Occupational Stressors among Teachers at Secondary School in Perak, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to present the findings on the stress factors of teachers in Ipoh, Malaysia.   Quantitative data were collected via questionnaire distributed amongst teachers in Ipoh. A total of 329 teachers completed the questionnaires.   The findings of the research showed that there were significant relationship between occupational stressors and stress. It is interesting to note that hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicated the four dimension of occupational stress namely role overload, work hour, family conflicts, financial factors and work location The research also indicates that three variables work load, hour work, family conflicts have significant relationship with stress while financial factors and work location have no relationship with stress. The variables have significant impact on the teachers stress. The regression analysis showed that there is   significant impact between occupational stressors and stress.

Keywords: Stress, work load, work hour, financial problem, family conflicts and work location.

Introduction

Teachers are the providers of knowledge, who educate, foster and nurture students to become someone in their life and also to create a knowledgeable person. The learning process takes place in a school that will help to facilitate the learning process and school is the workplace of the teachers.

There has been much research on occupational stress. The occupational stress terminology is used interchangeably with work stress and/or job stress but its meaning refers to the same thing (Larson, 2004). Job stress has long been an important concept in the study of employees' responses to their work environments. The many challenges in the work environment, characterized by heightened competition, increased work targets, threats of job loss, organizational change, lack of time, lack of space, continuous technological development, conflicting demand from organizational stakeholders McHugh, 1997), increased the use of participationary management and computerization (Murray (2007)), greater uncertainty and others have resulted in higher work stress.

Work stress is a major issue in the occupational safety and health aspect as well as organizational stress (Williams & Cooper, 2002) since it risks the employees' health and organizational success (Noblet, Rodwell & McWilliams, 2001). Occupational stress can cause unusual and dysfunctional behavior at work and contribute to poor physical and mental health (WHO, 2004). Job stress has long been an important concept in the study of employees' responses to their work environments. The many challenges in the work environment, characterized by heightened competition, increased work targets, threats of job loss, organizational change, lack of time, lack of space, continuous technological development, conflicting demand from organizational stakeholders   (McHugh, 1997), increased use of participatory management and computerization (Murray and Forbes, 1986). Stressful

employees are more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, less motivated and less safe at work (WHO, 2004). Work related stress also has been related to organizational problems such as absenteeism, high turnover, poor job performance, accidents and errors, and alcohol and drug abuse (Manshor, Fontaine, and Chong, 2003) and burnout (Mimura and Griffiths, 2003). Beyond absenteeism, 'presentism' or being present physically at work, but working less productively can also be the impact of work stress (Caverley, 2005).

In Malaysia, the same phenomenon may hold true because the weakening of global economy during the last several years has resulted in substantial downsizing and retrenchments within the electronics sector which accounted for 60% of the country's total export (Bank Negara Malaysia, 2001). The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship of sources of occupational stress and among teachers in Ipoh, Perak

High demands in the education field which is to be fulfilled through various education system reformations creates stressful situations for the teachers and this stressful situations affects the emotion, psychology and physiology of the teachers. (Nobile & McCormick, 2005). The teachers are experiencing stress in their life whether its' because of their family life or work life. Stress is created due to three categories of factors that are known as environmental factor, personnel factor and organization factor (Jaafar Muhammad, 2003). This stresses does impact the teachers in their teaching profession. Stress that the teachers experience are from the effect of stressors such as workload, work hour, work location which is closely related to the environment of the workplace, where else stress that is created by stressors such as family and financial problems related to personal issues of the teachers.

Literature Review

School is an organization that is often bombarded with the burden of various task and at times the tasks are unplanned but which arise from an unexpected situation (Abdul Shukor,1986). In discussing about workload that the teachers are engaged, Minister of Education Datuk Hishamudin (2005) urges the school administration not to burden the teachers' with jobs that are outside their scope of duty such as administration tasks, collecting money for school donation, solving school drainage problem and etc. because it really burdens them. He addressed the problems that the teachers are facing currently during a function Perak Matriculation College. Task that are not related to teaching such as administration tasks, co-curriculum programmes, meetings and student welfare programmes are burdening the teachers according to Jasmani (2009). Besides that the teacher are also responsible in implementing the co-curriculum outlined for the school, attend courses, do research and other tasks that are necessary and which are assigned to them. (Muhamad, 2010).

Teachers are spending almost half of the day at the school. They are to do so or because of the workload they have to complete and they are also need to stay back to supervise the student during co-curriculum activities and also needed to attend meetings after work hour. Complaints have been made by the teachers to NUTP regarding long work hours. Teachers usually leave school at 2.30 pm before the year 2012 and beginning year 2012 teachers are needed to work until 3.00pm by the school head masters but it is only happens occasionally, where most of the time teachers leave the school as late as 6.00pm (Berita Harian,Oct 11,2013). Sometimes the unfinished work of these teachers is brought to their home to be finished. He added that these conflicts are cause by time based factors such as long working hours and other factors that hinders time to be spent with their family. According to Jasmani (2009) teacher's profession is a challenging profession that their task is not only to educate the student but also to spend most of their time in solving the school issues such as student's misbehaviour and also clerical works.

Teachers Stress Due to Personal Factors

There are researches carried out on work-family relationships. There are two aspects that were identified which are work-family conflict and family-work conflict and the effects from these aspects known to be spill overs. There are negative and positive spill overs from both aspects in which where there will be spill over either negative or positive from work to family and family to work. (Farber, B. A. (2000); Faridah Karim dan Zubaidah Aman (1998). Whether the spill over is from work to family or from family to work both type of spill overs create tension and stress that can be reflected into each aspects of life(work and family). Howard (2008) summarized the definitions of Hock (1988) on conceptualized work-family conflict as a type of inter-role conflict where the issues of family and work are interconnected to each other and creates pressure to an individual and also creates conflict when some set of pressures (family pressure) lowers the ability to cope with other sets of pressure (work issues). Since the teachers are burdened with high workload and long work hours, teachers are to sacrifice their physical and mental health and relationships (in some cases) to fulfil their responsibilities Wood & Budden, C. (2006) This creates a situation where demands within the family clashing with work responsibilities, the home or work stress is likely to spill over to other spheres of life (Richard (2006). A problem in the personal lives of the teachers can be a potential stressor since they act in a feedback loop between work and the outside environment, Hepburn (2001).

The interrelationships between the personal life and work life of these teachers can explain that when there are stressful events in the personal lives of these teachers, it can exert negative effects on feelings of stress at work and consequently lead to a high degree of stress. (Feitler & Tokar (2004)).

Work Load

The amount of work or task that is expected to be done. Work load creates stress when the work becomes overloaded and the worker could not bear it. Work overload is the situation in which people have too much work to do. (Cambridge dictionaries online). It is the thoughts that one would be having in their mind as having too much work to do. According to Lawrenson & McKinnon (1982) workload becomes the major work domain predictors of work-family conflict, and is one of among five factors that creates work stress. According to Dunn (2000) in his research on 258 teachers in Pennsylvania and 166 voluntary teachers found that teachers are experiencing stress due to high workload that put them in a situation to bring the uncompleted work to their home and complete it after work hour or on weekends. It identifies teachers have more work to be done and their work load is heavy.

Work Hours

The amount of time which a worker is legally bound to work in a day according to the work contract (Jaafar Muhammad 2003) identified work time factor that causes stress among workers. This problem of teacher was complaint by NUTP (Berita Harian, 2010/04/01) which says teachers are forced to work every Saturday because they are involved in many activities, although there is a circular permits teachers to take leave twice a month on Saturdays.

When it concerns about stress, the employees have a high tendency towards high level of stress (William & Cooper 2003). Jasmani (2003) in her study on High School Teachers' Perceptions of Their Working Environment in Alor Star: A Grounded Theory Study on Several studies has highlighted teacher concerns about the need to extend the work hour to meet increasing job demands. Faridah (1998) considered that it was "impossible" for teachers to accomplish all the demands and tasks in the allocated time. Meetings were an additional workload demand, with teachers reporting 2.3 hours per week outside the school

day spent in meetings directly related to their job. The study by Jasmani (2005) found an average 47-hour work week for teachers.

Family Conflict

Family and work are interrelated and both are capable of affecting one another and also capable of affecting the quality of life (Salmond & Ropis 2005). The major challenges faced by employees are to balance their work and family lives. (National study, Duxbury & Higgins, ,2003). Family is an important part of the economic process, and when a person was employed directly the employer receives the employee obligations towards his family (Fairbrother, & Warn, (2003); Esteve, 2000). Claims relating to family and finances can be a major source of job stress in organization able to make the work more complicated pressure (Girdano & Dusek, 2001). Facts have shown that intra- Organizational extra organizational and influence the process of working pressure and it is hard to prevent. Extra organizational are external factors such as family problems and financial problems that would affect the teachers work stress.

Although some study shows that marital status is not always a determinant and that in some cases those who have happy marriages and get support from their spouses tend to be happy and successful in professional life as well and be less stressed (Baeler & Bryson 2008), a happy marriage life between a husband and wife is important so that the problems that the teachers face in the marital life's would not be a contributing factor to teachers stress.

Financial Factors

Financial factors may also affect the working pressure, (Mattenson & Ivancevich, 1982) argues that financial difficulties led to the individual looking for extra work, additional work can add family opinion but at the same time with the steal and cause fatigue individual. Similarly, financial loans like personal loans, buy a car, and buy a home loan is also a source of job stress to an individual or employee.
Huberman & Vanderberghe (1999) conducted a research on "Factors Contributing To The Causes Of Work Related Stress And Its Impact On Performance Of Tteachers in where they found that most of the teachers having low pay, high work load, role overload, bad school management and larger class sizes that being the major causes of stress in their work place. Salary received by the teachers becomes the major determinant in determining the teacher's financial status and when it is insufficient, the teachers involve themselves with other part time job that could support them financially (Kyriacou and Sutcliffe 1978).

These work stressors work load, work hour, work location, financial problem and family problem/conflict can be related and can be explained through the Model of Work Stress by Tatar & Horencyzk, (2003)

Location Factor

The location in which the teachers are dispersed in terms of their work location or living location. An issue was cited from the news picked from the Bernama (Kuala Lumpur 27, October, 2010) news by CUEPACS on its website (29 October 2010) regarding the separation of the married couples from the aspect of location that they live and work. This issue was brought up by some Parliament members of Malaysia who was having an opinion that any action of separation in the working region of the married couples whatever so whether it regards of job promotion or any other measure would not only will raise up their living cost but also may cause other social problems.

Hypothesis

Several hypotheses have been developed in this study based on the research questions and objectives of the study, the hypotheses are as bellow:

1. Ho1: There is no significant relationship between workload and stress.
2. Ho2: There is no significant relationship between work hour and stress.
3. Ho3: There is no significant relationship between family conflicts and stress.
4. Ho4: There is no significant relationship between financial factor and stress.
5. Ho5: There is no significant relationship between work location factor and stress.
6. Ho6: Occupational stressors have no significant relationship with stress.
7. Ho7: Occupational stressors have no significant influence on stress.

The Methodology

Respondents in this study consisted of 329 teachers attached to 4 randomly selected schools in Ipoh they were SMK Anderson, SMK St. Michael, SMK Buntong and SMK Methodist ACS. A total of 550 questionnaires were distributed to the schools. It took one month for the researcher to distribute and collect the responses.

Measurements

Occupational stressors. The independent variables in this study consist of occupational stressors which consisted of work load, work hour, family conflicts, financial factors and work location. The occupational stressors were measured using The Occupational Stress Inventory-Revised (Osipow, 1998), namely the Occupational Roles Questionnaire (ORQ) which originally has 60 items. The questionnaire was used by Murugayah (2008) who conducted a study on government officers of administrative and professional level in Malaysia. Originally, The OSI-R has three components, i.e. Occupational Roles Questionnaire (ORQ), Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ) and Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ). Salmond and Ropis (2005) who made a mixed-method and comparison study between medical-surgical and home care nurses in the United States found that the former experienced higher stress than the latter. In examining relationship of job stressors and general stress of the nurses, it was found nurses who experience higher level of stress will report higher negative mood, vice versa.

Ho (1996) found that there are significant and positive relationships between the teacher stress measures and the GHQ. In conducting a research on a university staff, Dua (1994) found that general stress and work related stress are associated with poor physical health, poor psychological and emotional health and high job dissatisfaction. Malek, Mearns and Flin (2010) made a comparative study between Malaysian and the United Kingdom firefighters and found that the sources of occupational stress have significant negative correlations with psychological wellbeing among firefighters in the United Kingdom and Malaysia.

Method of Analyses

Response and Profile of Respondents

At the end of the period, of the 550 questionnaires sent out, 329 useable response were obtained representing a response rate of 59.81 per cent. The sample is shown in Table 1, it shows that the greatest numbers of teachers are from SMK Anderson (51.4%), 53.8% are female; majority of them are 46.5% years old and about 42.6% of the respondents are single,

As for races 86.6% of the respondents are Malay, about 44% of the respondents are teachers of grade DG44 and 76.3% of the respondents are degree holders, 23.7% are masters holders and 23.7% and 64.4% had served from 1 – 5 years.

Table 1
Sample Profile

Demographic variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage %
school	SMK Anderson	169	51.4
	SMK St. Michael	37	11.2
	SMK Buntong	26	7.9
	SMK Methodist ACS	97	29.5
Gender	Male	177	53.8
	Female	226	68.7
Age	≤ 25 years old	32	9.7
	26 – 30 years old	153	46.5
	31 – 35 years old	86	26.1
	36 – 40 years old	38	11.6
	41 – 45 years old	5	1.5
	≥ 46 years old	15	4.6
Marital status	Single	140	42.6
	Married (without children)	54	16.4
	Married (with children)	130	39.5
	Divorced	3	0.9
	Others	2	0.6
Race	Malay	285	86.6
	Chinese	18	5.5
	Indian	15	4.6
	Others	11	3.3
Grade	DG54	4	0.01
	DG52	15	0.05
	DG48	20	0.06
	DG44	145	0.44
	DG41	144	0.43
	DG32	1	0.00
Academic qualification	Degree	251	76.3
	Masters	78	23.7
Tenure of service	< 1 year	46	14.0
	1 – 5 years	171	52.0
	6 – 10 years	73	22.2
	11 – 15 years	21	6.4
	> 15 years	18	5.5
Length of service in school	< 1 year	73	22.2
	1 – 5 years	33	10.0
	6 – 10 years	212	64.4

11 – 15 years	6	1.8
> 15 years	5	1.5

Occupational stress

All hypotheses were tested by using inferential statistics. For the first to sixth hypotheses, they were tested by using Pearson Correlation; for the seventh hypothesis, multiple regression was used, and hierarchical multiple regression was used to test the ninth hypotheses.

Usage of Pearson correlation

Pearson correlation was used to test hypotheses 1 to 6. The analysis was meant to determine whether occupational stress and the six dimensions of occupational stress have any relationship with stress. The output is shown in Table 2

Table 2
Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis between Occupational Stress and Stress

Variable	Stress
Work Overload	.351
Work Hour	.341
Family conflicts	.362
Financial Factors	.05
Work Location	.03
Occupational Stress	.404

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2tailed)
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The result of the analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between work load and stress. The correlation value of this variable of r =0.351, means that a positive and low relationship exists between the two. Thus Ho1 is rejected. The result shows that work hour has significant and positive relationship with stress. The relationship between the two is moderate because the r-value = 0.341. Thus, Ho2 is rejected. The result of the analysis shows that there is a average significant correlation between family conflicts and stress . The correlation value of r = 0.362 indicates that the two variables are positively and moderately correlated. Thus, Ho3 is rejected. The result shows that financial factors and stress is not significantly related. There's no relationship between financial factors and stress. Since the correlation value, r = 0.05, financial factors and stress is low but is not correlated. Hence, Ho4 is accepted. There is no significant correlation between work location and stress as the p-value > 0.05. Thus, Ho5 is accepted. The work location and stress is not significantly correlated as the r-value of 0.03, p > 0.05. Thus, we accept Ho5. There is a significant positive relationship between occupational stressors and psychological stress (r = 0.404, p < 0.05). Since the r-value is 0.404, it is indicated that the relationship between the two variables is a moderate relationship. We may infer that   higher scores on occupational stressors are associated with higher score on stress (higher score indicates low level of stress). As a conclusion, we have to reject Ho5 as Ha5 is substantiated.

Usage of Multiple Regression

A multiple regression analysis is used to test Ho7. Multiple regression tells how much of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variable. From

the model summary indicated in Table 3, we can see that the R^2 value is 0.388 which means that independent variable only explains 38.8% of the variation in the dependent variable. The adjusted R^2 value is 33.8% which means that the dimensions of occupational stressors contributed only 33.8% of stress. The remaining 61.2% were contributed by other factors not included in this study.

Table 3
Multiple regression analysis of Occupational Stress

Variables	Beta	t	Significant t
Work load	.268	5.453	.000
Work hour	.240	4.833	.000
Family Conflict	.250	5.096	.000
Financial Factors	.036	.717	.477
Work Location	.035	.716	.475

Dependent variable   Adjusted R^2 = .388   F = 45.597 ** $p < 0.01$

The regression analysis on all five dimensions of occupational stressors were significant at $p < 0.05$, at F = 45.597. However, it was found out that only three dimensions were significant which have p-value < 0.05, namely work load, work hour and family conflict. Another two dimensions, i.e. financial factors and work location were not significant to stress since the p-value of each was 0.477 and 0.475. We may conclude by saying that at least 3 dimensions of stress, namely work load, work hours and family conflict have impact on stress. Hence, Ho7 is rejected.

Recomendations

Many researchers (Manshor, Fontaine and Chong, 2002; Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons, 2007; Emilia and Hassim, 2007; Cai, Li and Zhang, 2008; Ho, 1996, Fairbrother and Warn, 2003; Salmond and Ropis, 2005; Baehler and Bryson, 2008) found that heavy workload is one of the main factors which causes stress across all types of occupations, namely managers, nurses, chefs, nurses, teachers, naval officers, policy advisors and permanent night workers.
The result of correlation analysis, a multiple regression analysis shows that only three dimensions of occupational stressors have a significant influence towards stress, namely work load, work hour and family conflict. As indicated by the multiple regression analysis, 38,8% of stress is due to occupational stressors, whereas another 61.2% were contributed by other factors not included in this study.

Undeniably, organizational factors can lead to poor emotional health. Dua (1998) found that apart from physical health and job dissatisfaction, emotional health are also the direct impacts of general stress and occupational stress. Marzabadi and Tarkhorani (2007) found that organizational factors are among the causes of stress and burnout.   Hence, the researcher has come up with eight recommendations to improve the present situation, as well as to cater the problems brought by the five dimensions of stress, namely work overload, work hour, family conflicts, financial factors and work location.

Stress survey

This survey should be administered to teachers across all states in Malaysia. Through this survey, Ministry of Education can study what the pattern of occupational stress looks like and immediate actions must be taken if the stress level shows an increment. However, if the

stress level is reported to be moderate, it cannot be taken for granted because there is a tendency to increase if appropriate action is not taken.

Stress management program

Stress management training program should be designed for all teachers so that they can learn more about stress, its effects and how to cope with it. In this regard, Ministry of Education should collaborate with the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) in organizing the courses.

Job rotation

All schools should give more attention to job rotation. As of now, there are a significant numbers of teachers who have been given the same additional task except teaching should be assigned to other task. Job rotation should be made compulsory to all teachers. Actually, job rotation is one of the ways to offset boredom, which can occur when performing the same job over an extended period of time.   Hopefully, job rotation can make people get the best out of their potential.

Mentoring

A mentoring programme is an official programme aims at personal developmental relationship in which senior teachers who have more experience or more knowledge help and guide less experienced or less knowledgeable teachers. In other words, it provides a way for a mentee or junior teachers to release their stress and ask opinion of his/her mentor on how to overcome stressful situation.

Sports and Recreational Facilities

Ministries education should provide recreational facilities such as gymnasium, sports equipment etc. for the staff. These facilities should be made available to all staff after office hours. Sporting activities and exercise are among the important ways to ease stress because they help to flush stress hormones like adrenaline out of the body.

Counseling Service

Counselling is a professional guidance in resolving personal conflicts and emotional problems (FreeDictionary.com). The counsellor focuses on enhancing the stress of the client, such that the client is then able to reach his/her full potential. A trained counsellor may be able to help in a number of ways. It can enable the client to develop a clearer understanding of his/her concerns and help him/her acquire new skills to better manage his/her problems. The counsellor can offer a different perspective and help him/her think of creative solutions to problems.

Time Management

Teachers should learn how to effectively manage their time. They should know how to prioritise their works when a lot of works are delegated to them at the same time. Teachers must be able to delegate their works to their subordinates. They have to spend time to coach and guide students on how to study, in the long run, it is worthwhile.

Communication

Since occupational stress may be attributed by lack of effective communication, organization should encourage effective communication among its teachers whether it is upward, downward or horizontal communication. Effective communication can also be practiced at home, between spouses or with other family members.

Research Limitation

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, the time duration to complete this research is very limited. As such, data collection cannot be expanded beyond other district or state. Second, this study is a cross-sectional design in which data were gathered at one point within the period of study. This may not be able to capture the developmental issues and/or causal connections between variables of interest.

Future Research

Future research should be conducted to identify the relationship between occupational stress and physical health among teachers. It is also recommended that the scope of the research be broadened to teachers in all states in Malaysia. Further, future research should also consider longitudinal research in order to capture the development and/or causal connections between occupational stress and psychological health and/or physical health.

Conclusion

This study has been fruitful in identifying the relationship between occupational stress and stress. It is hoped that this study would trigger an interest from all relevant parties related to teachers to dwell further into the research questions, particularly, those related to stress of teachers who have contributed significantly to the public service, particularly students, and the nation's development. It is also hoped that afterwards, teachers can live a healthy life and are able to balance it in almost every aspect. Stress should go mainstream and become a strategic issue that is routinely considered by all organizations, both in private and public service. This is so because if the teachers' stress is well taken care of, it's a win-win situation for the teachers and Ministry Education alike.

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