

THE LEVEL OF JOB STRESS AND BURNOUT ACROSS EMPLOYEES OF SIX SECTORS IN INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract *The economic recession in 2008 followed by a period of slow economic recovery and continuous volatile economic environment has apparently affected every sphere of Indian economy. The impact is so real that India cannot but revamp the business strategies in order to stay afloat and vibrant. Consequently, any financial instability directly affects the employees in the organizations in the form of work overload and job insecurity, which can increase stress and burnout among the employees. Therefore against the backdrop of slow recovery period in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, this study explored the level of job stress and burnout experienced by the employees across sectors, namely, I.T, health care, hospitality, educational, manufacturing and public-service sectors in India. Apparently, this study found that the Indian employees were overall moderately stressed and burned out. While health care and manufacturing sector employees experienced high amount of job stress and burnout, the educational and public-service sector employees reported lesser job stress and burnout comparatively. Hence, this study is of great help for the managerial practitioners to assess the level of stress and burnout spread across Indian sectors and take preventive measures against stress and burnout in a continuing atmosphere of economic instability.*

Keywords: *Job stress, Job Burnout, Indian Sectors, Recession, India*

Economic uncertainty, volatile business environment, currency depreciation and record lows in the share market have all become the norm of the day. Apparently every economic uncertainty can impact the economic stability of the nation affecting scores of businesses. One of the immediate effects of an economic downturn that is highly tangible in the business organizations is the job cuts. In the aftermath of the 2008 recession, many organizations have cut costs by reduction in work force, freezes in hiring and reduction in employees' time base which have led to increased workload and stress among the employees (Indvik and Johnson, 2014). According to Tsai and Chan (2011) and Bernier (2015) the employees after the 2008 financial crisis continue to experience higher stress and burnout due to the threat of layoffs, high psychological demand, shrinking economy and fear of making mistakes during work. However, there are conflicting findings about job stress and burnout experienced by the Indian employees across sectors in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and during the slow recovery period that followed.

A Worktrends 2011 survey conducted by Kenexa High Performance Institute reported that the Indian and Chinese employees experienced least amount of stress in 2011 after the financial crisis in 2008 (17% of workers – India & China) as compared to Western and American counterparts (U.S. – 32%, U.K – 35%, Brazil – 34%, Germany – 33%) (D'Mello, 2011). However, according to Kumar (2011) it was premature to conclude that United States' recession

in 2008 did not have any impact on India in the years to come. Walia (2012) also confirmed then that the financial crisis affected the Indian economy considerably. Although India seemed to have avoided a major downturn (with Indian economy growth rate only falling to 6.7 percent in 2009), yet the impact of recession in foreign direct investments, growth in exports, correction in salary offerings and job cuts have altered the way that businesses in India are run post the financial crisis (Das, 2013; Verick and Islam, 2010). Houdmont et al., (2012) reported that the number of staff taking time off due to job stress increased by 25 percent during an economic downturn.

Given that work related stress alone costs the national economy a staggering amount in sick pay, health care, lost productivity and litigation costs (Palmer et al., 2004), it is imperative to investigate whether Indian employees across sectors experienced stress and burnout during the slow recovery period after the financial crisis in 2008. By determining the level of stress and burnout experienced by the Indian employees across various sectors, this study can play an instrumental role in identifying which sectors' employees were badly hit by job stress and burnout post the financial recession. Additionally, the findings of this study can help various business sectors in bringing alleviating measures to deal with job stress and burnout in the midst of volatile economic environment and also in the event of another global recession.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Job stress

Job stress is considered as one of the great workplace health risks throughout the globe for employees (Siu et al., 1999). The Italian word, 'Stringere' which means 'to draw tight' is said to be the origin of the word stress (Cartwright and Cooper, 1997). The word 'stress' which was used primarily in the context of physics and engineering in the 17th century gradually moved to the domain of psychology in the 18th century to refer force or pressure caused by forces to the individual (Michael et al., 2009). Freud who is stated to have developed the first theory on stress considered stress as the result of reduced discharge of libidinal energy due to external obstacles or internal ones (Halkos and Bousinakis, 2010). From the time of its inception, stress has been defined in many ways. Keinan (1997) expressed that the stress has been looked over the years as stimulation, reaction and relation. As stimulation, stress is seen as a powerful element that is characterised by loss and threat. Stress is also considered as a reaction to a particular event or situation and finally as relation, stress is an encounter between environment and the person.

Job stress is different from general stress because job stress is a work related psychological stress (Wu and Shih, 2010). Job stress has been defined by various authors differently. Job stress has been looked at as negative emotional state, incapability, psychological state, burden, trait dependence and response to job stressors. According to Holmlund-Rytkonen and Strandvik, (2005) occupational stress is the inability to cope with the pressure or challenge posed by the job. This arises due to poor fit between the ability of the employee and the job requirements and conditions. According to Quick et al., (1997) stress is a psychological construct that people may experience on a daily basis. In addition, job stress has been observed as the experience of negative emotional states such as anxiety, frustration, worry and depression closely attributed to work related factors (Kyriacou, 2001).

Job Burnout

Greene (1961) was the first one to use the term 'burnout' (Maslach et al., 2001). The research on job burnout began with the study of emotion, arousal and the ways individuals cope with the arousal (Maslach and Jackson, 1984). The empirical studies on burnout began in late 1970s and early 1980s (Iwanicki and Schwab, 1981). Many researchers defined burnout from various perspectives such as to fail, wear out, loss, estrangement, response to chronic stress, exhaustion, and association with uncomfortable physical and emotional symptoms (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993). Freudenberger (1974) and many others who came later, looked at burnout as a problem between individual personality and

job environment, leading to loss of motivation and energy (Khanifar et al., 2012).

Maslach and Jackson (1981) defined burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that occurs amongst individuals who work closely with people. Maslach also explained burnout as a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job (Maslach, 2003). The emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and lack of personal accomplishment are three categories of job burnout which interact in an employee leading to weariness and decreased morale (Maslach and Jackson 1981, Zellars et al., 2000, Hayes and Weathington, 2007).

Emotional exhaustion is the first component of the job burnout model suggested by Maslach and others. According to Maslach et al., (2001) emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being overextended or depleted of one's emotional and physical resources. The second important component of job burnout as suggested by Maslach and others is depersonalization or cynicism. According to Maslach and Goldberg (1998) depersonalization is an excessively detached response to other people who may be either clients or even co-workers (Maslach et al., 2001, Cavus and Demir, 2010). The third important component of burnout as suggested by Maslach and others is lack of personal accomplishment. According to Zahrani (2011) lack of personal accomplishment is defined as the individual tendency to evaluate himself or herself negatively. Hence, Job burnout refers to fatigue or wearing out from the pressures of job, work overload and lack of control (Freudenberger, 1974, Angerer, 2003).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives that are outlined in this study are:

- To determine whether the Indian employees experienced job stress and job burnout during the slow recovery period after the last recession
- To identify the level of job stress across sectors in the Indian organisations during the slow recovery period after the last recession
- To identify the level of job burnout across sectors in the Indian organisations during the slow recovery period after the last recession
- To investigate whether there is a significant difference between sectors with respect to the experience of job stress and job burnout

METHODOLOGY

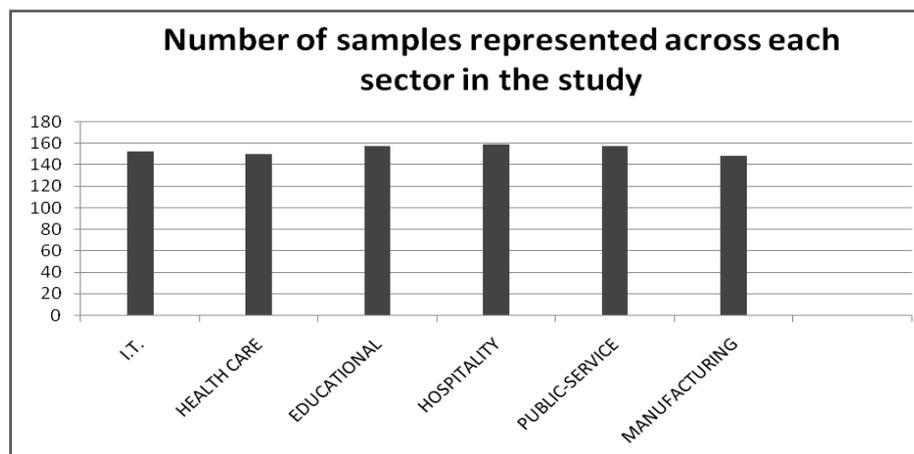
The employees from various organizations of six different sectors, viz., I.T., hospitality, educational, public-service, health care and manufacturing sectors from Chennai,

Southern India, formed the population of this study. Structured questionnaires were used to conduct the survey. A survey based research plan was utilized to gather the data because Creswell (2003) noted that survey-based research allows generalizing findings from a representative sample to a larger population (Barnes, 2007).

Samples statistics across sectors

The samples for this study were collected from various organizations belonging to six sectors, namely, information technology (I.T.), health care, educational, hospitality (Hotels), public-service and manufacturing sector. The chart presentation in Figure 1 shows the number of samples represented across each sector in the study.

Figure 1: Number of Samples Represented across Each Sector in the Study



As seen above in Figure 1, hospitality sector comprised 159 respondents, while educational sector and public-service sectors had 157 respondents, followed by informational technology (I.T.) sector had 152 respondents and manufacturing and health care sectors had 148 and 150 respondents respectively. Hence, there was not a big margin of difference as far as the samples represented in each sector were concerned.

Research Instruments

As the main objective of this research is to assess the level of job stress and job burnout among the employees of different sectors in the Indian organizations, two short instruments were specially chosen keeping in mind, the time constraints of the employees with respect to allotting time for filling up the questionnaires.

Job Stress Scale

Employees' Job stress was measured using Motowidlo et al., (1986) scale. Originally, the scale contained four items that queried respondents about how much their job induces stress. In this study, the modified version of Motowidlo et al., (1986) scale is used based on the CFA report by Dubinsky et al., (1995). Dubinsky et al., (1995) reported the reliability of the modified version of two items scaled as .80 alpha value. In their study, Gill et al., (2006) who used the two items of job stress as reported in Dubinsky et al., (1995) also reported that the scale was reliable. A response to five-point

likert scale from '1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree' captured the level of job stress among the employees and higher scores revealed greater stress among the employees with their jobs in the organization. The reliability (alpha value) for this Job stress scale in the present study was .79 and therefore the measure was found to be suitable.

Job Burnout Scale

Employees' Job burnout was measured using Gillespie and Numerof (1984) scale. Originally, the scale contained ten items that queried respondents regarding the level of job burnout. Gillespie and Numerof (1984) burnout scale is popularly used in various organizational contexts (Wesolowski and Mossholder, 1997). In this study, the modified version of Gillespie and Numerof (1984) scale is used basing on the CFA reported by Dubinsky et al., (1995). Dubinsky et al., (1995) reported the reliability of the modified version of two items scale as .93 alpha value. In their study, Gill et al., (2006) who used the two items of job burnout (as reported in Dubinsky et al., 1995) also reported the scale to be reliable. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5' was used to measure the employees' job burnout and the higher scores revealed higher amount of job burnout among the employees in the organizations. The overall reliability (alpha) value for this measure in the present study was .74.

RESULTS

The main aim of this study was to find out the level of job stress and burnout across employees of six different sectors

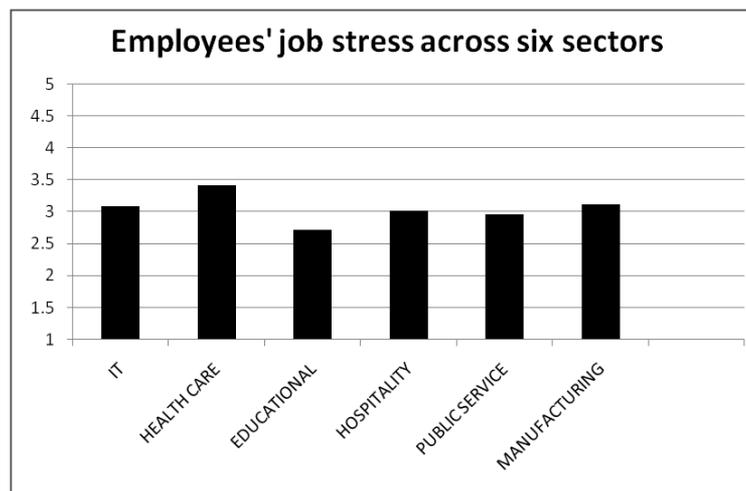
of Indian organizations during the slow recovery period after the 2008 recession. In this regard, the job stress and burnout of the employees were measured on a five-point scale, where 5 stood for highly stressed/burned out and 1 stood for low stress/burnout. The descriptive statistics reveal that the total job stress of the employees (including all sectors) was 3.05 (std. dev = 1.01), while total job burnout of the respondents was 3.25 (stddev = 0.97). The results of the respondents' job stress and burnout in each respective sector are detailed below in three sub-headings, namely, Job stress

across six sectors, Job burnout across six sectors and finally the difference between six sectors with regard to job stress and burnout.

Job stress across six sectors

Figure 2 shows an overall picture about employees' job stress across six sectors. The data in Figure 2 shows that health care sector employees had the highest mean score of 3.42 (std.dev = 1.12) in the 5-point Likert scale of followers' job stress.

Figure 2: Employees' Job stress Across Six Sectors



The manufacturing sector topped second in the chart with 3.12 as a mean score (std.dev = 0.93), followed by I.T. sector (mean = 3.09, std.dev = 0.86), hospitality (mean = 3.01, std. dev = 0.91), public-service (mean = 2.96, std.dev = 1.07) and educational sector (mean = 2.71, std.dev = 1.06).

Burnout Across Six Sectors

Figure 3 shows an overall picture about followers' job burnout across six sectors.

Figure 3: Employees' Job burnout Across Six Sectors

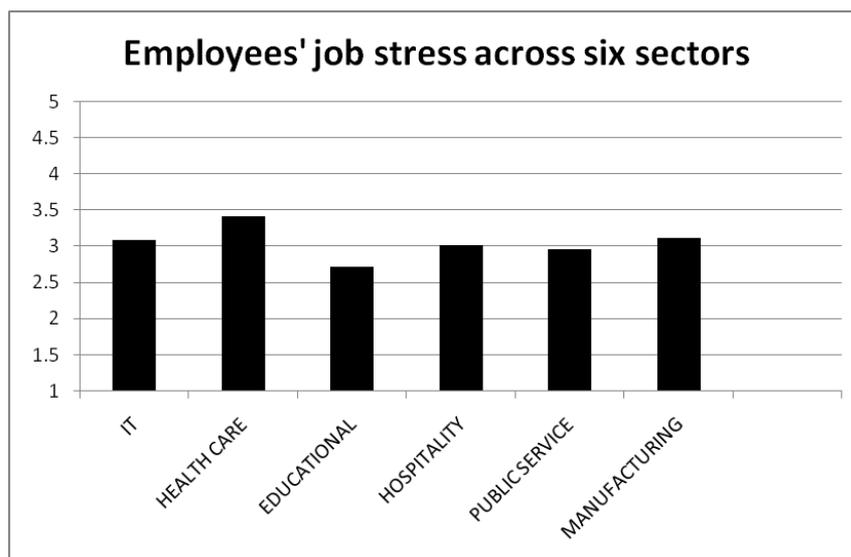


Figure 3 shows that manufacturing sector employees had the highest mean score of 3.00 (std.dev = 0.86) in the 5-point Likert scale of followers' job burnout. In the second place, hospitality sector had a mean score of 2.95 (std.dev = 1.02), followed by I.T. sector (mean = 2.89, std.dev = 0.87), health care sector (mean = 2.88, std.dev = 1.07), educational sector (mean = 2.78, std.dev = 0.97). Finally, public-service sector employees scored the lowest in their job burnout assessment with a mean score of 2.71 (std.dev = 0.98).

Difference between six sectors with regard to job stress and burnout

Having seen the mean scores and standard deviations of each sector in relation to job stress and burnout, it is imperative to investigate whether there is a significant difference between these sectors with respect to study variables. For this purpose, One-way Anova was done in order to identify whether there is a significant difference between six sectors with respect to job stress and job burnout experienced by the employees.

Table 1: One-way ANOVA for the Differences Among Six Different Sectors with Regard to Job Stress and Job Burnout

Variables	Sum of Squares		Df	F	p
Job Stress	Between groups	39.135	5	7.817	.000*
	Within groups	919.132	918		
	Total	958.267	923		
Job Burn-out	Between groups	8.730	5	1.834	.104
	Within groups	873.957	918		
	Total	882.687	923		

Note: *significant at p<.001

It is evident from the above ANOVA results of Table 1, that there is a statistically significant difference between six sectors with regard to employees' job stress (F = 7.81, p<.001). But, there was no statistically significant difference found between the sectors with reference to employees' job burnout (F = 1.83, p = .104).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that during the slow recovery period in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, the employees in India across different sectors were moderately stressed in their jobs. The job burnout reported among the employees was also considered to be moderate and obviously a bit higher than job stress scores. Hence, this result to a certain extent challenges the findings of Work trends 2011 survey that the Indian employees were not largely affected by

stress in the workplace after the recession in 2008 and during the slow recovery period that followed (D'Mello, 2011). Alternatively, the main possible reason why the Indian employees did not report extreme stress and burnout in the job is due to the fact that Indian economy was not swayed over instantly due to US meltdown. The business organizations in India were shielded to a larger extent due to adherence to strong foundation and fundamentals of the economy, regulated banking system and policies and above all governmental control over the Indian market (Walia, 2012). All these possibly kept the Indian business organizations safe, which in turn kept the Indian employees less exposed to factors leading to uncontrollable stress and burnout such as undue fear and anxiety with respect to job insecurity, work overload, high psychological demand, experience of undesirable changes, stress of layoffs etc.

Moreover, this study is significant for the fact that it gives one a comparative outlook on the level of job stress and job burnout prevalent among the employees across six different sectors in the Indian organizations. The results tell that the health care sector employees in India experienced high level of job stress as compared to other sectors like I.T, educational, hospitality, public-service and manufacturing sectors. Hence, the finding corroborates well with the observations made by Guo (2003) that the health care environment amongst other human services is more challenging, filled with uncertainty, rapid changes and new opportunities. Ornelas and Kleiner (2003) and Nowrouzi (2015) also pointed out that stress is a serious problem and a threat to health care providers. Burke et al., (2014) affirm that the recession which led to budget cuts and service reductions in the health care sector resulted in job burnout. According to Rees (1995) health professionals unlike others face lots of stress because they come face to face with situations that have profound implications like death and suffering.

Secondly, manufacturing sector employees as revealed by the study came closer to health care sector with regard to experience of job stress at the workplace. As far as job burnout was concerned, the manufacturing sector topped the chart, thus affirming that employees working in the manufacturing sector experienced higher job burnout as compared to others. This is due to the fact that manufacturing employees are exposed to a variety of daily and ambient stressors that include excessive noise, insufficient lighting, poor air quality, extremes in temperature, ergonomic and mechanical hazards (Mazerall, 1994). In line with the findings of this research, Pestonjee and Pandey (2013) pointed out in their work that the manufacturing group emerged far more stressed than the respondents in the service sector. Moreover, the finding with regard to reporting of high level of job stress and burnout among the employees in the manufacturing sector is not surprising because manufacturing sector is one among the ones which suffered a great setback after the recession in

2008. Raval and Kamble (2011) referring to manufacturing sector reported that the growth in exports had a sharp dip in October 2008 and continued to be the same until the end of the financial year. In a recent study on occupational stress among the blue-collar employees of the Indian Automobile Industry revealed that the blue-collar employees were found to be having very high occupational stress (Sharma, 2015). The fact that the export growth rate has not risen back to its original momentum and pace go on to prove the point that there have been extensive cuts in the amount of production across many manufacturing plants across the country, thus leading to job insecurity among the employees. Therefore, job stress and job burnout as reported by the manufacturing sector employees is only validated against the background of existing economic downturn and slow recovery in India today.

As expected, the I.T sector employees scored considerable amount of job stress just like the manufacturing sector. In fact, this finding is also not at all astonishing. Given that 61% of the revenues from I.T. firms come from U.S. alone (Kumar, 2011), naturally an economic downturn as big as recession in U.S in 2008 was expected to send back shockwaves across the I.T industry in India. Although, India is stated to have been resilient at the wake of recession, yet the stressful factors that come with any economic meltdown like the fear of lay-offs, slow hike in salary, job insecurity, work overload, extended working hours continue to haunt Indian I.T sector employees as evidenced by the finding of this study. Besides, Bhatt and Pathak (2013) also affirm that constant technological advancement accompanied by multiple shifts and strict deadlines expose I.T employees to undue stressful conditions (Raitoharju, 2005).

More obviously, the findings in relation to educational and public services sector as revealed by this study are quite interesting. While I.T, health care and hospitality sector employees' scores on job burnout appeared to be approximately similar, the educational and public-service sector employees comparatively reported a lesser amount of job burnout. This was also true with respect to job stress, wherein both the educational and public services sector reported the least in comparison to others. There may be varied reasons for this result. Primarily, it is evident that both the educational and public services sector employees were not much exposed to vulnerable effects of recession. Since the public service sector employees in India are predominantly Government employees, they never run the risk of job insecurity and therefore there is no fear or anxiety with respect to job even at the time of recession or afterwards during the slow recovery period. Similarly, another sector that did not get much affected by the economic downturn was educational sector. It has been observed that many professionals who lost their jobs due to crisis and meltdown joined many educational institutions to upgrade themselves

for a prospective future. Given the huge domestic market, the educational institutions continue to thrive, which in turn makes career in academic institutions more attractive, consistent and less stressful. The other reasons that may be attributed for the least amount of job stress and burnout in educational and public services sector are favorable working conditions, intellectual resources at hand to handle stress and burnout, structures to handle/settle grievances, limited and stipulated working hours and finally periodic holidays that are quite relaxing in nature.

Finally, while there was a significant difference in scores between the six sectors with regard to job stress among the employees, the job burnout scores did not have any significant difference between the six sectors, meaning, all the sectors uniformly reported job burnout among their employees. Hence, the results can be taken to mean that job burnout is a common phenomenon in all types of modern organizations today.

IMPLICATIONS

Having seen in this study that Indian employees are overall moderately stressed and experienced job burnout, this research breaks down the false perception of Indian employees not being affected by the recession or the slow recovery that followed. Hence, this study serves as a great cue to take up preventive measures to protect Indian employees from undue stress and degenerative burnout in today's volatile economic environment. In the light of this study, one of the main implications is to have a lot of preventive measures in the organizations today to keep stress and burnout away from the workplace. The present study is also greatly helpful for managerial practitioners in getting an assessment of the level of job stress and burnout spread across sectors in the Indian organizations today. As evidenced by this study, the policy makers in health care, manufacturing and I.T sectors need to be particularly watchful of the dangerous effects of job stress and burnout of their employees in these turbulent times. Given that economic downturn is going to stay for a while, it is essential that wellness and other social support programmes for the employees become part and parcel of the organisation's policies in those high risk sectors that are identified in this study.

CONCLUSION

Work stress and burnout have caught considerable attention among the researchers because job stress and burnout affects employees' job related behaviors like job satisfaction, commitment, organizational loyalty, job turnover, absenteeism and productivity (Rizavi et al., 2011, Maslach et al., 2001, Wang et al., 2014). Considering the substantial direct and indirect costs that stress and burnout can bring in to the organizations (Hsieh and Hsieh, 2003), this study presses

for immediate attention to safeguard employees from job stress and burnout in an economically volatile environment. Given that both job stress and burnout among the employees were investigated across sectors in and around Chennai, Southern India, it may be necessary to replicate this study by expanding investigation in various states across India for greater generalizability of the results. Additionally, it has been recommended that the future research concentrate on studying the factors leading to job stress and burnout, keeping in perspective the hostile economic uncertainty that continues to haunt Indian businesses today.

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