

**The Implication of Job Stress on Employees' Performance in Klang Valley, Malaysia**

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**Abstract**

Job Stress has been widely discussed and evaluated by researchers in the past decades. It is undoubtedly the most prevalent human resource challenges in the corporate industry nowadays and the issues cannot be ignored by the employer as this will cause negative impact to the organization's performance as well employee's well-being. The study was conducted focusing on Malaysia's local set-up company in private sector. The survey was carried out using quantitative research method, whereby a questionnaire is developed to collect data from a pool of employees located in Klang Valley in Malaysia. The participants were coming from different industries, which include automotive, plantation, developer, manufacturing, property and logistic company. There were total of 137 samples collected successfully and the data was analyzed using SPSS analytical software. Three hypotheses had been developed and Regression analysis was applied to assess the significant impact of the three independent variables towards employees' performance. The result revealed that work intensification and interpersonal relationship has significant impact towards performance of employees. Role ambiguity was being rejected in the hypothesis testing in this study. Based on this result, this study recommended the employer to stay focus on the strategies of "reducing the workload" and "develop good working relationship".

**Key Terms:** Job stress, occupational stress, work intensifications, work overload, role ambiguity, interpersonal relationship, employee performance

**Introduction**

Job Stress has been the most widespread human resource challenges in the corporate world today. This challenge contributed significant negative impact to the employees' well-being and ultimately affecting their performance. The key objective of this research paper is to analyze the impact of Job Stress on employees' performance in Malaysia private sector.

A survey conducted by Regus (a global workplace provider) indicated that 70 percent of Malaysian workers are exposed to stress related illness due to instabilities of global economic. The survey also revealed that 48 percent of the Malaysian

respondents said that their stress levels had risen and over 42% reported that they encountered sleep problem due to work worries (Kumar, Nov 2013). According to Sverke, Hellgren, and Naswell (2002), stress will have three negative impacts to both individuals and organizations. This includes absenteeism, employee attitudes and commitment to the organization. (Razak, et al., Nov 2014).

The success of a company is highly driven by the performance of employees. Therefore, the company is willing to spend resources in building individual talent to equip them with appropriate skill set to achieve company's goal. However, employers today tend to ignore the

negative impact to the company which arise from job stress as the researches are still showing high stress level suffer from the job. Even most of the companies today tried to create a harmony working environment so that to promote productivity, there seems to be no company which is completely free of stress. Job stress could cause demotivation to the employees, low productivity, constant errors in their performance, absenteeism and ultimately uncommitted to high quality performance. Job Stress in workplace had been noted but how these two factors will affect employees' performance will require further analysis. Hence this study examined the stressor that causes job stress within the organization. The corresponding effect on employees' performance will also be revealed from the survey analysis.

#### **Research Objectives**

1. To examine the effect of work intensification on employee performance.
2. To examine the effect of role ambiguity on employee performance.
3. To examine the effect of interpersonal relationship on employee performance.
4. To identify employee's expectation on preferred practices in reducing job stress in work place.

#### **Literature Review**

Stress by its definition refer to a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, demand, or resource related to what the individual desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important. According to the research on stress which carried out with a poll of 7807 individuals, it indicated that work (26%) is the most important source of stress in life. It's followed by finance

(20%), relationship (21%), children (10%), school (8%), fear of disaster (3%) and others (8%) (Robbins & Judge, 2013). This result implies that work stress is something that cannot be ignored by the company and it will likely affect the job performance which we will access in the later part of the literature review.

Job Stress is differed from general stress as it is in the nature of the organization. Stress in workplace has often been discussing as it is costly to the organization and has the trend of increasing. According to Blaug & Kenyon (2007), stress has a strong relationship with unhappiness and ill health among people (Saeed & Farooqi, 2014). Job stress can be described as the harmful physical and emotional responses that happen when the availability of worker's capabilities and resources does not meet the job requirements. According to Stanton (2001), Job stress is correlated to something in work place which perceived as threatening or demanding or something that has created discomfort to an individual employees (Bell, et al., 2012).

There are various types of stress at the work place and it's commonly known as task related and working environmental related factors using the basic framework provided by Froggatt & Cotton (1987). Task-related factors can then be further classified into role ambiguity, role conflict and work intensification; while environmental related factors is related to relationships with colleagues, working conditions, bullying and harassment (Montgomery, et al., 1996). In this research, we will focus discussing on three stressors namely work intensification (work overload), role ambiguity and relationships at work.

In the recent study carried out in Malaysia's Financial sector, the result obtained through regression analysis showed that role ambiguity and work intensification were found to be significantly related to job stress whereas working environmental factors (relationships with colleagues, working condition etc) are found to be non-related factors affecting job stress (Ismail & Tan, 2011).

Theoretically, there are 4 types of proposed relationships to measure job stress and job performance, i.e. a negative linear relationship, a positive linear relationship, a curvilinear/U-shaped relationship, and no relationship between the two variables (Jamal, 2007). This study conducted among the employees working in a large North American-based multinational corporation in Malaysia and Pakistan. The result of 90% comparisons strongly supported that the negative linear relationship between Job stress and job performance; whereas marginally 10% comparisons supported U-shaped relationship. This implies that majority are agreed job stress has adversely affecting the job performance (Jamal, 2007). This is because an individual who experience high stress level tends to spend most of the time to cope with stress and therefore reduce the job performance.

#### ***Work Intensification***

Work Intensification also can be defined as work overloaded. Tyagi (1985) defines Work intensification as role overload whereby an employee often face with various obligations, role demands and duties that required them to complete which beyond their capability with time available (Ismail & Tan, 2011). Another study mentioned that work overload exists

when multiple demands exceed resources available. This may be a qualitative overload which refers to a task that difficult to complete; and quantitative overload is experienced when there are too many tasks that need to be accomplished at the same time (Elloy & Smith, 2003).

*Hypothesis 1: Work Intensification has a significant impact towards employees' performance.*

#### ***Role Ambiguity***

Role ambiguity refers to the employees' uncertainty of primary requirements that they need to achieve on their jobs, and what is expected of them in regards to how they behave (Baron, 2010). Role ambiguity happen when employees do not have a clear objectives and guidelines for the role assigned to them. The employee that found to be deviated on role anticipation is mainly due to role expectations is unclear. In many organizations, Job Description is an important tool to provide clear expectation of a role which include main purpose of the role, key accountabilities, scope of business coverage, key skills and experiences required and reporting structure of the role (Khattak, et al., 2013).

Based on the early findings by Bedeian & Armenakis (1981), there are four widely accepted dimensions to role ambiguity which include gold/expectation/responsibility ambiguity, process ambiguity, priority ambiguity and behavior ambiguity (Bauer & Simmon, n.d.). Each of this will contribute certain stress level to the employee if the situation does not manage properly by the company.

*Hypothesis 2: Role ambiguity has a significant impact towards employees' performance.*

#### ***Interpersonal Relationship at Work***

Interpersonal relationship at work place is referred to interactions and collaboration of an employee with his/her peers, managers/supervisors, subordinates when doing their work. Work stress occurs in a negative working relationship environment where employees feel lack of support from colleagues and supervisors (Johnson, et al., 2005). The stress level of employees can be managed positively with a good relationship and strong support by colleagues and direct managers. A previous research by Galvin and Dileepan (2002) reported that poor working relationship with colleagues is among the most stressful factor within the company (Razak, et al., Nov 2014).

*Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal relationship with*

*colleagues/peer/manager/subordinates has a significant impact towards employees' performance.*

### ***Performance of the Employees***

Employees' performance can be defined as a task / activity in which an employee is able to complete the assigned task successfully, subject to the normal constraints of reasonable utilization of the available resources (Olusegun, et al., 2014). Employee performance is therefore a critical factor in organizational success.

Performance of employees is measured through variable perspective such as productivity, output, efficiency, effectiveness and it is affected by numerous factors in the organization. Rubin (2008) viewed job performance as the result of three factors working together which includes skill (knowledge, abilities and competencies of the employees), effort (degree of motivation the employee spent towards accomplishing the work) and the nature of work condition (degree of

accommodation in facilitating the employees' performance) (Ratnawat & Jha, 2014).

Whether a company is able to achieve the mission and vision is highly determined by the performance of their employees. Therefore, the company usually have a set of tools to access the performance with employees in a specific timing (mid-year and year-end) to determine whether the pre-described objectives are achieved within the specific period of time.

Hayes and Withington (2007) mentioned that stress in work environment can bring many negative impacts to the organization. This included reduction of job satisfaction, work performance and increased of absenteeism which results from decline in individual health (Razak, et al., Nov 2014). And as according to Kahler (1987), the business world today acknowledge that stress as a key element causes low productivity and high rates of absenteeism as well as high health care costs. (Sathasivam, May 2015, p. 3)

Arrington (2008) also stated that the one of the key factor that cause low level of employee performance is fatigue and tiredness resulted from work related stress. The employees who suffer with stress may result in lack of concentration and motivation. (Ismail & Tan, 2011, p. 233)

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This research paper will be carried out using combination of explanatory and descriptive design methods. The concept of job stress is socially formed and will have different interpretation and meanings between organization / employees from different industries and cultures. Therefore, explanatory research alone will not present the complete picture to uncover sufficient evidence to answer research questions.



Propositions need to be developed for both descriptive and explanatory studies. The researcher has to make an assumption on the basis of the literature review or any other earlier evidence as to what they expect the findings of the research to be (Rowley, 2002). Below summarizing how the combination approaches would help in this research paper.

- Ability to examine the influence of multiple job stressors on employee's performance.
- Ability to know the employees' expectation on "what" the employer could do to reduce the stress in workplace.

In this study, the primary data were collected through questionnaires survey. Researcher aimed to collect the data from multi industries in Malaysia; this includes Automotive, Logistic, Property, Manufacturing, Plantation and Developer. Company with different background and culture may have different view / perception towards job stress measurement. Probability sampling method is being chosen with the aim of collecting data from multiple industries in Malaysia private sector. Simple random sampling

technique is used to collect data. Random sampling ensures that each component in the population will have an equal chance of being included in the sample. The bias that inherently appeared in non-probability sampling procedure will be eliminated as the sampling process is based on random selection (Zikmund, et al., 2010). The researcher connected with the organization using random sample based on the number of employees working in these organizations.

### Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics is used by the researcher to test the assumptions made on variables which include mean, standard deviation, range of scores, skewness and kurtosis (Pallant, 2011, p. 53). Mean can be defined as an average value of a data set and this may be used to report central tendencies (Razak, Nov 2014).

Table below illustrates mean and standard deviation for each variable. The mean score for Performance (dependent variables) is 2.4953 with standard deviation of 0.34. Among the independent variables the lowest mean score is IR which is 2.2639 whereas the highest being the WI with a mean score of 2.9927.

**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Work Intensification (WI)	137	1	5	2.9927	0.76058	0.263	0.207	0.337	0.411
Role Ambiguity (RA)	137	1.25	4.25	2.8102	0.60065	0.17	0.207	-0.112	0.411
Interpersonal Relationship (IR)	137	1	4.2	2.2639	0.65806	0.178	0.207	0.423	0.411
Performance	137	1.85	3.5	2.4953	0.34111	0.501	0.207	-0.049	0.411
Valid N (listwise)	137								

*Table 13: Descriptive Statistics (SPSS generated)*

Descriptive statistics were also used to access the normality of the distribution of scores on the continuous variables. The two key indicators for normality testing that applied in this research are skewness and Kurtosis. Skewness value indicates the symmetry of the distribution while Kurtosis on the other hand, provides

information about the skewness of the distribution (Pallant, 2011). In general, the acceptable value of skewness and Kurtosis is between -1 to 1. Both obtained skewness and kurtosis value are fall within the suggested value of between -1 to 1. Hence, the data set is suggested normal and further reliability testing was conducted.

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.251	4	.813	8.532	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	12.574	132	.095		
	Total	15.824	136			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

According to ANOVA test significant value of Regression model is 0.000. Based on Table the significant level is 0.000. Hence, it can be concluded that there is significant effect of independent variables (WI, RA, IR) on the dependent variable (Employee Performance).

**Regression Analysis**

Multiple Regressions is based on correlation, but allows a more sophisticated exploration of the

interrelationship among a set of variables (Pallant, 2011). The dependent variable in the regression equation is modelled as a function of the independent variables, corresponding parameters and an error term (Dissanayaka, 2014). For this study, Regression was performed to predict the impact of 3 independent variables, namely Work intensification (WI), Role ambiguity (RA) and Interpersonal relationship (IR) on the dependent variables of Employee's performance.

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.711	.253		14.664	.000		
	WI	-.201	.050	-.448	-4.054	.000	.494	2.026
	RA	.008	.061	.013	.126	.900	.528	1.894
	IR	-.099	.049	-.192	-2.011	.046	.662	1.511

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

According to the table above which labelled with coefficients, this is used to tell the researcher whether this variable is making significant contribution to the equation. The general rule of thumb - if the Sig. value is less than 0.05, the variable is making a significant contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable.

Based on the table, the significant value of WI is 0.000, which is far below the p-value of 0.05. This can be concluded that WI has also contributed very significant impact to employee's performance. Hence, H1 is accepted. The significant value of RA is 0.9 and it is above the p-value of 0.05. This can be concluded that RA does not contribute significant impact to employee's performance. Hence, H2 is rejected. The significant value of IR is 0.046, which is below the p-value of 0.05. This can be concluded that IR has contributed significant impact to employee's performance. Hence, H4 is accepted. In conclusion of the Regression analysis, two hypotheses are accepted and one is being rejected.

### **Discussions**

*Hypothesis 1: Work Intensification has a significant impact towards employees' performance.*

Hypothesis 1 is accepted in this research study ( $p=0.000$ ). The participants are strongly believes that WI has significant impact to the employee performance. The overload happens when there are too many task assigned that need to be completed at the same time (Elloy & Smith , 2003). Employee who work very long hour to complete the work will cause fatigue and tiredness, which will in turn reduce the job performance of the employee.

*Hypothesis 2: Role ambiguity has a significant impact towards employees' performance.*

Hypothesis 2 is rejected ( $p=0.9$ ). The participants believe that RA does not have direct impact to the employee's performance. Role ambiguity is found to be insignificant to employee's performance. The reason of insignificant may be due to the companies that participate in this research are having less complexity in their reporting / management structure for small scale operations. Local set-up company usually do not emphasize on job description and so long as the employees received clear direction from their manager/supervisor, then job satisfaction can be achieved and perform well.

*Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal relationship with colleagues / peer / manager / subordinates has a significant impact towards employees' performance.*

Hypothesis 3 is accepted in this research study ( $p=0.046$ ). The participants are believes that IR has significant impact to the employees performance. Poor working relationship with colleagues is among the most stressful factor in the workplace (Razak, et al., Nov 2014). Employees who encountered problem in their working relationship with colleagues / manager will demotivate his or her to perform and create unhealthy work environment in an organization.

The above shows a deviation results carried out in Malaysia's financial sector, whereby the results shown role ambiguity and work intensification were significantly causes stress but relationship with colleagues were found to be non-related (Ismail & Tan, 2011). This implies that different industry with different

background may have different perception on stress towards employees' performance. The results in this study also found to be correlated to the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR). The fundamental of COR theory is that a stressful employee will result in resource losses, meaning their work performance will be affected due to stress (Hobfoll, 2001). In this study, the two stressors (work intensification and interpersonal relationship) are found to have significant impact to the work performance of an employee.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the Regression analysis result, work intensification presented a significant impact towards employee's performance. Majority of the participants in this research are at Executive or junior level (80%), they normally easily get stress and distracted when facing overload in their job demand and hence affect their performance level. Role ambiguity does not present a significant impact towards employee's performance. Early research indicates that role ambiguity and work intensification were significantly related to job stress; however the research does not provide the

indication whether this will have impact on employee's performance. This research implies that although some of them are facing role ambiguity issues in the present company they work, but it does not really impact to their performance level. Interpersonal relationship presented a significant impact towards employee's performance. This result is evident in past research as well that poor working relationship will cause stress. Employees will spend more time to tackle the working relationship or delay in achieving certain task due to incorporation received from peers / colleagues. Hence, it has seriously impacted to their performance.

### **Limitations and future focus**

Whilst the focus of the study was on solely private sector in Malaysia, there will be space for the researcher to expand the survey to multinational company and government civil servant to gain larger view of comments towards the research topic. The future studies could also be focused on more industries like banking, electronics, pharmaceuticals, palm oil processing, and timber processing which contributed main economy growth in Malaysia

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