

Causes and Consequences of Workplace Stress among Pakistan University Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the concept of workplace stress and its impact on the performance of faculty members working in Pakistani universities. Data were collected from five public and private sector universities in two phases based on mixed method design. In the interview phase, 10 university teachers were asked open ended questions about why they feel stress in the workplace. The six workplace factors identified as sources of stress for university teachers are: work overload, role ambiguity and role conflict, management ineffectiveness, disparity of rewards & recognition, unsupportive coworkers and lack of career development opportunities. In the survey phase, a questionnaire was developed and distributed among 350 teachers in selected universities. Entrant teachers (Lecturers) were found to be more prone to stress than senior faculty members on higher posts. Excessive workload and role conflict were found to be the highest stress causing factors. Effective and supportive management and career progression opportunities are suggested as means to reduce the stress level and address suboptimal performance of university teachers.

Keywords: Workplace stress, work overload, role conflict, rewards & recognition, coworker support, career development, work

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Introduction

Pakistan is a country where a number of improvements are needed to address development challenges. These changes can emanate from universities which can serve as the engines of growth in today's knowledge driven economy. The most important resource of the university is its teaching faculty. Therefore, factors adversely affecting teacher performance need to be addressed as a priority. Further in Pakistan, there has been a rapid growth in the HEI's (Higher Education Institutions) belonging to both public and private sectors. The challenge is therefore, to induct and retain highly capable and skilled teachers and teams to disseminate, create and apply knowledge. To this end, a positive and cooperative work environment is essential for innovative work and optimal performance.

In recent times there is rise in stress that spreads across all the spheres of life. Stress is a condition that occurs due to the worker's inability to meet and cope with the uncertain and excessive work demands which result in undesired and adverse physical and emotional response (Michie, 2002). University academic staff often feels overwhelmed because of excessive job demands, workload and publication efforts (Goldenberg & Waddell, 1990). In Pakistan, both teaching and research are the professional career requirements of university teachers (Sarwar, Aslam & Rasheed, 2010). Stress is felt as a pressure or burden often caused due to change in policies, higher performance required for quality teaching and research, and continuing further studies for career growth. Workplace stress reduces competence and adversely affects creativity and innovation (Drazin & Schoonhoven, 1996).

Objectives of the Study

The aims of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the different stress causing factors for university teaching faculty at their workplace.
2. To find which stress factors are having stronger influence on the performance of teaching faculty.
3. To prove that a stressful work environment leads to suboptimal performance
4. Giving some recommendation on how to manage stress faced by the teachers at their work place.

Literature Review

Since last few decades, stress is becoming an increasing problem for the organizations. According to Werther (1996), stress is the reaction of persons when there are extreme pressures and demands to perform in a competitive environment. Sources of job stress are both intrinsic as well as extrinsic (Dewe, Cox, & Ferguson, 1993). Beehret et al. (2000) found that stress factors within the workplace and job performance has a strong relationship with each other and also affects an employee mentally and emotionally. Slicskovic and Sersic (2011) suggested that stress affects the performance of teaching faculty of higher education sector due to high level of workload related to research and academic activities. Leka, Griffiths and Cox (2004) described that when a person feels stress at workplace, his/her ability to perform tasks as required affects and results in low performance and inefficiency. Imtiaz and Ahmad, (2009) described that there is decline in the performance of the employee if he/she is experiencing stress and also the management is not helpful in getting things under control.

Sources of stress at workplace include inherent factors of job, role in organization, relationship at work and career development (Greenberg, 2005). Work load, impaired communication, job insecurity, and organizational conflict are potential sources of stress among teachers (Calloway 2003; Johnson, 1993; king, 2002; Moore, 2003 & ling, 1991). Work becomes burden in a situation when a person has a lot of work to do at same time. Work overload is one of the most considerable causes of stress (Mullins, 2002). Jacobs and Winslow (2004) found that work overload negatively affects their research productivity. Srivastav and Pareek (2008) found that role ambiguity and role conflict creates stress.

Matilyn and Cary (2003) described management ineffectiveness as a main cause of workplace stress. Moreover, if the management of an organization treats its employees as tool not as companion, the outcome is poor performance of employees. Reskin (2008) identified lack of participation in decision making and poor organizational communication is as cause of stress. Lack of clarity of management policies and decision making exacerbates the feeling of stress among university staff.

Unsupportive relationship with coworkers and colleagues can be a source of stress. Torman (2000) suggested that workplace stress can be studied through relationship between colleagues and co-workers. Relationship with coworker means a relationship with those employees who are working at the same level and without any domination. Archibong et al. (2010) revealed that competition among coworkers, lack of trust and harsh working relationship with coworker or colleague creates stress for a teacher. Availability of a support system is very helpful in a stressful situation and with this support handling stress becomes effortless. Johnson et al. (2005) expressed that

deficiency in the support from colleague or coworker is a potential source of stress. Problematic relationship with coworker such as grouping of some teachers or isolation, withholding information, restraining from training or growth opportunities and unsupportive criticism can become a source of stress for faculty members.

Jordan, Ashkanasy and Hartel (2002) identified job insecurity as a potential source of stress. Patil (2011) defined that if an employee has a feeling of limited opportunity for self-growth, and standing behind in corporate ladder, he/she may experience stress. Stevenson & Harper (2006) identified the consequences of teachers' stress as impaired time management, lack of concentration and offensive behavior. McConnell (2003) explained that the higher expectation and the pressure to fulfill them causes stress which may be positive or negative in its effects. It has a positive effect if realistic deadline persuades employees to work well, but if work exceed a certain limit or continues for a long time its effect will be negative. The level of stress experienced by the individual will be high, if there is no balance between job demands and abilities (Jamal, 2005). White, R.A., Wilson, L.M., & Pfoutz, S.K. (2006) found that in universities, unreasonable deadlines and extra administrative work such as admission process, lack of appropriate break period and intense research work becomes a source of work related

McCormick (1997) expressed that teaching is a profession from which many roles are expected. Onyemah (2008) identified that role ambiguity and role conflict have a strong influence on performance. Role ambiguity arise because accessible information about the job is insufficient (Conley & Woosley, 2000), and Role conflict is different and opposing demands from a person. Role conflict negatively impacts the employee's behavior and results in declined performance (Viator, 2001). Role ambiguity is related to lower performance because it became difficult for an employee to focus on tasks and work efficiently (Conley & Woosley, 2000).

University teacher's main job is teaching but other work such as arranging seminars & conferencing, conducting meetings, preparing students for competitions, students counseling, and admission process makes teachers diverts their attention. Stress increases for employees performing different roles at the same time, if these roles are not clearly defined in job description.

Rewards have been considered as an important instrument in employee performance. A well awarded employee feels that he/she is valued to the organization for which he/she is working. Recognition can be defined as appreciation, gratitude and admiration for outstanding performance. Rewards and recognition have a strong influence on the employee satisfaction and performance. Recognition is a dominant energizer for employee positive behaviors that enhance performance of both manufacturing and service organizations (Luthans, Fox, & Davis, 1991; Snyder and Luthans, 1982). Cooper & Bright (2001) found that lack of proper rewards and recognition within an organization/

institution is an important source of stress. Traver and Cooper (1996) had also defined that lack of social recognition as a source of stress among teachers. Rewards in monetary form have a strong and important effect on employee performance (Ojokuku & Sajuyigbe, 2009). In universities, rewards and recognition play a pivotal role for the satisfaction and professional development of the teachers.

Providing a positive and challenging career development opportunity to an employee increases the morale of employee. Employee having access to development opportunities feels valued and recognizes support from organization. And with this positive feeling their performance boosts up. When an organization does not pay attention to the development of its employees, then this situation may become a source of stress. Sharpley, Reynolds and Acosta (1996) found in their research study that lack of promotion opportunities is a common cause of stress expressed by university staff. Limited promotion opportunities increases dissatisfaction and frustration and serves as a cause of stress (Gillespie et al., 2001).

Methodology

This study was conducted using a mixed method design. Sample was delimited to universities in Lahore as this is the most rapidly developing city in Pakistan. As per Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan there are 20 public and private universities in Lahore. Out of these 5 universities were selected randomly. The population was all the academic staff (faculty) of these universities.

At the exploratory stage, qualitative interviews were conducted to identify relevant factors. 10 university teachers (5 each from a public sector university and 5 from a private sector university) were asked open ended questions about why they feel stressed in the workplace. The key questions were:

1. As a university teacher, describe for us situations in which you felt over burdened with work.
2. What are the reasons due to which you feel stressed in your work life?
3. Please share with us issues in your work environment which make it difficult to manage things.
4. What changes in your work conditions can help you perform better?
5. How does work stress effect your teaching performance and research output?

Based on the themes extracted from these interviews, a quantitative research instrument was developed, to establish causal linkages. The quantitative research instrument had 40 statements, rated on a five point Likert Scale to tap opinions regarding 8 constructs. Table 1 shows the items measuring each construct.

Table 1
Constructs and Items in the Research Instrument

Constructs	Items
Workplace Stress	<p>In my daily working, often I am tensed and get annoyed.</p> <p>It is difficult to manage time at the university and I feel tensed about it.</p> <p>I feel things are outside of my control causing tension and uneasiness during work.</p> <p>Many times I feel mental fatigue and frustration while doing my university work.</p> <p>My work at the university puts emotional strain on me which can be difficult to bear</p>
Work Overload	<p>My working hours are too long and it is difficult to take break.</p> <p>I have to meet unreasonable deadlines during my work.</p> <p>I have to do a lot of paper and administrative work alongside teaching and research.</p> <p>I have to perform many tasks that are not the part of my job description.</p> <p>Supervision of the research work of students increases workload immensely.</p>
Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict	<p>Expectations regarding the work to be performed by me are not clearly defined.</p> <p>Management makes policies for teachers which are not clear.</p> <p>I have a lot of responsibilities with little authority.</p> <p>Often I am called to attend meetings and complete nonacademic assignments due to which my regular work is hindered.</p> <p>I work with people that expect unrelated things from me.</p>
Management Ineffectiveness	<p>There is lack of two way communication between faculty and administration/management.</p> <p>I feel that supportive feedback and constructive criticism is missing.</p> <p>Supervisor is not present when he/she is needed most.</p> <p>There is culture of favoritism/biasness in the university.</p> <p>Resources in the university are not managed well.</p>
Disparity of rewards & recognition	<p>Our University offers fewer benefits in comparison to other higher education institutions.</p> <p>For the amount of effort I put in my work, the salary and benefits are low.</p> <p>The system of rewards is inconsistent and inequitable.</p> <p>I do not receive much recognition or appreciation even when my work is better than others.</p> <p>Promotion is based on having strong references rather than performance.</p>
Unsupportive coworkers	<p>My coworkers are unfriendly and don't give respect to each other.</p> <p>There are conflicts and tussles between colleagues in the university.</p> <p>My colleague /coworkers are not helpful in work related problems.</p> <p>There is unhealthy competition between teachers.</p> <p>Over ambitious colleagues try to put me down.</p>

Lack of career development opportunities	<p>Although continuous learning is necessary for university teachers, I have very limited opportunity to develop my skills.</p> <p>The university offers few training and development opportunities.</p> <p>Availability of research grants is insufficient to make impact factor publications.</p> <p>I feel that progression in my career is not supported by the university.</p> <p>I have fear of redundancy as others can surpass me in position.</p>
Suboptimal Work Performance	<p>The overall quality of lectures and teaching methodology is not as good as it should be.</p> <p>There are lags in course completion, exam preparation and result declaration.</p> <p>Research and publication efforts are not up to the mark.</p> <p>Teachers do not engage with individual students or give them proper guidance.</p> <p>Most university teachers do not work with dedication and passion.</p>

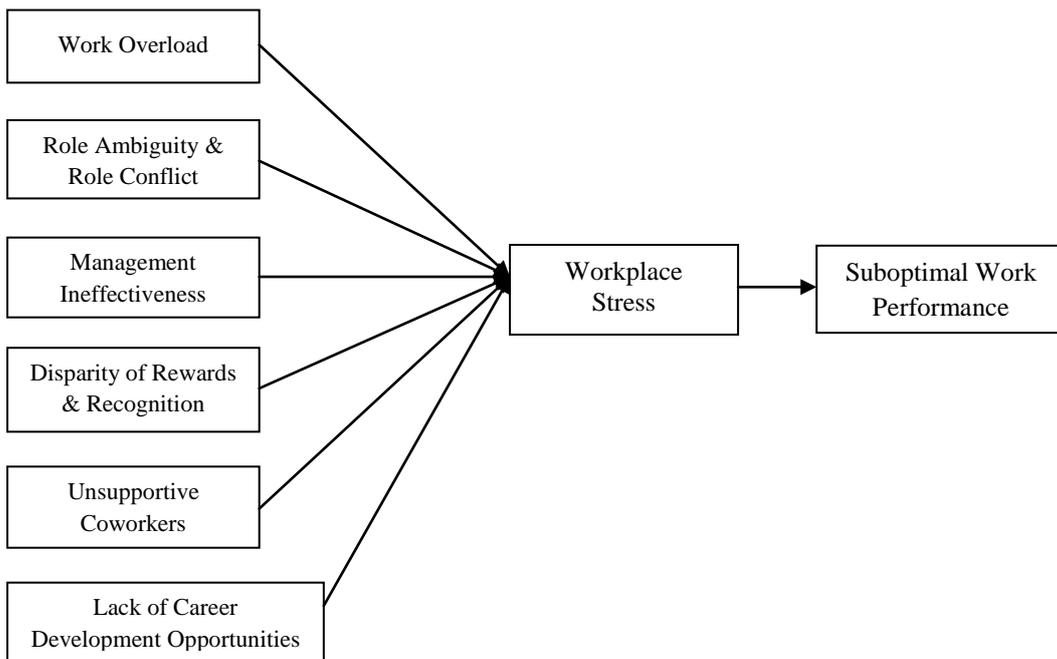


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Hypotheses Statement

"The significant causes of workplace stress among Pakistani university teachers are work overload, role ambiguity and role conflict, management ineffectiveness, disparity of rewards & recognition, unsupportive coworkers and lack of career development opportunities. A major consequence of workplace stress is suboptimal work performance".

Analysis and Results

Table 2
Sample Descriptive

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	193	55.14
Female	157	44.86
Designation		
Lecturer	217	62.0
Assistant professor	107	30.7
Associate Professor	16	4.5
Professor	10	2.8
University Status		
Private Sector	170	48.6
Public Sector	180	51.4

Table 2 shows that sample is quite balanced for gender and university status. Proportion of lecturers is the highest. In Pakistani universities, lecturers are new entrants experiencing high level of performance pressure for career development. Therefore, number of lecturers is highest among all designations of university teachers followed by Assistant Professors. Only highly qualified and experienced faculty members with excellent research record are promoted to the designations of Associate Professor and Professors therefore the number of respondents in these 2 categories is less,

Table 3
Group Differences

Variable	Mean Score Work place Stress	ANOVA	
		F-Value	Sig
Gender		1.96	0.163
Male	15.47		
Female	16.02		
Designation		5.94	0.003
Lecturer	16.7		
Assistant Professor	15.47		
Associate Professor	15.20		
Professor	14.8		
Status of University		5.74	0.017
Private Sector	16.3		
Public Sector	15.5		

The range for Workplace Stress scale is 5 to 25 and a score of 15 represents the level above which respondents can be seen as experiencing Stress. In Table 3 it can be seen that the group difference for gender is not significant ($F = 1.96$, $p > 0.05$) for workplace stress. The group difference for designation is significant ($F = 5.94$, $p < 0.05$) and lecturers experience highest level of stress ($M = 16.7$). Moreover, the group difference for public and private sector universities is significant ($F = 5.74$, $p < 0.05$) and employees of private sector universities ($M = 16.3$) experience more workplace stress as compared to public sector employees ($M = 15.5$).

Table 4
Correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Workplace Stress	(.71)							
2.Work Overload	**0.41	(.72)						
3.Role Ambiguity & Role Conflict	**0.43	**0.31	(.69)					
4.Management Ineffectiveness	*0.20	*0.22	*0.19	(.68)				
5.Disparity of Rewards & Recognition	**0.25	**0.30	0.16	**0.26	(.78)			
6.Unsupportive Coworkers	0.11	*0.21	0.09	**0.35	*0.19	(.80)		
7.Lack of Career Development Opportunities	0.15	0.08	*0.21	0.12	*0.22	0.09	(.73)	
8.Suboptimal Work Performance	**0.55	**0.45	**0.39	**0.35	**0.38	**0.29	**0.27	(.81)

-In parenthesis along diagonal Cronbach Alpha reliability (inter item correlation)

** Pearson correlation coefficient significant at $p < 0.01$ - * Pearson correlation coefficient significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows that work overload ($r = 0.41, p < 0.01$), role ambiguity and role conflict ($r = 0.43, p < 0.01$) are associated with workplace stress at moderate level. These variables are associated with level of workplace stress among university teachers. Unsupportive coworkers ($r = 0.11, p > 0.05$) and lack of career development opportunities ($r = 0.15, p > 0.05$) are not significantly associated with workplace stress. Results show weak positive correlation between workplace stress and Management ineffectiveness ($r = 0.20, p < 0.05$). Disparity of rewards and recognition ($r = 0.25, p < 0.01$) also contribute to workplace stress. These results support the hypothesis as correlation between suboptimal work performance and workplace stress is significant ($r = 0.55, p < 0.01$). Moreover, results show that work overload and role ambiguity and role conflict are also significantly associated ($r = 0.31, p < 0.31$) with each other. Management ineffectiveness is positively associated with unsupportive coworkers ($r = 0.35, p < 0.01$) and disparity of rewards and recognition ($r = 0.01$). The values of Cronbach Alpha along diagonals show reliability of scales used to measure constructs. With most constructs being associated significantly conceptual model convergent validity is suggested.

Table 5
Regression Analysis

	R Square	Adj. R Square	B (Standardized)	P- Value
Model 1	0.22*	0.17*		
Work Overload			0.35	0.00
Role Ambiguity & Role Conflict			0.32	0.00
Management Ineffectiveness			0.14	0.08
Disparity of Rewards & Recognition			0.24	0.01
Unsupportive Coworkers			0.16	0.09
Lack of Career Development Opportunities			0.13	0.10
(Dependent Variable: Workplace Stress)				
Model 2	0.54**	0.53*		
Workplace Stress			0.68	0.00
Dependent Variable: Suboptimal work performance)				
*F = 5.20	p < 0.01			
**F = 22.82	p < 0.00			

In model 1, the value of R square shows that 22% variation in workplace stress explained by explanatory variables which is significant ($*F = 5.20, p < 0.01$). Adjusted R squared shows good model fit. The value of standardized Beta relates to the effect of each independent variable to workplace stress and shows that work overload ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.05$), role ambiguity and role conflict ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.05$) and disparity of rewards and recognition ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.05$) have stronger effect on workplace stress among university

teachers. In model 2, the value of R square shows that 54% variation in suboptimal work performance is explained by workplace stress. The value of standardized beta is significant. These results support hypothesis that workplace stress causes suboptimal work performance of university teachers.

Discussion

The results show that the faculty of the both public and private sector Pakistani universities experiences stress at their work place, debilitating their academic and research performance.

Work overload and role conflict are among those factors that scored high in causing stress. The results regarding work overload are supported by extant literature (Ma & Kaber, 2006; Calloway, 2003; Mullins, 2002; Johnson, 1993; king, 2002; Moore, 2003; Ling, 1991). Role ambiguity and role conflict are the other major source of stress. This finding is corroborated by Srivastav and Pareek (2008) and Jex (1998). Results show that ineffective management becomes a reason of stress and negatively influences performance of the faculty members. This finding is similar to Matilyn and Cary (2003) who described ineffective management as one of the most influential factors in creating workplace stress. Similar to our findings, Imtiaz and Ahmad, (2010) described that low level of job performance is a result of lower management support

In the present study, unsupportive coworkers and lack of development opportunities are not significantly associated with workplace stress experienced by teaching faculty of public and private sector universities. A plausible reason for this finding is that university teachers' job is related to instruction and research performance with more interaction with students and less interaction with colleagues.

Analysis of group difference of public and private sector employees is significant. As per our research findings private sector university teachers experience more stress as compared to public sector university teachers. This difference may be due to the fact that in public sector universities, there is greater job security and less pressure. In private universities, fewer career progression opportunities and lack of research facilities creates stress among academic staff. The public sector universities staff/teachers also have more training programs and research grants than private sector faculty

Analysis of group difference also revealed that lecturers experience higher level of stress as compared to other designations. The result is in contrast to findings of White et al., (2006). In Pakistan, as university teachers are promoted to the higher ranks, the level of stress reduces. Senior faculty has fewer classes to teach and with experience they develop strategies to deal better with stress. Lecturers on the other hand teach more classes and feel confused due to role ambiguity and role conflict. Disparity of rewards and recognition at entrance level may also be causing some problems.

Conclusion

The stress level faced by educators should be a cause of great concern for policy makers because these professionals are directly responsible for grooming coming generations. Pakistan has a young population with 64% of the populace being below the age of 30 years. To turn this human resource into a youth dividend, concerted efforts need to be made to educate and train the young Pakistanis. Critical thinking, problem solving and self-confidence are the attitudes which are needed in the workforce of the future. These skills can only be taught by highly motivated and engaged teachers working in a stress free and congenial environment.

Recommendations

The faculty report that they feel difficulty in managing work efficiently which causes problems in doing quality work. By rationalizing work load, these issues can be managed. In private sector universities, especially, teachers are overburdened due to excessive administrative responsibilities in addition to research and academic activities. Therefore, the management should plan and reform the system and make improvement in the work schedule. Role ambiguity and role conflict can be reduced through accurate job description.

As private sector university teachers have been experiencing more stress, their Human Resource practices should be monitored regularly by HEC. Workload of teachers should be reported to QEC and for quality enhancement. Annual reports about appointments, work load, promotions and rewards given to the teachers should be reviewed systematically.

Career development opportunities can be a remedy for workplace stress. Universities should encourage younger staff through training programs about new technological and educational challenges, provide study leave and research grants for career growth and making the jobs secure for the employee to be productive, especially in private sector.

Workplace stress can be managed by creating culture of social interaction. Coworker support can also be a remedy to reduce stress by maintaining positive and supportive relationship with each other and help colleagues in improving and enhancing their performance.

To address the problem of employee turnover, a culture of equity should be espoused in Pakistani universities. Management must realize that retention of faculty members, both senior and junior is critical for the success of the organization. So extrinsic and intrinsic reward systems must be put into place to motivate the teaching staff.

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