

Stress Factors at Workplace and Occupation Phases

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Abstract

Occupational stress is psychological stress related to one's job. Occupational stress refers to a chronic condition. Occupational stress can be managed by understanding what the stressful conditions at work are and taking steps to remediate those conditions. Occupational stress can occur when workers do not feel supported by supervisors or coworkers, feel as if they have little control over the work they perform, or find that their efforts on the job are incommensurate with the job's rewards. Occupational stress is a concern for both employees and employers because stressful job conditions are related to employees' emotional well-being, physical health, and job performance. A landmark study conducted by the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization found that exposure to long working hours, which are theorized to operate through increased psycho-social occupational stress, is the occupational risk

factor with the largest attributable burden of disease, according to these official estimates causing an estimated 745,000 workers to die from ischemic heart disease and stroke events in 2016.

Keywords: Stress, Workplace Stress, Workplace and Stress Evaluation

Introduction

A number of psychological theories at least partly explain the occurrence of occupational stress. The theories include the demand-control-support model, the effort-reward imbalance model, the person-environment fit model, job characteristics model, the diathesis stress model, and the job-demands resources model.

The demand-control-support (DCS) model, originally the demand-control (DC) model, has been the most influential psychological theory in occupational stress research. The DC model advances the idea that the combination of low levels of work-related decision latitude (i.e., autonomy and control over the job) and high psychological workloads is harmful to the health of workers. High workloads and low levels of decision latitude either in combination or singly can lead to job strain, the term often used in the field of occupational health psychology to reflect poorer mental or physical health. The DC model has been extended to include work-related social isolation or lack of support from coworkers and supervisors to become the DCS model. Evidence indicates that high workload, low levels of decision latitude, and low levels of support either in combination or singly lead to poorer health. The combination of high workload, low levels of decision latitude, and low levels of support has also been termed iso-strain.

The effort-reward imbalance (ERI) model focuses on the relationship between the worker's efforts and the work-related rewards the employee receives. The ERI model suggests that work marked by high levels of effort and low rewards leads to strain (e.g., psychological symptoms, physical health problems). The rewards of the job can be tangible like pay or intangible like

appreciation and fair treatment. Another facet of the model is that overcommitment to the job can fuel imbalance.

The person–environment fit model underlines the match between a person and his/her work environment. The closeness of the match influences the individual's health. For healthy working conditions, it is necessary that employees' attitudes, skills, abilities, and resources match the demands of their job. The greater the gap or misfit (either subjective or objective) between the person and his/her work environment, the greater the strain. Strains can include mental and physical health problems. Misfit can also lead to lower productivity and other work problems. The P–E fit model was popular in the 1970s and the early 1980s; however, since the late 1980s interest in the model has waned because of difficulties representing P–E discrepancies mathematically and statistical models linking P–E fit to strain have been problematic.

The job characteristics model focuses on factors such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. These job factors are thought to psychological states such as a sense of meaningfulness and knowledge acquisition. The theory holds that positive or negative job characteristics give rise to a number of cognitive and behavioral outcomes such as extent of worker motivation, satisfaction, and absenteeism. Hackman and Oldham (1980) developed the Job Diagnostic Survey to assess these job characteristics and help organizational leaders make decisions regarding job redesign.

Diathesis-stress model

The diathesis–stress model looks the individual's susceptibility to stressful life experiences, i.e., the diathesis. Individuals differ on that diathesis or vulnerability. The model suggests that the individual's diathesis is part of the context in which he or she encounters job stressors at various levels of intensity. If the individual has a very high tolerance (is relatively invulnerable), an intense stressor may not lead to a mental or physical problem. However, if the stressor (e.g., high

workload, difficult coworker relationship) outstrips the individual's diathesis, then health problems may ensue.

Job demands-resources model

In the job demands-resources model model derives from both conservation of resources theory and the DCS model. Demands refer to the size of the workload, as in the DCS model. Resources refer to the physical (e.g., equipment), psychological (e.g., the incumbent's job-related skills and knowledge), social (e.g., supportiveness of supervisors), and organizational resources (e.g., how much task-related discretion is given the worker) that are available to satisfactorily perform the job. High workloads and low levels of resources are related job strain.

Factors related to the above mentioned psychological theories of occupational stress

Role conflict involves the worker facing incompatible demands. Workers are pulled in conflicting directions in trying to respond to those demands.

Role ambiguity refers to a lack of informational clarity with regard to the duties a worker's role in an organization requires. Like role conflict, role ambiguity is a source of strain.

Coping refers to the individual's efforts to either prevent the occurrence of a stressor or mitigate the distress the impact of the stressor is likely to cause. Research on the ability of the employees to cope with the specific workplace stressors is equivocal; coping in the workplace may even be counterproductive. Pearlin and Schooler advanced the view that because work roles, unlike such personally organized roles as parent and spouse, tend to be impersonally organized, work roles are not a context conducive to successful coping. Pearlin and Schooler suggested that the impersonality of workplaces may even result in occupational coping efforts making conditions worse for the employee.

Organizational climate refers to employees' collective or consensus appraisal of the organizational work environment. Organizational climate takes into account many dimensions of the work environment (e.g., safety climate; mistreatment climate; work-family climate). The communication, management style, and extent of worker participation in decision-making are factors that contribute to one or another type of organizational climate.

Negative health and other effects

Physiological reactions to stress can have consequences for health over time. Researchers have been studying how stress affects the cardiovascular system, as well as how work stress can lead to hypertension and coronary artery disease. These diseases, along with other stress-induced illnesses tend to be quite common in American work-places. There are a number of physiological reactions to stress including the following:

Occupational stress accounts for more than 10% of work-related health claims. Many studies suggest that psychologically demanding jobs that allow employees little control over the work process increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. Research indicates that job stress increases the risk for development of back and upper-extremity musculoskeletal disorders. Stress at work can also increase the risk of acquiring an infection and the risk of accidents at work.

Occupational stress can lead to three types of strains: behavioral (e.g., absenteeism), physical (e.g., headaches), and psychological (e.g., depressed mood). Job stress has been linked to a broad array of conditions, including psychological disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder), job dissatisfaction, maladaptive behaviors (e.g., substance abuse), cardiovascular disease, and musculoskeletal disorders.

Stressful job conditions can also lead to poor work performance, counterproductive work behavior, higher absenteeism, and injury. Chronically high levels of job stress diminish a

worker's quality of life and increase the cost of the health benefits the employer provides. A study of short haul truckers found that high levels of job stress were related to increased risk of occupational injury. Research conducted in Japan showed a more than two-fold increase in the risk of stroke among men with job strain (combination of high job demand and low job control). The Japanese use the term *karoshi* to reflect death from overwork.

High levels of stress are associated with substantial increases in health service utilization. For example, workers who report experiencing stress at work also show excessive health care utilization. In a 1998 study of 46,000 workers, health care costs were nearly 50% greater for workers reporting high levels of stress in comparison to "low risk" workers. The increment rose to nearly 150%, an increase of more than \$1,700 per person annually, for workers reporting high levels of both stress and depression. Health care costs increase by 200% in those with depression and high occupational stress. Additionally, periods of disability due to job stress tend to be much longer than disability periods for other occupational injuries and illnesses.

Occupational stress has negative effects for organizations and employers. Occupational stress contributes to turnover and absenteeism.

In today's workplaces every individual will experience work-related stress and the level of stress varies person-to-person. Different aspects of a person's life will affect their stress levels through work. In comparing women and men, there is a higher risk for women to experience stress, anxiety and others forms of psychological stress in response to their work life than there is for men due to societal expectations of women. Such as women having more domestic responsibilities, the fact that women receive less pay for doing similar work as men and that societally women are expected to say "yes" to any requests given to them. These societal expectations added into a work environment can create a very psychologically stressful environment for women, without any added stressors from work. Desmarais and Alksnis suggest

two explanations for the greater psychological distress of women. First, the genders may differ in their awareness of negative feelings, leading women to be more likely to express and report strains, whereas men more likely to deny and inhibit such feelings. Second, the demands to balance work and family result in more overall stress for women that leads to increased strain.

Stereotype threat is a phenomenon that can have effects on everyone, it highly depends on the situation the individual is. Some of the proposed mechanisms that are involved with stereotype threat include, but are not limited to: anxiety, negative cognition (where you are focused on stereotype-thinking), lowered motivation, lowered performance expectation (where you do worse on something because the expectation is that you won't be able to do well anyways), decrease in working memory capacity, etc.

Women are also more vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault than men. These authors are referring to the very real "double burden" hypothesis. In addition, women, on average, earn less than their male counterparts.

According to a recent report by the European Union (EU), in the EU and affiliated countries the skills gap between men and women has narrowed in the ten years preceding 2015. In the EU, when compared to men, women typically spend fewer hours in paid work but instead spend more hours in unpaid work.

Causes of occupational stress

Both the broad categories and the specific categories of occupational stress mentioned in the following paragraph fall under different psychological theories of worker stress, which include demand-control-support model, the effort-reward imbalance model, the person-environment fit model, job characteristics model, the diathesis stress model, and the job-demands resources model. (All these models are expanded upon earlier in this Wikipedia page).

The causes of occupational stress can be placed into a broad category of what the main occupational stressor is and a more specific category of what causes occupational stress. The broad category of occupational stressors include some of the following: bad management practices, the job content and its demands, a lack of support or autonomy and much more. The more specific causes of occupational stress includes some of the following: working long hours, having insufficient skills for the job, discrimination and harassment and much more.

General working conditions

Although the importance of individual differences cannot be ignored, scientific evidence suggests that certain working conditions are stressful to most people. Such evidence argues for a greater emphasis on working conditions as the key source of job stress, and for job redesign as a primary prevention strategy. In the ten years leading up to 2015, workers in the EU and affiliated countries have seen improvement in noise exposure but worsening in exposure to chemicals. Approximately, one-third of EU workers experience tight deadlines and must work quickly. Those in the health sector are exposed to the highest levels of work intensity. In order to meet job demands, a little more than 20% of EU workers must work during their free time. Approximately one-third of EU workers in lower-level jobs have some decision latitude. By contrast, about 80% of managers have significant levels of latitude.[citation needed]

General working conditions that induce occupational stress may also be aspects of the physical environment of one's job. For example, the noise level, lighting, and temperature are all components of one's working environment. If these factors are not adequate for a successful working environment, one can experience changes in mood and arousal, which in turn creates more difficulty to successfully do the job right.

Workload

In an occupational setting, dealing with workload can be stressful and serve as a stressor for employees. There are three aspects of workload that can be stressful.

Quantitative workload or overload: Having more work to do than can be accomplished comfortably.

Qualitative workload: Having work that is too difficult.

Underload: Having work that fails to use a worker's skills and abilities.

Workload as a work demand is a major component of the demand-control model of stress. This model suggests that jobs with high demands can be stressful, especially when the individual has low control over the job. In other words, control serves as a buffer or protective factor when demands or workload is high. This model was expanded into the demand-control-support model that suggests that the combination of high control and high social support at work buffers the effects of high demands.

As a work demand, workload is also relevant to the job demands-resources model of stress that suggests that jobs are stressful when demands (e.g., workload) exceed the individual's resources to deal with them.

Long hours

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2018, approximately 13,060,000 Americans or 8.7% of the labor force worked 41–48 hours per week. Approximately 14,734,000 Americans or 9.8% of the labor force worked 49–59 hours per week. And approximately 9,877,000 Americans or 6.7% of the labor force worked 60 or more hours per week. A meta-analysis involving more than 600,000 individuals and 25 studies indicated that, controlling for confounding factors, working long hours is related to a small but significantly higher risk of cardiovascular disease and slightly higher risk of stroke.

Status

A person's status in the workplace is related to occupational stress because jobs associated with lower socioeconomic status (SES) typically provide workers less control and greater insecurity than higher-SES jobs. Lower levels of job control and greater job insecurity are related to reduced mental and physical health.

Salary

The types of jobs that pay workers higher salaries tend to provide them with greater job-related autonomy. As indicated above, job-related autonomy is associated with better health. A problem in research on occupational stress is how to "unconfound" the relationship between stressful working conditions, such as low levels of autonomy, and salary. Because higher levels of income buy resources (e.g., better insurance, higher quality food) that help to improve or maintain health, researchers need to better specify the extent to which differences in working conditions and differences in pay affect health.

Workplace bullying

Workplace bullying involves the chronic mistreatment of a worker by one or more other workers or managers. Bullying involves a power imbalance in which the target has less power in the unit or the organization than the bully or bullies. Bullying is not a one-off episode. Nor is it a conflict between two workers who are equals in terms of power. There has to be a power imbalance for there to be bullying. Bullying tactics include verbal abuse, psychological abuse, and even physical abuse. The adverse effects of workplace bullying include depression for the worker and lost productivity for the organization.

Conclusion

Many organizations manage occupational stressors associated with health and safety in a fragmented way; for example, one department may house an employee assistance program and

another department manages exposures to toxic chemicals. The Total Worker Health (TWH) idea, which was initiated by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), provides a strategy in which different levels of worker health promotion activity are programmatically integrated. TWH-type interventions integrate health protection and health promotion components. Health protection components are ordinarily unit- or organization-wide, for example, reducing exposures to aerosols. Health promotion components are more individually oriented, in other words, oriented toward the wellness and/or well-being of individual workers, for example, smoking cessation programs. A review of 17 TWH-type interventions, i.e., interventions that integrate organizational-level occupational safety/health components and individual employee health promotion components, indicated that integrated programs can improve worker health and safety.

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