

The Relationship between Job Stress and Life Satisfaction among Non-Academic University Staffs

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In recent times, there are greater challenges in the work place more than ever before. It is becoming more evidently clear that university staff most especially non-academics, are recording higher percentage of occupational stress which invariably may lead to lower productivity. There are growing numbers of research linking job stress and existential well-being constructs like life satisfaction. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between job stress and life satisfaction among university's non-academic staffs. Two psychological measures were used to collect data from 85 non-academic staffs that cut across the various departments, centers, and other administrative units at a public university in Malaysia. Results revealed that there is a significant relationship between job stress and life satisfaction. Also, findings showed that the longer the length of work experience, the more workers get satisfied with their lives. Implications and suggestions for further research are discussed.

Keywords: job stress, life satisfaction, workplace, non-academic staff, work-related stressors

Modern-day work place is posing greater challenges more than ever before. Obviously, work helps individuals in providing social status, a sense of identity opportunities for personal development, integration, as well as an adequate amount of money to make ends meet (Gallie, 2002). On the other hand, Milliken and Dunn-Jensen (2005) posit that schedules and work contracts have left workers with intensification of work and less time for private and social life (Sparks, Faragher and Cooper, 2001). Thus, it is assumed that workers may be experiencing occupational stress which invariably may lead to lower job satisfaction.

Coleman (1976) found that job stress influences the employee's job satisfaction and their overall performance in their work. This is due to the fact that most of the organizations now are demanding for better job outcomes. Furthermore, with a fast growing economy like Malaysia in the Asian continent, the number of international universities in this South-East nation has increased immensely within the last decade. However, this sharp growth in the number of international universities is exposing academic and non-academic staffs to greater challenges in the learning environment.

Beehr (1995) defined job stress as "a situation in which some characteristics of the work situation are thought to cause poor psychological or physical health or to cause risk factors making poor health more likely" (p. 11). Besides, Akinboye, Akinboye and Adeyemo (2002) describe job stress as that detrimental emotional and physical response that arise when job demands are inconsistent with the resources and needs of the worker. Part of what serves as the main stimulators of occupational stress for educational administrators occurred in the work environment (Swent & Gmelch, 1977). In recent times, many of the most stressful events can said to be related to the workplace: firings, changes in financial status, altered responsibilities, variations in work hours or conditions, etc.

Reaction based definitions like Akinboye et, al. (2002) see stress as a person's psychological or physiological response to environmental factors, in which stress is seen as both the stimulus (stressor) and the response (strain). Based on this perspective, stress often happens when the demands of a particular experience is about to exceed the resources

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available, thus, resulting to change in the person's psychological and physiological condition in order to deal with with the experience (Cooper, Dewe, and O' Driscoll, 2001). So, a stressful situation occurs when a person exert an impact on and responds to his/her environment (Siu, 2002). Current research on stress among academic university staff indicates that occupational stress is alarmingly widespread and increasing (Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper, and Ricketts; 2005). Besides, it is reported that key stressors among head teachers are work load and work-life balance which affects their physical health and psychological well-being (Phillips, Sen and McNamee, 2007). Lecturers in higher institution of learning are also found to be exposed to stress-related work illnesses with reports of significant relationship between workplace stressors, psychological well-being and productivity of university staff (Jacobs, Tytherleigh, Webb and Cooper, 2007).

Burnout in the workplace could also be considered as a stress-related phenomenon which is often defined as a combination of three components: the environment, negative thoughts, and physical responses (Flórez Lozano, 1994). An employee in high stress situations may exhibit a number of symptoms like low self-esteem, feeling of being overwhelmed, inability to concentrate, fatigue and greater negative self-criticism, emission of defective judgement, emotional and irrational thought, ill-tempered and unpredictable behavior (Hofmann, Levitt, Hoffman, Greene, Litz, and Barlow, 2001). More so, Çam (2001) posits that burnout symptoms caused by the increasing effect of the stressful workplace that surpasses the coping capability of the staff, is a condition which pushes the employee to become withdrawn.

Moreover, findings from some studies have indicated that job stressors may result in mental and behavioural stress reactions like depression and psychosomatic problems (Houkes, Janssen, de Jonge and Nijhuis, 2001). As mentioned earlier, the challenge of meeting up with modern-day work-life and ever-changing technologies (Quick, 1997) which requires workers to perform better in their job remain one of the major factors influencing job stress. In a study by Tytherleigh et al. (2005), participants that comprises of all staff categories from 14 universities and colleges in Britain yielded support for job insecurity as a the most significant source of stress. In addition, it was reported that administrative staffs reported significant higher levels of stress relating to work relationships and control.

Ahsan, Abdullah, Yong Gun Fai and Shah Alam (2009) conducted a study on job stress on job satisfaction among University Staff in Malaysia, results revealed that there is a significant relationship between four of the stressors constructs (relationship with others, workload pressure, home-work interface, performance pressure, role conflict and role ambiguity) that was tested coupled with significant negative relationship between job stress and job satisfaction.

The concept of subjective well-being incorporates both individuals' affective and cognitive evaluations of their lives in which positive and negative emotions represent the affective domain, while life satisfaction represents the cognitive domain (Civitci and Civitci, 2009). In addition, Ostermann (1999) found out that the level of job stress experienced by employees is determined by three dimensions, which include self, life situations and work. Besides, since factors like financial remuneration and job demands for example, can said to determine a worker's socio-economic lifestyle, the degree of stress experienced in the workplace can be influenced by the nature of the employee's self attributes. Hence, this purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between job stress and life satisfaction.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction has been referred to as a person's cognitive judgment of life as a whole. Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) defined life satisfaction as “a cognitive, judgmental process which depends upon a comparison of one’s circumstances with what is thought to be an appropriate standard.” (p.71). However, one of the key assumptions in life satisfaction research is that the judgement of satisfaction is primarily based on the individual's own set of standards rather than on objective measures defined by experts (Diener & Suh, 1997). Thus, individuals are believed to construct a judgment of what makes their life satisfactory (Fox & Kahneman, 1992).

There are growing interests on the well-being of workers in higher institutions as researchers have examined the relationship between life satisfaction turnover intentions and job satisfaction (Ghiselli, La Lopa and Bai, 2001; Kong, Ju, Maziah and Hj. Din, 2006). More so, Jusoff, Hj. Hussein, Ju, and Hj. Din (2009) evaluated the life satisfaction and demographic variables (like age, category, gender, and years of service) among the UiTM Penang academic and non-academic staff in Malaysia. With a majority of the 199 participants being non-academicians, results revealed that the university’s staffs were moderately satisfied with their life. Also, results showed that there were significant differences between life satisfaction and the age and years of service of staff, though, there was no significant difference in life satisfaction based on category of staff and gender.

In addition, Woei Lian, Ming Lin and Kuan Wu (2007) examined the differences of job stress, job satisfaction and life satisfaction, between technical and managerial workers in the Information System field in Taiwan. With 257 respondents, results revealed that managerial employees tend to have significantly higher degrees of job and life satisfaction than their technical counterparts. Inversely, technical employees had higher degrees of job stress than managerial employees. It was also found that job stress has negative effects on life satisfaction while job satisfaction has positive effects on life satisfaction.

From the above related studies on job stress and life satisfaction, it could be deduced that job stress is a function of staff’s self-concept, life situations and work-related factors. So far, there tends to be a few studies on job stress among university staff. However, there are strong indications of high stress levels among staffs in higher institutions. In addition, life satisfaction can said to be linked with demographic variable like years of service. It is also observed that there is little research on the relationship between job stress and well-being constructs like life satisfaction. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between job stress and life satisfaction. More so, much interests have been expressed about the high levels of physical and mental problems, including burnout, among, teachers, sportsmen and health-care practitioners (Medina, 2002), but little research has been found in administrative and non-academic staffs as it could be considered a helpful profession with lots of responsibility in daily running of higher institutions.

Besides, this study provides one of the contributions to academic research in assessing the relationships among job and life attitudes as it relates to non-academic staffs in higher institutions. Thus, the objectives of this study include;

1. To examine the relationship between job stress and life satisfaction.
2. To assess the relationship between life satisfaction and length of work experience.

So, based on the above stated objectives, the following hypothesis were tested

H1. There would be a significant negative relationship between job stress and life satisfaction.

H2. There would be a significant positive relationship between life satisfaction and length of work experience.

H3. There would be a significant negative relationship between job stress and length of work experience.

In addition, this study will adopt Rice's (1984) conceptual model which proposes that working conditions have an impact on overall life satisfaction through perceptions of the quality of working life and non-working life. The model illustrates that working conditions influence life satisfaction through changing characteristics (interests, energy level, mood, personality, health etc.) of the person and the environment. Hence, the conceptual framework of the study focuses on job stress, working conditions that are believed has a stress-push effect of job stress, and life satisfaction as a subjective well-being measure as illustrated below.

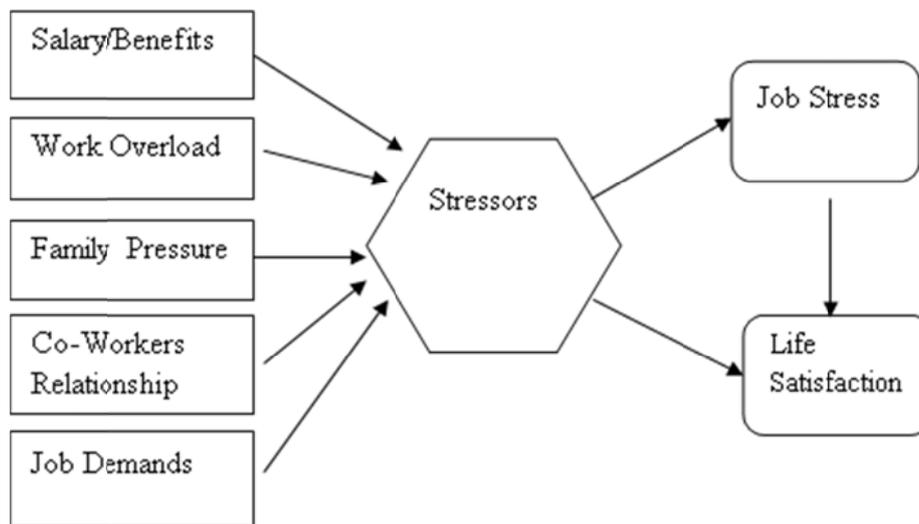


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Job Stress and Life Satisfaction

Methodology

This study was conducted in a public university in Kuala Lumpur. However, issues related to available number of non-academic staffs, time and cost constraints were taken into consideration in selecting the sample size. Using the non-probability sampling technique, a total of 120 respondents were selected as a sample of the study from the university. In all, eighty-five administrative staffs completed the questionnaire. Statistics showed that the participants were 65.9% female and 34.1% male. Majority of the participants were within the age bracket of 30-39 with 54%. More than 55% had less than six years working experience as almost all the participants are predominantly Malays.

Instruments

This study used the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) to assess life satisfaction. The 5-items of this measure are rated on a 4-point Likert-type

scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The psychometric properties have been demonstrated for this scale. Diener et al. (1985) reported the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the 5 item scale as .92. Besides, some studies have reflected the convergent validity of the SWLS with fairly strong correlations with subjective well-being measures like that of Andrew and Withey's D-T Scale (.68), and Campbell, Con-verse, and Rodgers' semantic differential-like scale (.75).

Job stress was measured with the use of the Job Stress Scale (Parker & DeCotiis, 1983). It is a 13-item summative Likert-type rating scale that measures overall job stress using anchor that range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). With the Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, the construct validity of the instrument was demonstrated in testing the correlation between Job Stress Scale and the Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory ($r = .66, p = < .01$; Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Demographic Variables

	Age	Years in Service	Source of Stress
Mean	1.7412	1.9059	2.1176
Std. Deviation	.65743	1.19147	1.31305

Procedure

The questionnaire sets were distributed to the participants and collected in their offices on a self-report basis. All participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, and length of work experience and their major source of stress. They were also requested to read the directions stated on the questionnaire carefully before endorsing their responses. In order to encourage honest responding, it was highlighted that there were no right or wrong answers to any of the questions and all the responses were completely anonymous.

Results

Descriptive statistics and Pearson r correlations are used to describe the stressors and the relationship between variables under study. The source of job stress among the participants is shown in table 2, as salary benefits remain the major factor non-academic staffs regarded as the main source of job stress with 48%.

Table 2

Frequency scores of Stressors

Stressors	Frequency	Percent
1.Salary	41	48.2
2.Workload	14	16.5
3.Co-workers Relationship	15	17.6
4.Family Pressure	9	10.6
5.Job Demands	6	7.1
Total	85	100.0

For hypothesis 1, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between job stress and life satisfaction. There was a significant negative correlation between the two variables, $r = -0.246$, $n = 85$, $p = 0.023$. This shows that workers with reduced stress are satisfied with their lives. See table 3 below.

Table 3

Correlations between Job Stress and Life Satisfaction

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Job stress	2.2344	.44362	85
Life Satisfaction	2.7859	.41609	85
		Job stress	Life Satisfaction
Job stress	Pearson Correlation	1	-.246(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.023
Life Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	-.246(*)	1

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

For hypothesis 2, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between life satisfaction and length of work experience. There was a significant positive correlation between the two variables, $r = 0.281$, $n = 85$, $p = 0.009$. This is indicated in the table 4 below.

Table 4

Correlations between Years of Service and Life Satisfaction

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Years in service	1.9059	1.19147	85
Life Satisfaction	2.7859	.41609	85
		Years in service	Life Satisfaction
Years in service	Pearson Correlation	1	.281(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
Life Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.281(**)	1

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

In regards to hypothesis 3, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between job stress and length of work experience. There was no significant correlation between the two variables, $r = 0.281$, $n = 85$, $p = 0.009$. This is indicated in the table 5 below.

Table 5

Correlations between Job Stress and Length of Work experience

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Length of work exp	1.9059	1.19147	85
Job stress	2.2344	.44362	85
		Length of work exp	Job stress
Length of work exp	Pearson Correlation	1	-.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.512
Job stress	Pearson Correlation	-.072	1

Discussions and Conclusions

Many studies tend to focus on job stress and job satisfaction. This study however distinguishes itself from others by highlighting the importance of existential wellness of non-academic employees. This is important because many human resource managers in and outside the university environment know that when employees are happy with their life and work, they tend to be more motivated and productive. The purpose of this study is to assess the relationship between job stress and life satisfaction. Based on the findings, the negative correlation signifies that workers with reduced stress at work live satisfactory lives. This can be linked to the findings of Woei Lian et al., (2007) in which there is a relationship between job stress and life satisfaction. This suggests that evaluation of working conditions that produce job stress is needed for workplace intervention programmes in order to reduce job-related stressors.

This study remains a platform through which information on job stress and existential concerns of non-academic staff from a public university in Malaysia is unveiled. The results of the study also revealed significant relationship between life satisfaction and the length of work experience. This is to mean that a worker with higher number of years in service tends to live a more satisfactory life. Though, this study did not examine the mediating effect of length of work experience on job stress and life satisfaction, it can be inferred that since majority of the participants (55%) had less than six years working experience, it is possible that staffs with lengthy number of years in service would have been able to adopt coping strategies against stress and eventually live a meaningful and satisfactory lives. This finding can be linked to that of Jusoff, et. al (2009) where there was a link between life satisfaction and the age and years of service of staff. However, this study's findings did not show any significant relationship between job stress and length of work experience.

In addition, the results of this study revealed that issues related to salaries and financial benefits remain the major stressor among other four sources of stress. However, this study did not examine the relationship between stressors and job stress or life satisfaction; there is great need for university administrators to consider possible strategies in order to inspire workers through various financial incentives that can enhance the satisfaction of their living. These incentives should include monetary rewards and motivational rewards. Moreover, regular informal discussion forums and workers-oriented existential counseling provided by competent psychologists and counselors could contribute to university's non-academic staffs in helping to minimize experiencing stress at work, feeling in good health and being more satisfied with their daily living in and outside the working environment.

This research examined the relationship between job stress and life satisfaction. Since the cause and effect relationship cannot be established, generalizing the result of the present study remains one of its limitations. Thus, there is need for further research to examine other mediating variables on the relationship between job stress and life satisfaction, including components of the job itself and reward, in order to establish whether there are other factors which act as a source of satisfaction in a Malaysian context.

In this research, results showed a significant positive relationship between life satisfaction and length of work experience. There is need for further research to pursue posited relationships between life satisfaction and other demographic variables relating to job security, work status and educational qualification.

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