there is stress in the life of Nigerian Bankers. A shocking 97% believed that job stress could affect their wellness and about 99% believe that performance was hampered by stress. The research was conducted on 150 individuals from the Nigerian Banking sector. The test and study conducted by the writers of these three papers in quite an extension. This paper is just presenting the gist of their work.

In this paper, we had chosen five hypotheses for the sake of explanation. They are as follows:

Table 4: Hypotheses and results

Hypothesis	Statement	Results
H1	Time pressure significantly and adversely influences employee performance.	Fail to Reject
H2	Workload pressure significantly and adversely influences employee performance.	Reject
H3	Stress significantly and adversely impacts employee performance.	Fail to Reject
H4	Work-related stress significantly and adversely affects individual decision-making.	Fail to Reject
H5	Lack of clarity on work responsibility significantly and adversely impacts employee performance.	Fail to Reject

Based on the finding of the secondary data, this study rejects the null hypothesis as it found that organizational stress has an impact on employee performance.

5. Conclusion:

The research has shed light on the significant impact of occupational stress on employee performance in the workplace. The findings, derived from secondary research and survey data, indicate that factors such as time pressure, workload, and lack of motivation contribute to negative productivity. The study underscores the need for organizations to address these stressors to enhance employee well-being and overall organizational effectiveness.

Limitations and Future Directions:

The research acknowledges certain limitations, including the reliance on secondary research and

the absence of primary data from real-world occupational settings. These limitations present opportunities for future research to delve into primary data collection through surveys and questionnaires, providing a more comprehensive and current understanding of the dynamics between occupational stress and employee performance. Additionally, expanding the study regionally can offer insights into cultural variations and contextual nuances.

Recommendations for Organizations and Leaders:

Open Communication:

Encourage open communication between employees and management to understand and address stressors.

Foster an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their challenges and concerns.

Health and Wellness Programs:

Offer medical and physical health insurance and benefits to alleviate concerns about health and well-being.

Implement wellness programs that focus on mental health support, stress reduction, and work-life balance.

Clear Goals and Recognition:

Set clear goals for employees to avoid ambiguity and overburdening.

Recognize and acknowledge employees' achievements, fostering a positive work environment.

Building Relationships:

Promote relationship-building among employees to create a supportive and positive workplace culture.

Encourage camaraderie and a friendly atmosphere to enhance overall morale.

Individualized Approach:

Recognizing that individuals respond differently to stress, organizations should adopt an individualized approach. Engage in one-on-one conversations with employees to understand their unique needs and preferences for stress alleviation. This personalized approach can contribute to a more tailored and effective stress management strategy.

Recommendations for Future Research:

Primary Data Collection:

Future researchers should prioritize primary data collection to provide real-time insights into the current state of organizational stress and its impact on performance.

Regional Variations:

Explore regional variations in stress and performance dynamics, considering cultural and contextual factors.

Longitudinal Studies:

Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in stress and performance over extended periods, capturing trends and patterns.

Dynamic Organizational Context:

Recognize the dynamic nature of organizational structures and functions, ensuring research remains relevant to contemporary workplace settings.

In conclusion, this research serves as a foundation for understanding the complex interplay between occupational stress and employee performance. Implementing the recommended strategies can contribute to creating healthier and more productive work environments.

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