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OCCUPATIONAL STRESS: RELATIONSHIP WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND COPING SELF-EFFICACY

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Abstract *The present study aimed to investigate the relationship of occupational stress with emotional intelligence (EI) and coping self-efficacy (CSE). The sample consisted of 159 bank employees working in public and private banks in Delhi-NCR. Out of these, 87 were males and 72 were females. The age range of the sample was 27–55 years (mean age = 39 years). The Occupational Role Questionnaire of Occupational Stress Inventory, CSE Scale, and the Assessing Emotions Scale were used for data collection. Data were analysed using independent samples t-test, correlational analysis, and multiple regression analysis. Results showed that a significant negative relationship exists between occupational stress and EI, and between occupational stress and CSE. A significant positive relationship was found between CSE and EI. Multiple regression analysis showed EI as a significant predictor of occupational stress. Implications based on enhancing EI so as to decrease occupational stress are discussed.*

Keywords: *Occupational Stress, Emotional Intelligence, Coping Self-Efficacy*

INTRODUCTION

The world of today is characterized by increased competition and pressures. This creates challenges for the individuals, which may lead to stresses and strains. Many of these stresses and pressures may arise at the workplace. When an individual is equipped in coping with stress and managing their emotions, they are better able to deal with these stresses.

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Stress has been defined in a number of ways but the most popular understanding is based on stimulus-response. A definition of stress based on stimulus defines stress in terms of force acting upon the individual. However, a response definition focuses on the way an individual responds to the stressful conditions.

Occupational stress has become an important area of concern in today's world. Not only does it negatively impact performance, it leads to increase in healthcare costs, and workplace accidents as well as increase in absenteeism and turnover (Jex, 2006). It also leads to negative outcomes for the society as it interferes in the functioning of other important domains of one's life like family, leisure, etc. French, Rodgers, and Cobb (1974) define occupational stress as "the characteristics of the job that pose a threat to the individual". "A stressor represents anything in the job or organizational environment that requires some type of adaptive response on part of the employee" (Jex, 2006).

Many models have been developed to explain occupational stress and how to deal with it. The Institute of Social Research Model (French & Kahn, 1962; Katz & Kahn, 1978) explains occupational stress in terms of the objective environment, psychological environment, response, mental and physical health and disease, enduring properties of the person, and interpersonal relations. In his process model, McGrath (1976) conceptualized the process of stress as a four-stage process: situation, perceived situation, response selection, and behaviour. Beehr and Newman's (1978) facet model describes occupational stress in terms of various facets: personal facet, environmental facet, process facet, human consequences facet, organizational consequences facet, and adaptive responses facet. The Demands-Control model (Karasek, 1979) states that most stressful situations for employees are the ones where the job demands are heavy but they have very little control over their work. The person-environment (P-E) Fit model (French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982) states that an employee perceives the work environment as stressful when there is a lack of fit. The fit could be at many levels such as that between the skills of the employee and the requirements of the job, between the

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characteristics of the employee and the characteristics of the organization, etc.

There are many factors that lead to occupational stress. Some of the prominent workplace stressors are role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, workload, etc. Other factors that may cause stress at the workplace are interpersonal conflicts at the workplace, work-life conflict, perceived control, etc.

COPING SELF-EFFICACY

According to Bandura (1994), "Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives". Self-efficacy beliefs play a crucial role in one's life as they determine people's thoughts, feelings, motivation, and behaviour (Bandura, 1994).

According to Bandura (1994), people's beliefs about their efficacy can be developed by four main sources of influence: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and somatic and emotional states.

Coping is defined as behavioural or cognitive efforts to manage situations that are appraised as stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping involves both *emotion-focused coping*, and *problem focused coping*. Emotion focussed coping focuses on managing one's emotional responses related to stressful events. Problem focussed coping focuses on changing the root cause of the stress. It focuses on taking control of the relationship between them and the stressor (Lazarus, 1991).

Coping self-efficacy (CSE) beliefs are an individual's beliefs about their ability to cope with external stressors. According to Bandura (1997), individuals with a high level of CSE tend to create an adaptive approach through which they view tasks that require high efforts as challenging; on the contrary, individuals with low CSE perceptions are more likely to perceive the same tasks as stressful.

High CSE has been found to be related to positive outcomes such as better psychological adjustment to chronic disease (Chesney et al., 2006); natural disaster (Benight et al., 1999), etc.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become one of the most researched topics in psychology. EI was declared as one of the most useful phrases of the late 1990s by the American Dialect Society (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000).

Mayer and Salovey (1997) defined EI as "the ability to perceive accurately, the appraisal and expression of emotions, the ability to access and/or generate feelings so as to assist thought, the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and the ability to regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth". The four branches of emotional intelligence as given by them are: perceiving emotions, facilitating thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions.

EI, according to Bar-On (2000), is defined in terms of "an array of emotional and social knowledge and abilities that influence the overall ability to effectively relate with environmental demands". The five main domains in this model are intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and general mood.

Goleman (1995, 1998) developed the competency model of EI. He proposed five dimensions of EI consisting of 25 competencies put under five heads namely self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills.

EI has been found to be positively linked to academic performance (Brackett & Mayer, 2003); satisfying interpersonal relationships (Malouff, Schutte, & Thorsteinsson, 2012); and work performance (Goleman, 1998). EI varies inversely with bullying, violence, tobacco use, and drug problems (Trinidad & Johnson, 2002).

PRESENT STUDY

The rise in occupational stress has been a cause of concern. Any kind of stress faced by the individual requires certain coping efforts to be made by them. A large part of coping efforts made by the individual is significantly related to understanding and managing one's emotions. Hence, CSE and EI are very important variables in this regard as they play a key role in dealing with stress. Occupational stress has been studied more in terms of its effect on health and performance. Very few studies have been conducted on the relationship between occupational stress and EI, and self-efficacy. Therefore, the present study is significant as it attempts to study the relationship among occupational stress, EI, and CSE, as well as to find out the significant predictors of occupational stress.

OBJECTIVES

- To study occupational stress, EI, and CSE in a sample of bank employees.
- To study gender differences in occupational stress, EI, and CSE.
- To find out the relationship among occupational stress, EI, and CSE.
- To find out the significant predictors of occupational stress.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 159 bank employees working in public and private banks in Delhi-NCR. Out of these, 87 were males and 72 were females. The age range of the sample was 27–55 years (mean age = 39 years).

Tools

Occupational Stress Inventory-Revised™ (OSI-R™) (Osipow, 1998)

Occupational Stress Inventory (OSI-R) consists of three sections, the Occupational Role Questionnaire (ORQ), the Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ), and the Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ). A set of six scales measure occupational stress which are collectively called Occupational Role Questionnaire (ORQ) earlier called the Occupational Environmental Scales (Osipow & Spokane, 1981). The six scales are Role Overload (RO), Role Insufficiency (RI), Role Ambiguity (RA), Role Boundary (RB), Responsibility (R), and Physical Environment (PE).

Coping Self-Efficacy Scale (Chesney, Neilands, Chambers, Folkman, & Taylor, 2006)

The Coping Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES) consists of 26 items designed to measure perceived self-efficacy for coping with challenges and threats. Respondents are asked to rate the items on a 11-point scale ranging from "cannot do at all", to "certain can do". The item ratings are summed to create the total score.

Assessing Emotions Scale (Schutte et al., 1998)

The Assessing Emotions Scale assesses trait EI. It is a 33-item self-report inventory consisting of positively and negatively keyed items. Respondents rate themselves on the items using a five-point Likert type scale, which ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Three items are reverse scored. Total scale scores are calculated by summing up the ratings for all the items.

PROCEDURE

Informed consent was taken from the participants. The participants filled up the questionnaires on occupational stress, EI, and CSE. The questionnaires were then scored and data were pooled in for statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objectives of the present study were to study occupational stress, EI, and CSE in a sample of bank employees. The study also aimed to find out the relationship among occupational stress, EI, and CSE, as well as gender differences in these variables. A very important objective of the study was to find out the significant predictors of occupational stress. For this purpose, descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were carried out. Table 1 depicts the descriptive statistics (mean and SD) and the results of the independent samples t-tests for assessing gender differences in all the variables of the study.

As can be seen in terms of occupational stress, males are found to be experiencing significantly more occupational stress (Mean: males = 164.85, females = 154.46, t = –2.47, $p < .01$) mainly in terms of role overload (Mean: males = 32.10, females = 29.54, t = –2.42, $p < .02$); role ambiguity (Mean: males = 28.02, females = 24.99, t = –2.33, $p < .02$); and more extreme physical environment (Mean: males = 23.85, females = 18.11, t = –5.05, $p < .000$) as compared to females. Martocchio, O'Leary, and Anne (1989) performed a meta-analysis on 15 studies that examined sex differences in occupational stress. Results indicated that there are no sex differences in experienced and perceived work stress.

On CSE, males were found to be significantly lower than females (Mean: males = 127.49, females = 145.41, t = 3.49, $p < .001$). On EI too, males were found to be significantly lower than females (Mean: males = 116.75, females = 126.58, t = 2.60, $p < .01$). Hence, it can be seen that even though males are experiencing more occupational stress they are significantly lower in terms of their ability to cope with the stressors which may further enhance their occupational stress levels. Schutte et al. (1998) and Van Rooy, Alonso, and Viswesvaran (2005) found that females have significantly higher reported EI than males. However, Petrides and Furnham (2000) found that males' estimates of EI were significantly higher than that of females. These authors suggested that males score higher on self-estimates of EI than females because females may tend towards self-derogation on self-report measures. Findings of Reiff et al. (2001) indicated that girls are higher on EI. Women were also found to score higher on measures of EI than men by Brackett, Mayer, and Warner (2004); Kafetsios (2004); Perry, Ball, and Stacey (2004).

Table 1: Showing the Descriptive Statistics and Results for T-test for Gender Differences Males (M) n = 87, Females (F) n = 72; N = 159

Variables	Mean (Total Sample)	S.D	Gender	Mean	t-value	Df	Significance
Occupational Stress (OST)	160.14	26.85	M	164.85	–2.47	157	.01
			F	154.46			

Variables	Mean (Total Sample)	S.D	Gender	Mean	t-value	Df	Significance
Role Overload (RO)	30.94	6.74	M	32.10	–2.42	157	.02
			F	29.54			
Role Insufficiency (RI)	23.89	6.85	M	23.81	.155	157	.88
			F	23.98			
Role Ambiguity (RA)	26.65	8.29	M	28.02	–2.33	157	.02
			F	24.99			
Role Boundary (RB)	25.50	5.82	M	26.09	–1.42	157	.16
			F	24.78			
Responsibility (R)	33.41	6.43	M	33.41	.003	157	.99
			F	33.42			
Physical Environment (PE)	21.25	7.66	M	23.85	–5.05	157	.000
			F	18.11			
Coping Self-efficacy	135.61	33.33	M	127.49	3.49	157	.001
			F	145.41			
Emotional Intelligence	121.20	24.13	M	116.75	2.60	157	.01
			F	126.58			

Table 2: Product Moment Correlations among the Variables of the Study

Variables	OST	RO	RI	RA	RB	R	PE	CSE	EI
OST	1	.754** .000	.524** .000	.556** .000	.665** .000	.596** .000	.473** .000	–.212** .007	–.426** .000
RO	.754** .000	1	.192* .015	.299** .000	.411** .000	.515** .000	.472** .000	–.092 .250	–.289** .000
RI	.524** .000	.192* .015	1	.437** .000	.287** .000	.035 .661	.016 .837	–.204* .010	–.323** .000
RA	.556** .000	–.299** .000	.437** .000	1	.279** .000	–.072 .369	.006 .937	–.130 .103	–.321** .000
RB	.665** .000	.411** .000	.287** .000	.279** .000	1	.418** .000	.227** .004	–.177* .025	–.193* .015
R	.596** .000	.515** .000	.035 .661	–.072 .369	.418** .000	1	.252** .001	–.046 .569	–.120 .132
PE	.473** .000	.472** .000	.016 .837	.006 .937	.227** .004	.252** .001	1	–.073 .357	–.195* .014
CSE	–212* .007	–.092 .250	–.204* .010	–.130 .103	–.177* .025	–.046 .569	–.073 .357	1	.485** .000
EI	–.426** .000	–.289** .000	–.323** .000	–.321** .000	–.193** .015	–.120 .132	–.195* .014	.485** .000	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 shows the correlations among the variables of the study. As can be seen, a significant negative correlation of EI is found with occupational stress total (r = –.426, p < .000), RO (r = –.289, p < .000), RI (r = –.323, p < .000), RA (r = –.321, p < .000), RB (r = –.193, p < .01), and PE (r = –.195, p < .01). Hence, it can be concluded that a significant negative relationship exists between EI and occupational stress. This is because high EI is related to better stress management. Emotionally intelligent individuals are aware of their emotions and more adept at managing their emotions. However, it could also be that prolonged experience of occupational stress can lower one's EI.

A significant negative relationship of CSE was also found with occupational stress total (r = –.212, p < .007), RI (r = –.204, p < .01), and RB (r = –.177, p < .02). El-sayed, El-Zeiny, and Adeyemo (2014) studied the relationship between occupational stress, EI, and self-efficacy among faculty members in faculty of nursing Zagazig University, Egypt. Findings indicate that occupational stress was negatively

related with faculty members' EI and self-efficacy. Hence, it can be concluded that a significant negative relationship exists between CSE and occupational stress. This is because the more one believes in one's capabilities to cope with stress, the better their coping is thereby leading to lower amount of occupational stress.

A significant positive correlation was found between EI and CSE (r = .485, p < .000). Belanger (2005) found that individuals with higher levels of EI had more self-efficacy and that having more self-efficacy in turn enhanced their academic performance. Sutton and Wheatley (2003) have suggested that "the substantial variation in teacher efficacy may result in part from variance in teacher' emotions". Chan (2004) found that self-efficacy beliefs were significantly predicted by the components of EI. Elias et al. (2007) found positive and significant correlations between EI and mathematics self-efficacy (r = .310, p < .05) and English self-efficacy (r = .498, p < .05). This could be because a very important component of EI is stress management. Individuals high on EI have more confidence in their capabilities to handle stress thereby leading to high CSE. This could work the other way round too.

Table 3: Regression of Occupational Stress on Emotional Intelligence and Coping Self-efficacy

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
1	.426	.181	.171	17.29	.000

(a) Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Intelligence, Coping Self-efficacy

Table 3 shows the results of multiple regression of occupational stress on EI and CSE. Results show that when the independent variables of EI and CSE were entered in the regression model with occupational stress as the criterion, they contributed to 18.10% of the variance in occupational stress. The F-value has been found to be significant (17.29, p < .000). The standardized beta values of the best fit model indicate that there is a negative significant relationship between the predictors and the criterion variable occupational stress. This shows that as these predictors increase, occupational stress decreases. The standardized beta values are: EI (–.422) and CSE (–.008). This shows the significant predictive power of EI for occupational stress. CSE, however, did not emerge as a significant predictor of occupational stress.

Mikolajczak, Menil, and Luminet (2007) found that when confronted with emotional labour, individuals high in trait EI experience lower levels of burnout and somatic complaints. EI is claimed to influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures (Bar-On, 1997). Ogińska-Bulik (2005) explored the relationship between EI and perceived stress in the workplace and health-related consequences in human service workers. The results confirmed the important role of EI in perceiving occupational stress and preventing employees of human services from negative health outcomes. Gohm, Corser, and Dalsky (2005) found that EI was positively related to stress management among college students who either closely attended to their emotion or regularly distanced from and intellectualized their feelings.

Meta-analysis (Martins, Ramalho, & Morin, 2010; Schutte, Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2007) reported significant relationships between EI and mental health, r = .36, psychosomatic health, r = .33, and physical health, r = .27. These studies underline the importance of EI in coping with stress and in happiness and well-being.

Hence, in the present study EI has emerged as a significant predictor of occupational stress. The significant variance caused in occupational stress by EI can be explained in many ways. The root cause of many stresses lies in emotional mismanagement. EI plays a key role in handling stress since it involves competencies related to understanding and managing one's emotions. Through self-awareness, a very key component of EI, one can understand when and why one is feeling stressed. With self-management, one can manage distressing emotions better. It also helps in understanding that stress can be managed. Individuals high in EI are aware of various ways of managing stress and, therefore, EI helps in handling stress better.

Implications

The results of the present study have many implications for employees and organizations. First of all, the results demonstrate EI to be a significant predictor of occupational stress. Hence, EI, which includes the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions, understanding the emotions of other people, as well as relationship management, plays a key role in dealing with occupational stress. Although CSE did not emerge as a significant predictor of occupational stress, it was found to have a significant negative correlation with occupational stress like EI; hence, this shows the important role of CSE in dealing with occupational stress.

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship of occupational stress with EI and CSE. The results show that when a person has high EI as well as high CSE, they are better able to deal with occupational stress. The findings

of the present study hold a lot of importance, since many research as well as intervention efforts are being directed to find out ways to deal with stress especially occupational stress. Since, in the present study, EI has been identified as a significant predictor of occupational stress, training programmes may be organized by the organizations for their employees to enhance their EI so that they can effectively deal with occupational stress.

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