

Impact of Age and Level of Experience on Occupational Stress of Academic Managers at Higher Educational Level

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Abstract

The present study was aimed to analyze the impact of age and management experience on occupational stress of academic managers in Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan. Qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used to explore the impact of age and management experience of occupational stress by using a sample of 120 academic managers of public sector institutions of higher education located in Punjab, Pakistan. In order to select representative sample from the population, simple random sampling technique was used. Data were collected through registered mail and personal visits to the offices of principals. Total sample size was 120. For data analysis; both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Research instrument Occupational Stress Inventory–revised (OSI-R) was used to collect data. For data analysis Pearson Correlation and ANOVA were applied. Data analysis revealed that significant negative relationship was found in responses of academic managers regarding impact of age and management experience on occupational stress. Findings also suggest that there is a connection between age, management experience and the way stress is perceived.

Keywords: *Occupational stress, age, management experience.*

1. Introduction

No society can flourish without significant and sustained higher education. Today, as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, higher education is considered critical for the achievement of economic progress, political stability and peace. Higher education forms an important part for the development of the country. Higher education makes student a trained asset for the country. Development of any country depends on the skills of a country's people. And that in turn requires a robust and effective higher education system. Higher education plays an important role in the personality development of the students. Through higher education, students get to learn and polish their skills in terms of both oral and written communication. Higher education contributes in the country's development in different ways. For attaining objectives of higher education, academic managers are of supreme importance and manager's job is highly orchestrated. Academic Manager has to deal with number of areas at the same time, so patience, vision, crises management ability and accomplished of task are almost unavoidable traits. Success of any process directly co-relates to its management. Management effectiveness could be due to the personality of the manager. The role of an academic manager and his array of responsibilities are of great importance. Much is expected of him in connection with the successful accomplishments of management, process and a system. Academic Manager can take best decision, if they are psychologically healthy and strong. In such a complex scenario, management may seriously be affected by the occupational stress.

Occupational stress is a term used to define ongoing stress that is related to the workplace. Stress is defined in terms of its physical and physiological effects on a person, and can be a mental, physical or emotional strain. It can also

be a tension or a situation or factor that can cause stress. Occupational stress occurs when there is a discrepancy between the demands of the environment/workplace and an individual's ability to carry out and complete these demands. Occupational stress can eventually affect both physical and emotional well being if not managed effectively. The literature concerning occupational stress in educational settings has typically focused on teachers, but not other academic management staff. The present research tends to explore the impact of age and level of experience on occupational stress in academic managers in public sector higher education institutions in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

Stress at work is an increasingly common feature of modern life and it has become one of the important parts of our daily lives which cause a great deal of stress. Due to the competitive nature of the job environment most of the people in the world are spending their time for job related work purposes resulting ignore the stressor those are influencing their work and life. Modern life is full of stress. Stress is basically a word derived from a Latin word "stringer" meaning to draw tight. The word stress is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as a "state of affair involving demand on physical or mental energy." According to American Heritage Dictionary, stress is a state of extreme difficulty, pressure, or strain.

(Selye, 1975) an early authority on this subject, said that stress constitutes the factors affecting wear and tear on the body. The bodily strain that an individual experiences as a result of coping with some environmental factor is stress. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986) defined stress as a particular interaction between the person and the environment, appraised or evaluated by the person as being taxing or exceeding his or her personal resources, and, as a consequence, disrupting his or her daily routines. Occupational stress often occurs when individuals' physical and emotional do not match or cannot handle their job demands, constraints and/or opportunities (Leka et al., 2004; Ugoji & Isele, 2009) may establish two major types of stress: eustress (good stress) and distress (bad stress) (Fevre et al., 2003). Eustress is often defined as individuals who have experienced moderate and low stress levels and distress is frequently defined as individuals who have experienced high stress level. Individuals who experience eustress will be able to meet job demands and this may help them to increase positive work life (e.g., satisfaction and positive moral values). Conversely, individuals who experience distress will not able to fulfill job demands and this may motivate them to decrease quality of work life (e.g., dissatisfaction and negative moral values) (Fevre et al., 2003; Leka et al., 2004).

Occupational stress, in particular, is the inability to deal with the demands in a job (Rees, 1997), because of a poor fit between someone's abilities and his/her work requirements and conditions (Holmlund, Rytönen & Strandvik, 2005). It is a mental and physical condition which affects an individual's productivity, effectiveness, personal health and quality of work (Comish & Swindle, 1994). Occupational stress is an extremely difficult construct to define. Obviously, it is stress on the job, but stress on the job occurs in a person. For now several sources of occupational stress exist. Some of these stressors are intrinsic to the job. Some are related to the employee's role with the organization, some to career development, some to relationship at work, and some to the structure and climate of the organization.

In 1992 the United Nations (Akinboye, et al, 2002) describes "job stress" as the twentieth century disease. In the words of (Akinboye et al, 2002) over 70% of employees world-wide describe their jobs as stressful with more than one in five reporting high levels of stress at work on a daily basis. In further corroboration of this scenario, (Winfield, 2000) indicated that the prevalence of occupational stress among academic and general staff of higher education institutions from across the globe is alarmingly widespread and increasing.

Stress is an unavoidable characteristic of life and work. It is a generalized non-specific response of the body to any demand made on it. Occupational stress describes physical, mental and emotional wear and tear brought about by incongruence between the requirement of the job and the capabilities, resources and needs of the employee to cope with job demands (Akinboye et al, 2002).

Occupational stress has been described as the experience of negative feelings, such as frustration, worry and anxiety, perceived to arise from work related factors (Kyriacou, 2001). The literature suggests four variables that may have significant interactions with occupational stress: gender, age, experience in the job and position (Antoniou, et al, 2006; Lau, Yuen & Chan, 2005). Demographic variables that are proven to relate to someone's job stressor relationships include gender, age, marital status, job tenure, job title, and hierarchical level (Dua, 1994; Murphy, 1995). Concerning the relationship between age and occupational stress, the ability to handle stress associated with job and organization was found to increase with age and experience (Sager, 1990). Age can be explained in the terms that the individuals matured personality disposition related to the attainment of developmental tasks specific to each developmental tasks specific to; each developmental phase and its influence on individual's perception of the situations as stressful or otherwise.

Researches revealed that younger staff members reported more job stress than older staff and staff between the ages 31 and 40 suffered the most from job stress (Sharpley, et al, 1996), employees who are less than 30 years old experience the highest levels of stress (Ben-Bakr, et al, 1995), and that younger teachers experienced higher levels of

burnout, specifically in terms of emotional exhaustion and disengagement from the profession (Antoniou, et al, 2006). The major explanation for such a finding is that older employees have often reached a stage where career development is not their major concern, and hence a number of job characteristics which may cause stress to younger staff, who have their career ahead of them, do not cause stress to older staff (Dua, 1994). Several researchers reported that in industrial setting job satisfaction and job involvement increases with age and as a result occupational stress would decrease (Cherrington, 1979) in view of dearth of conclusive studies about whether the same is true with the teachers at different age levels in India, the present study was conducted. (Nina & Ana, 2007) Study revealed that older people perceive significantly higher levels of stress.

Levels of occupational stress experienced by staff members in similar work environments can vary from one individual to another. Demographic factors may play a role in the level of occupational stress felt by teachers and other staff (Kyriacou, 2001). Four variables have been suggested in literature that may have significant interactions with occupational stress: gender, age, position and experience in the job (Laughlin, 1984; McCormick, 1997; Punch & Tuetteman, 1996). (John & John, 2007) reported that age is a significant predictor of occupational stress, younger staff members reported higher levels than older colleagues. The differences were particularly strong between the youngest and the oldest staff members. These results appear to support the findings of some studies (Lau et al, 2005) found relationship between age and occupational stress. Demographic variables that are proven to relate to someone's job stressor/health relationships include gender, age, marital status, job tenure, job title, and hierarchical level (Murphy, 1995), among which gender, age and hierarchical level were found to be the most significant. Some studies have found that teachers with low levels of experience reported greater stress than their more experienced colleagues (Laughlin, 1984; Manthei & Gilmore, 1996). While (Clunies-Ross et al; 2008) found that experience has no relationship with occupational stress. (McCormick, 1997) noted that stress increased with experience among school teachers. (Borg and Falzon, 1991) identified differing rank orders of the strengths of a set of stressors for each years-of-experience category. However, a number of studies suggest that experience has no relationship with occupational stress (Chaplain, 1995; Jepson & Forrest, 2006).

A complex relationship appears to exist between occupational stress and age. (Laughlin, 1984) reported significant differences in stress among age groups, but these differed according to the stressors. For example, the youngest group of teachers (aged under 26 years) reported greater stress from pupil behavior issues than older colleagues, while teachers aged between 26 and 30 years reported higher stress from professional recognition needs than their younger and older colleagues. In the same study the oldest group of teachers (aged over 40 years) reported higher levels of stress from curriculum demands than their younger colleagues. (Solman & Feld, 1989) reported similar findings with regard to pupil behavior and curriculum demands from a later study of Australian Catholic schools. (Lau et al, 2005) reported higher levels of occupational stress among younger teachers. Younger and relatively new in the profession teachers present higher levels of stress and Stress levels may differ in relation to age. It is documented that younger people present higher levels of emotional exhaustion as compared to their older colleagues (Byrne, 1991). (Balakrishnamurthy and Swetha, 2009) study strongly indicates the relationship between stress and demographic variables such as age and level of experience. As adults, stress is a daily event, but children are not exempt from its impact and subsequent consequences. Symptoms of stress are especially apparent in teenagers (Bittman, 1999). Chandraiah, et al, (2003) study reveals higher levels of job stress among managers of (25-35 years) age than their counterparts in the middle age (36-45 years) and the old age groups (46-55 years). The study also found that the age found to be negatively correlated with occupational stress. Andrew Smith, et al (2000) study indicated that the middle aged workers (30-50 year olds) had slightly higher proportions in the high reported stress category than those at the extremes of the age range. There is no age at which we are exempt from stress. Most of us are well aware that as a person chronologically ages, there are more responsibilities and situational stressors that become part of our lives which subsequently can bring about consequences affecting our well being. Age and level of experience were the biographical variables identified as being related to occupational stress of academic managers in the sample. This study sought to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the stress levels exhibited by an individual having specific chronological age and management experience. There is a lack of consistency of findings with regard to biographical variables and stress. There exists, therefore, a need to investigate how biographical differences are related to occupational stress of academic managers at higher education level.

3. Methodology

Descriptive research was involved to collecting data to testing the hypothesis of this study. Survey type study was applied to explore the impact of age and management experience on the level of occupational stress among academic managers at higher educational level. All the Public sector degree colleges of Punjab were taken as population of the present study.

There were 295 public sector degree colleges in Punjab. Male degree colleges were 132, female degree colleges were 163. In order to select representative sample from the population, random sampling technique was used. 60 male and 60 female heads of degree colleges were selected as a sample. The sample size was 120 heads of degree colleges. For measuring the stress of the subjects in work place, the Occupational Stress Inventory–Revised (OSI-R) developed by Osipow, 1998 was used. For examining the reliability, an analysis of internal consistency of items was made. For this purpose, Cronbach's alpha was used. Reliability of occupational stress inventory was .91 which indicated that instrument was reliable. Data were collected from sampled degree colleges through personal visits of the researcher. After data collection, whole data were transferred to the computer and with the help of SPSS, data were analyzed with appropriate statistical technique such as mean; standard deviation, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation. On the basis of data interpretation, analysis and findings were drawn and conclusions were made. Biographical data were also collected. Respondents were required to indicate their age (30-40, 41-50, 51>) and years of experience in the current role (0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20 and 21>).

4. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate what relationships biographical variables had with occupational stress. This study will leave a new dimension to the whole education system. Results of the study will help the top management of higher education institutions to establish appropriate environment to reducing the occupational stress that can enhance the level of performance among academic managers. Two variables; age and management experience were investigated. Both variables were shown to have associations with occupational stress. Table 1 shows the fragments of ages of the academic managers. The academic managers were categorized into three major age groups, namely, 30-40 years, 41-50 years, and 51> years. This table shows stress levels of academic managers classified in terms of three major occupational experience categories. Comparison of all the three groups of stress level, showed the calculated F value (17.744) significant at 0.01 level which shows significant differences exist between the academic managers stress levels and their age. Among the above, the age group between 30-40 years had noticeably higher amount of stress than their counterparts, the mean stress score of the group with age of 41 to 50 years revealed low levels of stress when compared with all the other experience groups. While the mean stress score of the group with age of 51> years indicated high levels of stress when compared with age group of 41 to 50 years. This means younger and older academic managers experience more stress than middle one. This study is supported by the study of (Ramsey, 2000), which found that younger staff members reported more occupational stress than older colleagues. (Madya, Shahrin, Tee 2006) study indicated that there was no significant correlation between stress levels and demographic factors, such as age and length of teaching experience in technical teachers. While this study is consistent with study of (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe 1978) which concluded that age and length of teaching experience are associated with stress level.

Result of Table 2 shows the fragments of management experience of the academic managers. The management experience of academic managers were categorized into five major experiences groups, namely, 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years and 21> years. Result of this study classifies stress levels of academic managers into five major occupational experience categories. Comparison of all the three groups of stress level, showed the calculated F value (9.356) significant at 0.01 level which indicates significant differences exist between academic managers' stress levels and their management experiences. Among the above, the experience group between 0-5 years had distinctly higher amount of stress than their counterparts, the mean stress score of the group with experience of 11 to 15 years revealed low levels of stress when compared with all the other experience groups. This means more experienced people had learnt certain stress-coping tactics in the course of their experience, thereby enabling them to effectively deal with the stress triggered due to their personal and professional commitments. This trend was inverted in the less experienced groups. Possibly, in their long job tenure, they learned how to master the particulars of work and thereby feel work as relatively less exhausting than younger managers. The middle aged is more satisfied than the other two younger groups. The middle age group seems to be more satisfied, when compared to the other groups. It is also reported that the younger age managers (30-40 yrs) experiencing significantly higher stress than the middle aged and older managers. Table 3 shows mean scores, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation of academic managers. The calculated Pearson correlation (-.330^{***}) is significant at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is a significant negative relationship between academic managers' age and occupational stress. This means the age of respondents is associated with their stress levels. Older academic managers are not having higher stress levels than their younger colleagues. Where age was a significant predictor of occupational stress, younger staff members reported higher levels than older colleagues. The differences were particularly strong between the youngest and the oldest staff members. The result of this study appears to support the findings of study (Lau et al, 2005) but is incongruent with study of (Nina & Ana, 2007).

Table 4 shows mean scores, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation of academic managers. The calculated Pearson correlation (-.377**) is significant at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is a significant negative relationship between academic managers' management experience and occupational stress. This means the management experience of respondents is associated with their stress levels. Senior academic managers are not having higher stress levels than their junior colleagues. (McCormick, 1997), anticipated that years of experience, would also be related to occupational stress. (Solman & Feld, 1989; Jepson & Forrest, 2006) reported no relationship between experience and stress. This is in contrast to studies that have identified effects of such variables on similar aspects of occupational stress (Al-Mohannadi & Capel, 2007; Punch & Tuetteman, 1996).While this study indicates negative relationship between academic managers' management experience and occupational stress.

5. Recommendations

Education managers may have responsibility for a number of activities in the educational sector, ranging from the development of policy to the development and review of course curricula and teaching materials. Best decision can be taken by academic managers, if they are psychologically healthy and strong. This study sought to make a contribution to an increasing body of research on occupational stress among academic managers in higher education. This study was confined to one province in one country and it was conducted only to government degree colleges and academic managers of those colleges. Further research should be extended to wider jurisdiction.

Young and junior academic managers reported the highest levels of occupational stress. It is recommended that there is an apparent need to support and build resilience in younger and junior academic managers by introducing a participative leadership style to involve as many subordinates as possible to resolve stress-producing problems. There is a need of structured induction programs, ongoing mentoring and encouragement of collegial support among staff members. Higher management should devise regular stress management programs to meet the need of managers. It may include training sessions/activities and therapy to serve as restoratives and mental tonics and also stress releasing factors to be promoted. Establish work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job

Table 1 One-way ANOVA results for the relationship between age and level of occupational stress Perceived

Age levels (years)	n	Mean	SD	F-ratio	Sign.	Level of sign.
30-40	12	360.75	37.652	17.744	.000	.01
41-50	36	284.58	38.961			
51>	72	288.93	41.778			

Table No 1 explains that 'F' value (17.744) is significant, so the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference regarding occupational stress among academic managers having different age is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant difference regarding occupational stress among academic managers having different age.

Table 2. One-way ANOVA results for the relationship between management experiences and level of occupational stress perceived

Management experience (years)	n	Mean	SD	F-ratio	Sign.	Level of sign.
0-5	44	324.48	47.775	9.356	.000	.01
6-10	36	279.94	35.255			
11-15	24	274.38	39.877			
16-20	6	278.60	27.508			
21>	10	275.17	29.647			

Table No 2 explains that 'F' value (9.356) is significant, so the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference regarding occupational stress among academic managers having different management experience is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant difference regarding occupational stress among academic managers having different management experience.

Table 3: Correlation between academic managers' age and occupational stress

Variables	Mean	S.D	N	P	Sig (2-tailed)
Occupational stress	294.81	45.933	120	-.330**	.000
Age	2.50	.674	120		

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

Table No.3 shows that correlation value (-.330**) is highly significant at .01 level of significance, so the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between between academic managers' age and occupational stress is rejected and it is concluded that there significant negative relationship found between academic managers' age and occupational stress

Table 4: Correlation between academic managers' management experience and occupational stress

Variables	Mean	S.D	N	P	Sig (2-tailed)
Occupational stress	294.81	45.933	120	-.377**	.000
Management Experience	2.18	1.223	120		

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

Table No.4 shows that correlation value (-.377**) is highly significant at .01 level of significance, so the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between academic managers' management experience and occupational stress is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant negative relationship found between academic managers' management experience and occupational stress

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