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Research Article

Workplace Stressors, Employee Welfare, Productivity

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ABSTRACT

This study was about the delicate balance between employee well-being and organizational productivity. On the one hand, if work demand was too high, employees would be too stressed, and organizational productivity would be affected. On the other hand, if a workplace is too relaxed, the business may not survive. An optimal combination of employee well-being and organizational productivity had to be addressed in equal terms. The method used to identify potential workplace stressors was qualitative in as much as it made use of observations and interviews with informants. The method used to determine levels of workplace stressor experience of employees was descriptive-quantitative. This study made use of employee work stressor experience as leverage to highlight its dynamics with employee welfare and organizational productivity. Work stressors in the context of a fast-food establishment were identified. Employees were given survey questionnaires to determine the levels of workplace stressor experience. One-way ANOVA was used to determine the significance of the difference between workplace stressors, and subsequently, areas of intervention were identified. The conclusions were the following. Role conflict, role ambiguity, work overload, working conditions, and workplace relationships were identified as potential workplace stressors based on fast-food operations and settings. Identified workplace stressors were experienced by employees at varying levels. There was a significant difference between workplace stressors. Interventions were to include all identified stressors beginning with the most prevalent, work overload. Areas of intervention included social and organizational support, employee stress-coping attitudes and skills, work performance abilities, and work-life balance.

Keywords: *Workplace Stressors, Workplace Relationships, Work Overload, Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, Employee Welfare, Organizational Productivity*

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Introduction

There was a delicate balance between employee well-being and organizational productivity. On the one hand, if work demand was too high, employees would be too stressed in their work, and issues like employee turnover and employee burnout would happen. These, in turn, would affect organizational productivity. On the other hand, if a workplace is too relaxed, the business may not survive. An optimal combination of employee well-being and organizational productivity had to be addressed in equal terms. This issue of balancing was the central concern of the study. Neglecting employee welfare would lead to work stress. In a study with university teachers, it was found that work stress was associated with both physical and psychological health (Ahmad S. et al., 2021). In a study about workplace stressors among nurses, it was found that work stress led to heightened depression and anxiety (Kaushik et al., 2021). In another study, it was found that work-related stress had negative effects on employee turnover intention (Na-Nan, 2023). In a study conducted with collegiate coaches, it was found that workplace stress was positively associated with employee burnout (Wright et al., 2023). A study by Yang et al. (2019), affirmed the same occurrence. Work stress did not only affect employees but also affected employers. In a study conducted in an interior design company, it was found that work stress had a significant negative effect on employee work productivity (Ekaputri & Riyanto, 2022). In another study conducted in a telecommunication company, it was also found that work stress had a significant negative effect on employee productivity (Asmala et al., 2021). A similar study by Simbolon et al. (2023), also affirmed the same occurrence. If work stresses hurt productivity, the opposite, which came in the form of employee well-being or employee welfare made a favorable impact instead. In a study about employee well-being in corporate sectors, it was found that promoting employee well-being was positively associated with organizational productivity (Rahman & Tahseen, 2023). In a study on employee welfare and firm financial performance, it was found that higher employee welfare was significantly related to company productivity (Liang et al., 2022). A

similar study by Ufoaroh et al. (2019), affirmed the same occurrence. With the awareness of the issues surrounding work-related stress and possible alternatives, this study focused on the identification of workplace stressors and levels of experience of employees on the same, in a fast-food establishment setting. It sought to elaborate on the dynamics of employee experiences with these workplace stressors, to highlight areas of intervention. Subsequently, these interventions would address both employee welfare and organizational productivity.

Research Questions

The study investigated the experiences of a fast-food establishment about workplace stressors. It identified various potential areas of workplace stressors. With the identification of the levels of workplace stressor experience, possible interventions were suggested. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions.

1. What were the dynamics of the fast-food establishment about workplace stressors?
2. What were the levels of workplace stressor experiences of fast-food employees in terms of role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, working conditions, and workplace relationships?
3. Were there significant differences among the various areas of workplace stressors?
4. Based on the findings of the study, what were the implications in terms of possible interventions in line with workplace stressors, employee welfare, and productivity?

Methods

The method used to identify the dynamics of the fast-food establishment about workplace stressors was qualitative. It made use of observations of the actual practices of fast-food establishments and informal interviews with people who had first-hand experiences. The same method was used to identify the presence of various areas of workplace stressors and their subsequent specific questions. These questions were validated and subjected to a dry run before their actual use in the research.

The method used in acquiring data on the level of workplace stressor experience of employees of a fast-food establishment was a

descriptive survey. Data were collected from respondents through questionnaires that required them to answer simple close-ended questions. The total number of employees was 103 and with the use of Slovin's formula, a sample size of 51 was generated with a ten percent margin of error. Permission to collect data was sought. The weighted means of each item in all instruments were determined. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test whether there was a significant difference between workplace stressors.

Results and Discussions

Fast-food Establishment Dynamics and Role Conflicts

Fast-food establishment employees could have any or a combination of job areas like expediting supplies, facilities maintenance, inventory monitoring, food preparations, food packaging, taking customer orders, food delivery-related preparations, sales-related tasks, regular engagement with customers, and many other minor details related to fast-food operations. All these items were done while keeping in mind the quality standards for products and services of the fast-food establishment. Jobs become more challenging during weekends and holidays due to increased customer volume, possible shortages of supplies, and other subsequent problems. Employees who were new or were not fully familiar with assigned job areas could experience conflicting job demands. In a study on job experiences of diversity and inclusion professionals, this was one of the causes of burnout (Pemberton & Kisamore, 2022). This situation was commonly known as role conflict and in a study by Yang et al. (2019), it was found that there was a positive relationship between role conflict and work stress. Work stress was not the only effect of role conflict, in a study by Kalra et al. (2023) it was found that there was a negative relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction. This meant that when role conflict intensified job satisfaction diminished. Role conflicts do not only affect the person concerned but also the organization. Specifically, this affected employees' organizational commitment. In a study in the education sector, it was found that there was a relationship between role conflict and

organizational commitment (Mariam et al., 2021). A similar study by Sultana et al. (2021) also affirmed the same phenomenon. Furthermore, the presence of heightened role conflicts indicated also the presence of workplace bullying. In a study among multi-national corporations, it was found that workplace bullying was prevalent where there was a high level of role conflict (St Samanthar et al., 2022). On this same issue, a study by Harlos et al. (2023) asserted that role conflict was the strongest predictor of workplace bullying. Role conflict, indeed, was a breeding ground for work stress, burnout, job dissatisfaction, diminished organizational commitment, and workplace bullying.

Role Ambiguity and Work Overload

Employees who were new or were not fully familiar with assigned job areas could experience a lack of clarity in their job duties. In a study on job experiences of diversity and inclusion professionals, this was one of the causes of burnout (Pemberton & Kisamore, 2022). This lack of job clarity was commonly termed job ambiguity. In a study by Ahmad J. et al. (2021), it was found out there was a positive relationship between job ambiguity and work stress. The same study found that work stress had a negative relationship with job satisfaction. It meant that as work stress increased, job satisfaction diminished. Job ambiguity affected not only employees but also the organization. A study found that there was a significant relationship between job ambiguity and organizational commitment (Mariam et al., 2021). A similar study also affirmed this phenomenon (Sultana et al., 2021). Job ambiguity also affects organizations from the aspect of job performance. In a study on work stressors and job performance, it was found that there was a significant relationship between job ambiguity and job performance (Ali N. M. & Ghani, 2022). Furthermore, in a study, it was found that role ambiguity was one of the predictors of workplace bullying (Harlos et al., 2023). And another study pointed out that where there was a high level of role ambiguity there would also be a prevalence of workplace bullying (St Samanthar et al., 2022). Role ambiguity, indeed, was a seedbed for work stress, burnout, job dissatisfaction, diminished organizational

commitment, diminished job performance, and workplace bullying.

Another stressful situation happened when there was a disparity between workforce availability and the jobs that needed to be done. This phenomenon mostly happened when there was increased customer volume. This was commonly termed as work overload. A study in a website-making company, it was found that work overload had a significant positive relationship with work stress (Purnama et al., 2023). In a study in public sector universities, it was found that being overburdened led to work stress (Haq et al., 2020). In another study where the nurse-patient ratio was one of the concerns, it was asserted that addressing the problem of work overload of nurses could alleviate work stress (Wu et al., 2023). In a similar study by Hakro et al. (2022), it was asserted that there was a direct relationship between work overload and job stress. Furthermore, in a study by Jung et al. (2023), it was found that work overload was associated with the stress of mental demands. Stress, however, was not the only effect of work overload. One of its other effects was employee turnover intention. A study by Ali S. A. et al. (2021) revealed a strong positive relationship between work overload and turnover intentions. A similar study by Hakro et al. (2022) also affirmed the strong relationship between work overload and turnover intentions. Moreover, work overload could also affect performance. A study by Haq et al. (2020), showed clear evidence that being overburdened in the job affects job performance. Work overload brought about stress, employee turnover, and poor job performance. Furthermore, work overload also affects work-life balance. Wu et al. (2023), in their study that focused on social support initiatives, emphasized the need for work-life balance as an alternative to work overload.

Working Conditions and Workplace Relationships

The next possible source of stressors was the working conditions of the fast-food establishment. As for the physical set-up of the workplace, it followed standardized store space measurements and facility maintenance. It was the non-physical components of working

conditions that were more subtle. One of its possible stressors was the length of working hours. In a study on diversified professionals, it was found that the length of working hours was a major predictor of employee burnout (Pandey & Risal, 2023). In a study by Tamunomiebi & Mezeh (2021), it was found that long working hours of some employees were the cause of the increased rate of ill health. Another indicator of a stressful work environment is if an employee is uncomfortable in it. In a study, it was found that work stress had a significant relationship with being uncomfortable on the job and eventually led to low work performance (Haq et al., 2020). Another stressor related to working conditions was the uncertainty of the job itself. In a study, it was found that temporary workers experiencing higher levels of economic hardship, interpersonal conflict, and organizational constraints reported greater emotional exhaustion (Striler et al., 2020). In worse cases, employees who were exposed to threats and humiliation in the work environment would experience a stress level depending on the gravity of the threat or humiliation. A study by Lindert et al. (2023), found that threats and humiliation were associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. However, a positive work environment could also bring about employee satisfaction and productivity. In a study, it was pointed out that there was a very strong relationship between employee well-being and work productivity (Sangadji et al., 2023).

Another stressor identified in the study was the area of workplace relationships. The most intense and easily recognizable stressor in workplace relationships was interpersonal conflict. A study pointed out that interpersonal conflicts were strongly associated with employees wanting to leave their jobs and considered it the strongest predictor of negative effects at work (Jasiński & Derbis, 2022). In another study, interpersonal conflict was linked to increased counter-productive work behaviors (Striler et al., 2020). Remarkably, in another study, even cynicism or skepticism was positively associated with employees' intention to leave (Abugre & Acquah, 2022). Instead, trust brought the opposite effect. A study found that trust between employees and managers had a positive relationship with creativity and

service performance (Kalra et al., 2023). In addition, another study established that where there was strong mutual trust among employees and managers alike, the incidence of firm profitability also increased (Brandl, 2021). Moreover, supportive workplace relationships brought about positive effects. In a study, it was found that supportive workplace relationships were associated with job satisfaction and the

promotion of employee well-being (Bella, 2023). In a similar study, it was found that friendly workplaces enhanced manager-subordinate relationships (Pandita et al., 2019). Likewise, in a study by Baek et al. (2023), it was found that if supportive workplace relationships intensified, employee depressive symptoms diminished.

Levels of Workplace Stressor Experience

*Table 1. Levels of Workplace Stressor Experience of Fast-food Employees
n =51*

	Workplace Stressors	Level of Experience	Interpretation
1	Role Conflict	2.38	Occasionally Experienced
2	Role Ambiguity	2.25	Occasionally Experienced
3	Work Overload	2.12	Occasionally Experienced
4	Working Conditions	2.99	Seldom Experienced
5	Workplace Relationships	2.91	Seldom Experienced
	Average	2.53	Seldom Experienced

Legend: 3.26– 4.00 Never Experienced; 2.51-3.25 Seldom Experienced; 1.76 – 2.5; Occasionally Experienced; and 1.00 -1.75 -Always Experienced.

Role conflict, role ambiguity, and work overload were given ratings which were interpreted as “occasionally experienced.” While it did not show in the interpretations, it was work overload that got the lowest rating with a mean of 2.12. It meant that of all the five workplace stressors included in the study, work overload was most felt by employees. The study by Purnama et al. (2023), had an interesting take on workplace overload. On the one hand, in the study, it was found that work overload had a positive relationship with work stress. On the other hand, the same study found that perceived organizational support had a positive effect on work overload. This concept was supported in the study of Leger et al. (2022), which pointed out that positive changes in work environments, like increased supervisor support and flexible schedule, was associated with better effective responses to common daily stressors at work and in our context, it would include occasional work overload. In another study, social support initiatives of organizations would allow managers to identify work stressors which included work overload (Wu et al.,

2023). While role conflict was only experienced occasionally, it should be noted that it led to work stress and subsequently led to burnout (Yang et al., 2019). Similarly, work ambiguity was positively associated with job stress (Ahmad S. et al., 2021). And in a study by Pember-ton & Kisamore (2022), it also led to burnout. Working conditions were relatively better in the fast-food establishment concerned. Nevertheless, although seldom, it was still experienced by employees. It was a workplace stressor, that if not checked, would lead to employee burnout (Pandey & Risal, 2023), employee turnover (Borg & Scott-Young, 2022), and even affect organizational productivity (Sangadji et al., 2023). Based on the results, workplace relationships were also seldom experienced. Although seldom, it was still present. It still needed to be addressed, for if kept unchecked, it would lead to employee burnout (Pemberton & Kisamore, 2022), manifestations of counter-productive work behaviors (Striler et al., 2020), and employee turnover (Abugre & Acquah, 2022).

Test for Significant Difference between Workplace Stressors

Table 2. Test for Significant Difference between Workplace Stressors

n = 51

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	32.07	4	8.02	21.06	0.00
Within Groups	95.17	250	0.38		
Total	127.24	254			

There was a statistically significant difference between the means of role conflict, role ambiguity, workload, working conditions, and workplace relationships. This meant that some workplace stressors were more prevalent than others. If they were to be ranked in terms of their frequency it would be as follows, work overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, workplace relationships, and working conditions. The first three were occasionally experienced and the last two were seldom experienced. In a study about depression, anxiety, stress, and workplace stressors, it was found that workplace stressors were varied across work areas, and subsequently, it was asserted that the need for intervention should be patterned after specific situations (Kaushik et al., 2021).

Areas for Possible Interventions

It was reasonable to prioritize interventions according to the rank in terms of the workplace stressors' frequency on how they were experienced by fast-food employees. As mentioned earlier, workplace stressors were ranked according to the following order, work overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, workplace relationships, and working conditions. In terms of initiatives, the simplest would come from having supportive friends at work. In a study, social support was found to help address workplace stressors (Wu et al., 2023). A similar study affirmed this finding. It was found that social support had a moderating effect on work stress (Yang et al., 2019). Likewise, support from the organization, also helped employees manage work stress. A study found that there was a moderating role of organizational support in workplace stressors (Hayat & Afshari, 2020). A similar study also pointed out the positive significance of organizational support to work stress (Purnama et al., 2023). Another study found that organizational support can offset the negative impacts of work stressors

(Harlos et al., 2023). Related to organizational support, positive changes in work environments promoted employees' healthy responses to work stressors (Leger et al., 2022). Support, whether it came from friends, organizations, or improvements in the workplace, helped employees to manage work stress.

Aside from support, certain employee characteristics also helped them manage work stress. In a study about the moderating effects of positive thinking on work stress, it was found that positive thinking had a significant moderating effect on job-related stress (Nan-Nan, 2023). Another characteristic that helped was self-monitoring. In a study about the moderating effect of self-monitoring, it was found that self-monitoring had a moderating effect on role conflict and job satisfaction (Kalra et al., 2023). Another employee characteristic that helped was adaptive coping ability. In a study about workplace stressors and emotional coping, it was found that enhancing adaptive coping ability improves the employees' ability to manage work stress (Foo et al., 2023). Another employee characteristic that helped was emotional intelligence. In a study about emotional intelligence and job stressors, it was found that enhanced emotional intelligence improves employees' capacity to cope with workplace stress (Liu et al., 2023). In terms of enhancement of employee characteristics that help them cope with work stress, the areas related to employee positive thinking, employee self-monitoring, employee adaptive coping ability, and emotional intelligence have been proven to help. The combination of these personal characteristics and skills that helped employees to cope with stressful work situations was summed up in the word, learned resourcefulness. It was related to an employee's ability to cope with stressful situations in both personal and professional areas through acquired skill sets and positive behaviors. A study by Goff (2023),

found out that higher learned resourcefulness enhanced coping skills and decreased stress longitudinally.

Aside from support and employee characteristics enhancement, employees' level of education had been proven to also help. In a study on the effects of education on work-related stress, it was found that highly qualified workers showed lower levels of work-related stress (Schoger, 2023). Another education-related employee qualification that was proven to help, was knowledge management, which was related to employees' skill level of handling information and resources in the job. In a study about knowledge management and emotional exhaustion, it was found that knowledge management can mitigate the bad effects of role conflict, enhance work performance, and eventually, although indirectly, diminish work stress (Parayitam et al., 2020). Higher educational qualifications and higher work efficiency were proven to be moderating factors related to work stress. Based on the preceding inputs, three areas of intervention were identified. These areas were social and organizational support, stress-coping characteristics, and work efficiency. However, since workplace stressors are scattered into various areas in organizations and since needs in one organization would not be the same as others, tailor-fitting initiatives could be helpful (Kaushik et al., 2021).

Another area that was disrupted by work stress was the work-life balance of employees. A study by Çobanoğlu et al. (2023), found that there was an inverse relationship between job stress and work-life balance. A similar study revealed that occupational stress significantly diminished employees' work-life balance (Noordin et al., 2023). While on the surface, work-life balance seemed to be an issue reserved only for employees, organizations were also affected by it. A study revealed that employees with good work-life balance, exhibit high morale and subsequently affect organizational productivity (Obinwanne & Kpaji, 2022). In a similar study, it was found that work-life balance had a positive and significant effect on productivity (Hidayat & Aulia, 2023). Based on the preceding phenomenon, ensuring employee work-life balance was a way of boosting organizational

productivity. Thus, ascertaining work-life balance was in the interest of organizations. Since when work stress increased, work-life balance also decreased, organizations needed to address employee welfare with the expectation that productivity would improve with it. From a higher perspective, addressing issues related to work stress had a symbiotic effect on both employees and organizations.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were deduced.

1. Role conflict, role ambiguity, work overload, working conditions, and workplace relationships were identified as sources of workplace stressors based on the dynamics of fast-food establishment operations and settings.
2. All five identified workplace stressors were experienced by fast-food employees at different levels.
3. There was a significant difference between workplace stressors.
4. All five identified workplace stressors were considered in the intervention for improvement, beginning with work overload which had the lowest rating.
5. Areas of intervention focused on employee welfare which included social and organizational support, employee stress-coping attitudes and skills, work performance abilities, and work-life balance. All these components were associated with organizational productivity.

Recommendations

After considering the conclusions, recommendations were directed to the management of the fast-food establishment focused on the study, to the management of other fast-food establishments, and future researchers.

1. It was recommended to the management of the fast-food establishment focused on the study to initiate improvements in all the areas of the identified stressors beginning with work overload which had the lowest rating.
2. It was recommended to the management of other fast-food establishments to implement productivity initiatives from the

perspective of employee welfare which came in the form of social and organizational support, employee stress-coping attitudes and skills, work performance abilities, and work-life balance.

3. It was recommended to other researchers to conduct studies related to the affirmation of the positive relationship between the identified factors of employee welfare and organizational productivity.

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