

# **WORKPLACE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH JOB STRESS**

**LIU YUAN**



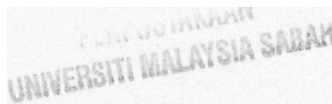
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**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH  
2006**

# **WORKPLACE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH JOB STRESS**

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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF HUMAN CAPITAL  
MANAGEMENT**



**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH  
2006**

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**DECLARATION**

The materials in this dissertation are original except for quotations, excerpts, summaries and references, which have been duly acknowledged.

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## ABSTRACT

Job stress is an important issue in an organization. The objective of this research is to examine whether workplace factors (intrinsic to the job, role in the organization, relationship at work, career development, and organization structure & climate) have a positive impact and significant on job stress, and also to examine whether the age and gender play moderate roles in the relationship between workplace and job stress. The literature review provides detail development of how these variables influence job stress. The respondents were based on a sample population. The questionnaire were constructed out of extensive literature review. The hypotheses were tested using SPSS program of multiple regression and hierarchical regression. The research discovered that the workplace factors (intrinsic to the job, relationship at work, career development, organization structure and climate) have a positive impact and significant on job stress, the factor of role in the organization have a negative impact but no significant on job stress. Age and gender do not play moderate roles in all the relationship between workplace factors and job stress..



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## **ABSTRAK**

### ***Faktor Tempat Pekerjaan Mempengaruhi Tekanan Kerja***

*Tekanan pekerjaan merupakan isu yang sangat penting dalam mana-mana organisasi. Objektif kajian ini ialah mengkaji sama ada faktor tempat pekerjaan mempunyai impak dan signifikan positif terhadap tekanan kerja. Faktor demografi iaitu umur dan jantina juga dikaji hubungan antara tempat pekerjaan dan tekanan. Soratan literatur yang mendalam telah dibincang untuk variabel-variabel yang mempengaruhi tekanan kerja. Responden kajian dipilih secara random dari populasi kajian dan satu soal selidik yang extesif telah disediakan berdasarkan sorotan literatur. Oleh itu, kajian kali ini telah menggunakan SPSS program dan membuktikan tekanan mempunyai positif impak dan mempengaruhi dalam tempat pekerjaan tetapi misi dalam pekerjaan pula mempunyai negatif impak dan tidak menunjukkan bahawa boleh mendapat tekanan pekerjaan. Umur dan jantina tidak mempengaruhi hubungan antara faktor tempat kerja dan tekanan kerja.*



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Overview

Today's society is getting into a high-speed development environment. Everything focuses on efficiency and everything face to change. International economic unification accompanying intense competition posed new challenges and opportunities. Globalization, intensification of competition, and technological advancements-to mention just a few of the current challenges to businesses-demand that companies develop innovative organizational design forms that in particular foster a high degree of utilization and development of employee qualifications (Pfeffer, 1991). A physically and mentally healthy workforce is one of a country's most valuable assets. However, there are signs that work-related psychological disorders are a serious threat to the well-being of any workforce. Job stress is one of the main sources, which lead to both psychological injured and poor health problems (Berry, 1998). The nature of work is changing at whirlwind speed. Perhaps now more than ever before, job stress poses a threat to the health of workers and, in turn, to the health organizations (NIOSH, an organization which is committed to providing organizations with knowledge to reduce this threat).

Abstract Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. As never before, there is a need for effective interventions to prevent, reduce, and manage job stress. According to one school of thought, differences in individual characteristics such as personality and coping style are most important in predicting whether certain job conditions will result in stress-in other words, what is

stressful for one person may not be a problem for someone else. This viewpoint leads to prevention strategies that focus on workers and ways to help them cope with demanding job conditions.

Although the importance of individual differences cannot be ignored, scientific evidence suggests that certain working conditions are stressful to most people. Excessive workload demands and conflicting expectations are good examples. 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.

Stresses and strains in the workforce manifest themselves in reduced productivity, increased absenteeism due to illness, and, most important, a demographic change, the profile of today's workforce looks very different from that of the previous generation.

## **1.2 Rationale of this study**

Organizations have introduced global changes to deal with some of these issues, such as improving career development, redesigning jobs, or providing counseling for interpersonal problems (Murphy, Hurrell, Sauter & Keita, 1995). Research evidence as to the effectiveness of these interventions is encouraging, at least in the short term, and a growing number of stress reduction programs have demonstrated considerable economic savings to organizations in reduced rates of sickness and absenteeism as well as reduced health care costs.

### **Sources of Occupational Stress**

The primary sources of occupational stress within an organization originate from four areas. These areas include task demands, physical demands, role demands, and interpersonal demands. Any demand, either of a physical nature or psychological nature, encountered in the course of living is known as a 'stressor'. A stress response will occur as

a result of an individual's interaction with and reaction to the stressor (Karasek, 1979). Task-related stress is directly related to the specific characteristics of the job itself. This type of stress involves role ambiguity, conflicting task demands, work overload or work underload, inadequate resource support, no provision for meaningful participation in decision-making, and insecurity, among others (Knotts, 1996).

Physical demands of the workplace are another source to be considered. Environmental factors such as temperature variations, noise vibrations, and lighting may significantly affect individual stress. For example, extremes in lighting can cause stress, which often results in headaches and nervous tension (Knotts, 1996).

Role demands are external to the tasks associated with a job. This particular type of stress typically develops as a result of flawed organizational structures, ineffective organizational development, the inability of an individual to successfully pursue achievement goals within an organization, or some combination of all three. The individual's stress often results when his or her work role and responsibility has not been clearly defined (Knotts, 1996).

The final source area of occupational stress relates to interpersonal demands. "Interpersonal stress at work is concerned with the demands that are placed on us in developing working relationships with other people in our organizations" (Knotts, 1996). Leadership style of managers and supervisors is often a source of stress for their employees.

### **Stress Outcomes**

The result of stressors commonly associated with occupational stress tends to vary widely. Workers may simply resort to daydreaming or fantasizing. Alternatively, employees may react more actively by creating interpersonal and intraorganizational conflicts involving escalating levels of communication problems. Workers may also experience effects in their psychological and physical health. Psychological consequences may include anxiety,



boredom, low self-esteem, forgetfulness, depression, anger, apathy, or worry. Physical consequences may include, but are certainly not limited to, headaches, diabetes, fatigue, hypertension, chest and back pain, ulcers, or even infectious diseases. Studies show that 85% of all physical illness is stressing related (Randolfi, 1996). These results are just a few of many stress outcomes that may result from the effects of occupational stress. Workers may also exhibit deviations in their behavior. Examples of departures from normal behavior may be overeating/loss of appetite, smoking, alcohol abuse, sleeping disorders, emotional outbursts, or violence and aggression (Randolfi, 1996).

From the organizational aspect, stress has many consequences. Reductions in effectiveness, productivity, and communication are results that are not as easy to identify; however, such outcomes can be among the most debilitating for both the organization and the individual. Other results may include accidents in the workplace, job turnover, low morale, poor work relations, poor organizational climate, and absenteeism (Randolfi, 1996). Absenteeism, for example, results in 4% of the work hours which are lost, and translates into millions of dollars annually (Knotts, 1996).

### **Classifications of Stressors**

Occupationally related stressors tend to vary from job to job and from organization to organization. These stressors can be easily divided into three classifications:

The first classification contains stressors that are common to a wide variety of jobs. This group includes issues regarding customer demands, time constraints, and ineffective training.

The second classification contains stressors that are common to a wide variety of organizations. This group includes issues related to absence of support from organizational superiors, non-competitive wage structures, poor job descriptions, and ineffective organizational motivational strategies.

The third, and last, classification contains factors related to interdepartmental

activities within an organization. This group included issues such as poor cooperation, organizational politics, and similar activities. Occupationally related stressors also tend to evolve as changes occur in organizational environments, organizational staffing, and job tasks (Schaubroeck, 1993).

Extensions of the basic research in this area found that both contextually related and role-related variables affect interpersonal communication, job attitude, job behavior, and the magnitude of job stressors. In this context, the researchers concluded that an individual's perceptions of work-generated stressors and their eventual reactions to these organizational realities are influenced by the location within a particular organizational environment of that individual (Schaubroeck, 1993). Occupational stress is often associated with overachievers or workaholics. High levels of self-induced stress usually characterize these individuals. Stress, however, is also associated with so-called underload situations. Studies of plant closures and involuntarily unemployed workers found that health problems, both physical and mental, are higher during layoff periods than during periods of employment. Studies also found that stress is often higher among blue-collar workers than among managerial personnel. Job level, associated with job status, was found to be tied to self-esteem. Lower self-esteem was associated with higher levels of stress. Even on the job, job underload creates as much stress as does job overload. Job underload means that an individual is not challenged in her or his work, and may be subject to periods of boredom or periods of fatigue stemming from boredom. Job underload may also create higher levels of anxiety, depression, and physical illness than job overload. Alienation has also been related to the development of occupational stress (Garfield, 1995). Alienation is especially harmful to effective organizational communications. Alienation with respect to occupational stress is defined as an objective social situation that exists independent of its recognition by those in that situation (Garfield, 1995). Such a definition of a stressor means that it could have an impact



whether or not those individuals working in that environment perceived its presence in the environment. The definition also infers that stress-creating events or situations may be viewed as being inherent in specific occupations or tasks. Further, the definition infers that stress-outcomes may not always be controllable by individuals exposed to stressors.

**Job “Burn-Out”** A concept closely associated with occupational stress is job burn-out. The term is frequently used in connection with all so-called high-pressure occupations. Job burnout actually has been found to be present in all occupations, regardless of whether or not the occupation is a so-called high-pressure occupation (Maslack, 1997). Job burnout is held to result from the combined effects of work-related factors that create unrelieved work stress, which, in turn, leads to a generally debilitated psychological condition in individuals. Certain behaviors associated with job burnout have been observed in a wide variety of occupations. These behaviors include a tendency on the part of an individual to blame others in an organization for one's own problems, increased absenteeism, increased involvement in interpersonal conflicts and confrontation, and increasing isolation from others in the organization (Maslack, 1997). Individuals suffering from job burnout frequently attempt to remove themselves from the situations they perceive to be the source of their problems without actually terminating their jobs. Their strategies in such attempts involve a breakdown in communication, and are often damaging to both their organizations and to their own careers.

**Recommendations for Stress Management**

There are many approaches managers and supervisors can take to prevent occupational stress. However, any attempt made by management to institute a stress prevention program would constitute the first step in the process: identifying the problem. Several remedies to the stress-communication problem include listening by the managers, creating teams to deal with the organizational communication problems, and mediation. Managers should always ensure that the workload is in line with the workers' capabilities and resources. They should also design jobs to provide meaning, stimulation, and

opportunities for workers to use their skills. Along with these essential steps, the workers' roles and responsibilities should always be clearly defined. Improving communication is another critical step in preventing occupational stress. If workers are given the opportunity to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs, uncertainty about career development and security may be reduced. Work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job should also be established. In conclusion, building general awareness about occupational stress is the first step in prevention. Securing top management commitment and support for the program will only lend to more positive results. Reduction in occupational stress is a worthwhile time investment for managers and supervisors, as it will only stand to improve productivity, morale, and overall organizational climate.

In terms of the organizational health framework, the notion of organizational performance should be considered quite broadly. Relatively few occupational stress theories have explicitly well-being and performance, with most theories focusing on ill-health as the ultimate outcome (Cooper, 1988). It is generally assumed, however, that ill-health results in substantial cost to work organizations through sickness absence, medical expenses, and lost productivity. These potential outcomes of occupational stress are highly relevant to the organizational health framework, because they can have a substantial affect on an organization's "bottom-line".

Accordingly, by integrating the concepts of psychological distress, job satisfaction, and morale into a broader model of employee well-being, it may be possible for work stress researchers and practitioners to demonstrate a strong link between employees' levels of well-being and organizational performance (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). To combining the gender variable, although the relationship between women's employment and their physical and psychological well-being is not clear-cut, this research helps to clarify some of the ambiguity. New methodology that increases the number and types of

stressors examined shows that women do generally experience greater mental distress than men and helps clarify other differences in women and men.

### 1.3 Research Problem

Stress is a word that conjures up negative images both in the popular literature and the scientific one. There is general agreement that job stress is a growing problem in the modern workplace, it makes a lot of negative stress –related outcomes to both individuals and organizations. Especially in YILI Dairy Company, the rising costs of health care, child care, food and housing affect even more workers and leave them vulnerable to health problems known to be caused by stress. The collection costs of stress in YILI Organization for absenteeism, reduced productivity, rising compensation claims, health insurance, and the direct medical expenses have been estimated more than 12 million RMB per year (This information was gathered through the interview via email with Mr.Zhao, the human resource manager of YILI Company). So it is important to understand the source of stress in the modern changing workplace, and it is the primary process that directs the resources effectively in order to reduce the job stress.

Therefore, by focusing on the impact of five workplace factors (intrinsic to job, role in organization, career development, relationships at work and organization structure & climate) on job stress, finding out the source of job stress may help to get some solutions to problem in this area. The main problem to be solved in this research is whether the workplace factors we mentioned above are the source of job stress. This research, basically, will also try to answer to the foregoing research questions as outlined below:

- 1 Is there a relationship between the factors of intrinsic to the job and job stress?
- 2 Is there a relationship between the factors of role in the organization and job stress?

- 3 Is there a relationship between the factors of relationships at work and job stress?
- 4 Is there a relationship between the factors of organizational structure & climate and job stress?
- 5 Are finding age play a role in moderating the relationship between work factors and job stress?
- 6 Are finding gender play a role in moderating the relationship between work factors and job stress?

#### 1.4 Research Objectives

The first objective of this research is to examine whether the independent variables (intrinsic to job, role in organization, career development, relationships at work and organization structure & climate) have the positive impact on job stress in the YILI Company in China.

The second objective of this research is to explore whether age and gender play moderated roles in the relationship between workplace factors and job stress level.

#### 1.5 Scope of Study

The research is to show whether the work factors we mentioned above has a positive impact on job stress. Population of this research consisted of workers attached to YILI Dairy Product Limited Company, NEI- MONGOLIA in China. This location was selected since through the interview via email with human resource manager in YILI Company, it was found that the effect of job stress is becoming a very serious problem in this company.

## 1.6 Significance of Study

The research not only contributes to the literature of the factors about sources of job stress, but also helps the management of the various firms in NEI-MONGOLIA in CHINA to pay more attention to the stress factors and improving human resource management in order to fit the high-speed change in the modern workplace.

Data and information collected from this research can help the managers to find what are the factors caused job stress, according these results to get an effective strategy to cope with the stress symptom both on individuals and organizations. Furthermore, the company can increase productivity; achieve competitive advantage by employee retention. The research of this research could also serve as a reference for further investigations about factors of health organization.

Found the moderator roles of age and gender between work factors and job stress help the employees have a clearly self-position to find a way to avoid job stress disorder and improve ability to suitable for work environment change.

The research also can help the company ameliorate work place and set up a good relationship between employees and company, and achieve goals.

## 1.7 Definition Of Key Terms in This Study

The key variables used in this study have specific meaning and such definition in general context as well as in the context of this research are outlined below:

### 1.7.1 Job Stress

Job Stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury.



The concept of job stress is often confused with challenge, but these concepts are not the same. Challenge energizes us psychologically and physically, and it motivates us to learn new skills and master our jobs. When a challenge is met, we feel relaxed and satisfied. Thus, challenge is an important ingredient for healthy and productive work. The importance of challenge in our work lives is probably what people are referring to when they say, "a little bit of stress is good for you."

### **1.7.2 Intrinsic to the Job**

As a starting point to understanding job stress, there are a variety of factors intrinsic to the job that are potentially stressful and have been linked to poor mental health (Cooper & Smith, 1985; Kelly & Cooper, 1981). These include poor physical working conditions, shift work, long hours, travel, risk and danger, new technology, and work overload or underload (of both qualitative and quantitative nature).

### **1.7.3 Role in the Organization**

When a person's role in an organization is clearly defined and understood and when expectations placed on the individual are also clear and non-conflicting, stress can be kept to a minimum. But researchers have clearly seen that this is not the case in many work sites. Three critical factors role ambiguity, role conflict, and the degree of responsibility for others are seen as major sources of stress (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980).

### **1.7.4 Relationships at Work**

Relationships with others at work (i.e. superiors, colleagues, and subordinates) are potentially stressful. Most studies have concluded that mistrust of coworkers is associated with high role ambiguity, poor communication, low job satisfaction, and diminished

psychological well being (Cooper & Payne, 1988).

Improving personal relationships in the workplace is a complex process and may have implications for a range of interpersonal skills training. Oldham (1998) investigated the impact of physical layout on communication and employee satisfaction among clerical staff. It was found that employees were more satisfied when working in traditional partitioned offices than open plan. Partitioned offices were recognized as providing greater possibilities for focusing on the task and for communicating in private.

#### **1.7.5 Career Development**

Career development is a lifelong process involving psychological, sociological, educational, economic, physical and culture background factors, and chance factors that interact to influence the career of the individual.

#### **1.7.6 Organizational Structure and Climate**

Just being part of an organization can present threats to a person's sense of freedom and autonomy. Organizational workers sometimes complain that they do not have a sense of belonging and that they lack adequate opportunities to participate; they may feel that their behavior is unduly restricted and that they are not included in office communications and consultations.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

The nature of work is changing at whirlwind speeds. Perhaps now, more than ever before, job stress poses a threat to the health of workers. Stress has long been associated with the onset of significant physical and mental health problems. Stress began to be implicated in areas beyond the bounds of physical and mental health as far back as the 1980s. In the organizational environment, stress has been implicated in the deterioration of performance efficiency by both managers and subordinates. When performance efficiency suffers the quality of the overall organizational environment and productivity deteriorates. A deterioration of the organizational environment is accompanied by deterioration in organizational communication.

Books and professional journal articles in the field of stress probably would fill a small library; moreover, there are probably as many models of the process as there are investigators. For this research, the literature review just focus on the factors which cause of job stress. During 1980s, much research in the field of workplace stress suggested six major sources of pressure at work (Cooper, Cooper, & Eaker, 1988). The most supporting model for this research is Dynamic of Work Stress Model, which developed by Cartwright and Cooper (1997), it list both work-related and non-work pressure factors as source of stress.