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The Impact of Work Stress on Employee Performance in the Hotel Industry in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Stress is an important factor that can affect employee performance of any organization. The employees have a tendency towards high levels of stress regarding time, working for longer hours which reduces the employees' desire for performing better. The management approach towards their employees can impact on either reducing or increasing stress on them. The identification of the link among these factors would be helpful to boost employee performances of any company. The purpose of this study is to analyse the impact of work stress levels on employee performance in the hotel sector. The nature of work in hotels include hard deadlines, unexpected interactions with guests, long working hours, night and evening work, repetitive work, high emotional demands, low influence (control), shift work, high workspace, and problems with coordination of work. Therefore, working in the hospitality industry can be stressful and many workers are vulnerable in terms of their poor working conditions and low wages. According to previous research, the factors affecting employee stress were identified as work ambiguity, and workload whilst the results caused due to stress were identified as performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intention. This study examines the relationship between job stress and employee performances among hoteliers in seven selected hotels that operate in the Southern province. The sample of 120 participants consists of Senior Managers, Guest Relation officers, HR officers and the service crew. The data was acquired through self-administered questionnaires. The results showed a negative impact of job stress on employee performances. Therefore, the job stress considerably reduced the performance of an individual.

1. Introduction

Selye (1956) defines stress as a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint, or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important. The HSE (Health Safety Executive, UK, 2001) defines stress as an undesirable response people have upon them. It arises when they fear that they cannot deal with it (Ibid). HSE distinguishes between stress and pressure. Pressure is seen as positive and something that actually helps expand our performance. However, the problems arise when the sources of pressure become too regular without time to recover, or when just one source of pressure is too excessive for us to cope with (Ibid).

The employees' performance is affected by stress that indirectly affects the organization survival (Kazmi, 2008), because, if employees reduce their work efficiency, then this situation not only affects the organizational performance but also results in loss of healthy shares in an increasingly competitive market, and may even jeopardize the survival of the organization (Ibid) commonly used, in industrial psychology. Nowadays, it is a part of Human Resource Management (HRM) and refers to whether a person is performing his job well or not. Amongst the most commonly accepted theories, the theory of Campbell and his colleagues (2001) is important. They describe the psychological perspective of job performance as an individual level variable, i.e., performance is something a single person does and this differentiates performance from organizational performance or national performance which are higher level variables. Byars and Rue (2006) have defined the same as the extent to which an employee accomplishes the tasks that make up his or her job.

Considering the hotel industry, there is a vast gap between the demand and the supply of hoteliers in Sri Lanka (Jayawardena & Miththapala, 2013). This means the current workforce of hoteliers meet with a high amount of pressure in order to fill the gap in the workforce and therefore people are forced to work for longer hours in order to maintain their careers and stay above the competition. This considerably deprives them of their free time and thereby, it is no surprise that the workforce is facing extreme stress. Rachid and Dominic (2006) have recognized workplace stress as a contributing factor to employee absence, turnover, and poor performance. This means the hotels have to pump massive amounts of time and cost in taking necessary action against employee stress levels in order to improve their performance. Therefore, the researchers intend to examine the impact of the stress on employee performance within the hotel industry and to discuss the stress through employees' work ambiguity and work overload.

2. Research problem

Tourism is a fast-growing industry which has been identified presently (www.srilanka.travel.n.d). That fast growth is facilitated by the sufficient employment opportunities and regional development employment (BOI, 2018). In 2012, Sri Lanka passed a milestone in its tourism history by recording more than one million tourist arrivals (Jayawardena & Miththapala, 2013). In the year 2018, 2.5 million tourists are expected to receive by the government (Ibid). To cater for this increase, there is an urgent need for more well-trained and qualified employees (Ibid). Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) indicates that there were a total of 57,780 persons directly employed in the tourism industry during the year 2012 (Ibid). Hence, using a statistical analysis of 57,780 direct employees servicing 1 million in 2012 will pave the way for 101,232 direct employees to service 2.5 million in 2018 (Ibid). The country, therefore, needs to train and develop more 43,452 new tourism workers to cater for such an increase (Ibid).

Out of the nine provinces in Sri Lanka, the Southern Province is treated as an ideal tourist destination by both locals and foreigners (Provincial Tourism In Sri Lanka, 2018). Most of the tourists who are coming to Sri Lanka frequently visit this region as their favourite destination. Therefore, Galle is one of the districts recorded the highest number of rooms (over 7,000) available in the year 2018 (Tourism Industry Report, 2018). Thus, the researchers have presented some of the data regarding the customer base of one of the selected hotels that operate in the Southern province.

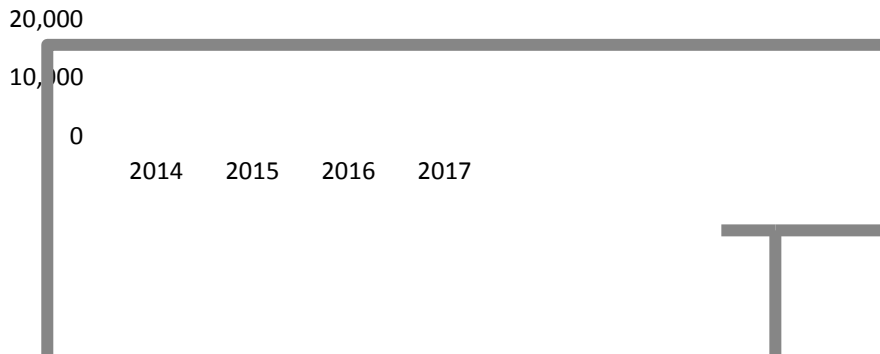


Figure 01: Annual Customer Base of a Selected Hotel, 2017

Figure 1 presents that the number of customers attracted to the hotel has increased yearly and therefore more workers are required to cater for such an increase in the customer base. However, when the researchers consider the hotels' data regarding the number of employees,

it reveals that most of the departments don't have enough employees as they expected (company internal records, 2017). This is further proved by Jayawardena and Miththapala (2013) stating that, in their article, the total employee shortage will be 43,452 workers in the whole industry. Due to the insufficient employee in the hotels, the workload of each worker becomes higher. This causes the worker fatigue and results in health-related issues, labour turnover and absenteeism (Sampson & Akyeampong, 2014).

When it comes to the industry examples, it is a well-known fact that the employees have to work around the clock during the peak season, especially in the southern part of Sri Larnaka. The employees get an overload of work since they have to work for longer hours without any break, or sufficient time to visit their loved ones. Not even that, employees feel work ambiguity since they have to cover the others' works during their colleagues' absence or due to employee shortage. This might cause employee stress. Demands at work, which includes exposure to issues such as workload and work patterns have been identified as a major contributor to work stress (Health and Safety Executive, 2001). Parker and DeCotis (as cited in Health and Safety Executive, 2004) observed that work stress can occur when individuals are faced with too much work than they can carry out. The implication is that employees perceive their workload to be high are likely to experience work stress, especially when the demands of the job do not match their capacity to handle such workloads (Ibid).

Work-related stress has become an important issue within the hospitality literature (Sampson & Akyeampong,2014). Further, their study reveals that seven factors cause work-related stress. Frontline hotel employees have indicated they suffer headaches, become frustrated and are unable to concentrate as a result of work-related stress (Ibid).

Even though this has become a hot issue in the hospitality industry, there is a dearth of studies conducted in this area. Within this scenario, the researchers intend to examine whether there is an impact of employees' experience of the work stress on their performances in the leisure sector of Sri Lanka, with special reference to the Southern province. The main research question of the study was 'what is the impact of work stress on employee performance?' and the specific questions were 'what is the impact of work overload on employee performance?' and 'what is the impact on work ambiguity on employee performance?.'

3. Review of the relevant literature

A study in the UK indicated that the majority of the workers were unhappy with the current culture where they were required to work extended hours and cope with large workloads

while meeting the performance targets and deadlines simultaneously (Townley, 2000). Cooper and Emory (1995) had conducted a research study to examine the work ambiguity and workload effect on employees' job performance. The results indicated that work overload and work ambiguity were negatively related to job performance.

An association between job stress and job performance of managers and blue-collar employees had been studied by Jamal (1984). A random sample of 305 blue-collar and 325 managerial workers in Canadian firm was surveyed through a structured questionnaire. Variables used for this study were job stress, job performance, and organizational commitment. A negative linear relationship between job stress and job performance was found and very limited evidence was observed for curvilinear or no association.

Rachid and Dominic (2006) revealed that workplace stress could increasingly be recognized as a contributing factor to employee absence, turnover, and poor performance. Further, Murphy (1995) researched that high levels of job stress could hobble an organization since pervasive stress often led to sharp losses in performance. Moreover, the research proved by Selye (1956) also supported this argument indicating that high job stress could lead to low performance.

4. Methods

In this study, the researchers have adopted a descriptive research design. A descriptive survey enables the researchers to describe the characteristics of the variables of interest. It is therefore justified that descriptive design is most suited and adopted in this study. The researchers have selected probability sampling design for the study because it provides the assurance that the sample will accurately reflect the population (Cooper & Emory, 1995). First, the 7 hotels operate in the Southern province were selected randomly which comprised a total sample of 120 participants.

Primary data was collected through questionnaires, which were designed and distributed to the target group. The secondary information was gathered using annual company reports, journal articles and research papers produced by various researchers over the years. The primary data analysis was done using SPSS version 23.0. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability, correlation, and regression. The correlation was used in order to identify the forms of relationships among the variables and simple linear regression was used to test the statistical significance of the hypotheses and also to measure the strength of the relationship.

Conceptualization and Hypotheses

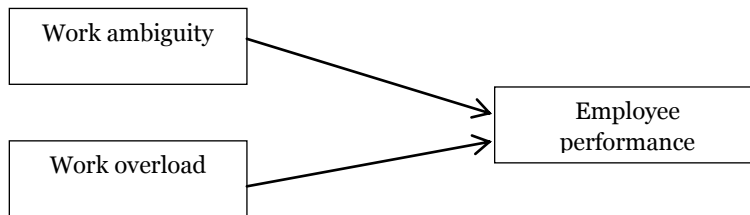


Figure 02: Conceptual Framework

Hypotheses 01

Work ambiguity has been thoroughly researched by prior researchers. Ramadu and Allan (2006) have found that two significant contributors to job stress are work ambiguity and role conflict. The basic definition for work ambiguity could be "the uncertainty of the task requirements of a particular job" (Eli, 2006). It has been researched by various researchers in many industries, and the relationship between work ambiguity and employee performance is considered as main role stressors that affect the employees. Bhuian, Menguc, and Borsboom (2005) have proved that employees who experience work ambiguity tend to perform at lower levels and generally are negatively related to job outcomes. Further, in a research done by Knight, Hae-Jung, and Crutsinger (2007) also have proved that salespeople who experience high levels of work ambiguity demonstrate low levels of customer orientation, selling orientation, and job performance. Similarly, a meta-analysis conducted by LePine and his colleagues (2005) showed that stressors such as work ambiguity are proved to be negatively related to job performance, which has also been added by Tracy and Presha (2002) who state that work ambiguity as an organizational stressor is thought to reduce the employees' ability to perform as it would divert the effort away from performing towards coping with work ambiguity. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the study can be depicted as,

H1- There is a negative impact of work ambiguity on employees performance

Hypothesis 02

Role overload is the degree to which a person perceives him/herself to be under time pressure because of the number of commitments and responsibilities one has in his/her life (Reilly, 1982). Work overload occurs where multiple demands exceed resources, and when there is not sufficient time to complete the set tasks (David & Catherine, 2003). Aziz (2004) who argues in relation to IT professional states that the ever-increasing technological complexity requires the users to change and therefore put qualitative pressures on the employees. The statement insisting that those who perceive higher levels of role overload tend to perform less has been supported by previous research carried out by Eric (2006). He states that though

stress is a normal part of life, work overload does nothing more than temporarily reducing the performance, thereby inducing serious illness. This has been further proved by Simona, Shirom, and Fried (2005). He has found that role overload negatively relates to all measures and dimensions of job performance. Therefore, is it important to recognize that the workload does not lead to increased productivity, effectiveness and economic savings and therefore can cause considerable losses, both human and economic (Auvo et al, 2006). Hence, depending on the above the second hypothesis of the study is;

H2- There is a negative impact of work overload on employee performance

5. Data analysis

The analysis was carried out on a specified target sample of 120 employees. A specific sample was used for the study because of the time limitations and restrictions in obtaining data from a larger sample. According to Allen and Seaman (2007), the questionnaires were built based on the five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The entire data analysis was done using SPSS version 23.0. Before the analysis of data using SPSS, data was coded/questionnaires. These processes ensured that the collected data was systematically organized (Mugenda, 2003). The data was analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability, validity, correlation, and regression. The correlation was used in order to identify the forms of relationships among the variables and simple linear regression was used to test the statistical significance of the hypotheses and also to measure the strength of the relationship.

6. Results and discussion

6.1. Demographic analysis

Majority of the respondents are male and single. As a percentage, it is 76.7% and 79.6%. Out of the total, 49.5% represents the age category of 21-30 whereas 22.3% represents the age group of below 20 years and just 7.8% representation of the age group of 41-50. It has also been observed that 35.9% of employees represent their highest educational level as ordinary level, 40.8% as advanced level, 15.5% as diploma, and 7.8% have achieved their highest educational level up to degree. When considering the employee's working experience, 79.6% employees have less than 1-year working experience, while 5.8% of employees have 3-5 years working experiences.

6.2. Reliability and validity of study variables

According to Tull and Hawkins (1987), reliability is the extent to which a measurement is free from variable errors. Therefore, as a result of this research, the Cronbach alpha value is used to assess the reliability of the scales. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency, that is, how closely related a set of items are as a group. The test will be significant when the alpha value result in more than 0.7 (George & Mallery, 2003).

Table 01: Reliability Statistics of Study Variables

Study Variable	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Workload	5	.839
Work Ambiguity	5	.729
Employee Performance	5	.729

Source: Survey Data (2018)

According to the above results, the scale used to measure the constructs of the study is highly reliable and significant since the reported Cronbach's Alpha value are greater than 0.7.

Table 02: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.917
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	730.920
	Df	105
	Sig.	.000

Source: Survey Data (2018)

The sample adequacy was tested using Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) Coefficient and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS). Sampling adequacy is measured by using KMO value. BTS is a statistical test used to test the overall significance of correlation. Generally, Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) needs to exceed 0.50. (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). Table 4 shows that the KMO value (0.917) and its significance that guarantees the sample taken from the population is sufficiently adequate to represent the whole population.

6.3. Correlation analysis

The correlation coefficient measures the strength of the relationship between two variables (Nickolas, 2017). Pearson's correlation coefficient is one of the most commonly used correlation coefficients and measures the linear relationship between two variables. The value of the correlation coefficient, denoted as r , ranges from -1 to $+1$, which gives the strength of the relationship and whether the relationship is negative or positive. When the value of r is greater than zero ($r > 0$), it is a positive relationship; when the value is less than zero ($r < 0$), it

is a negative relationship. A value of zero indicates that there is no relationship between the two variables (Ibid).

Table 03: Correlation Coefficient with Control Effect

Control variables	Avg EP	Avg WL	Avg WA	Gender	Age	Relationship status	Educational qualification	Working experience
Avg EP	1							
Avg WL	-0.709***	1						
Avg WA	-0.700***	0.786***	1					
Gender	-0.026	0.040	0.087	1				
Age	0.120	-0.104	-0.066	0.047	1			
Relationship Status	0.226**	-0.142	-0.066	0.062	0.096	1		
Educational Qualification	0.121	-0.171	-0.060	0.207**	0.160	0.180	1	
Working Experience	-0.044	0.068	0.070	0.029	0.089	0.136	0.275**	1

Notes: number of employees =103, EP= employee performance, WL= work load, WA=work ambiguity,

p***<, 0.01, p**<0.05

Source: Survey Data (2018)

According to Table 5, it is evident that work ambiguity and performance observe a significant relationship ($p < 0.01$). Moreover, it is also evident that work ambiguity and performance observe a -.700 of strong negative relationship. Similarly, in the findings of Fried, Ben-David, Avital, and Yeverchياهو (1998), it was proved a negative relationship between work ambiguity and performance. It is also evident that workload and performance observe a significant relationship ($p < 0.01$). Moreover, it is also evident that workload and performance observe a -.709 of strong negative relationship. Similarly, in the findings of Eli (2006), it was found that there was a negative relationship between work overload and employee performance.

6.4. Regression analysis

Regression Analysis is a set of statistical processes for estimating the relationships among variables. It includes many techniques for modeling and analyzing several variables when focusing on independent variables and dependent variables. The regression analysis is used in this study to assess the variation (impact) of independent variables (work ambiguity and work overload) on the dependent variable (employee performance).

Table 04: Regression Analysis

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig
.746 ^a	.556	.548	.43196	63.708	.000 ^b

a. Predictors : (Constant), AvgWA, AvgWL

Source: Survey Data (2018)

In the above Table 6, the R² of the model is 0.556, which shows that approximately 55.6% of variance in job performance can be explained by the linear combination of the workload and work ambiguity. This is proved by the “F” value which is significant (p<0.01).

Table 05: Coefficients of WL & WA

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	5.180	.291		17.816	.000
AvgWL	-.414	.107	-.417	-3.873	.000
AvgWA	-.375	.108	-.372	-3.460	.001

Source: Survey Data (2018)

According to Table 7, a negative impact is evident as the value of beta for the workload is -0.414 (p<0.01) which has shown a 41.4% variance in employee performance is explained by work overload. In other words, if one unit of workload increases, the employee performance will decrease by 41.4%. Therefore, the above data supports to accept the hypothesis 2 (H₂). This proves that there is sufficient evidence to accept the negative impact of work overload on employee performance. According to the findings of the study, It is also evident that there is a negative impact of work ambiguity on employee performance. The beta value for that is -0.375 and which is significant (p<0.01). It shows that a 37.5% variance in employee job performance is explained by work ambiguity. In other words, if one unit of work ambiguity increases, the employee performance will decrease by 37.5%. Therefore, it supports to accept the hypothesis 1 (H₁). The hypothesis testing information is further summarised in Table 8. □

Table 06: Summary of Hypotheses Testing

No	Variables	Expected	Observed	Whether supported/not	Values
1	Work ambiguity and performance	Negative	Negative	Supported	$\beta = -.372$ ($t = -3.460$, $p < .01$) correlation coefficient after controlling the control variable = $-.700$, $p < .01$
2	Workload and performance	Negative	Negative	Supported	$\beta = -.417$ ($t = -3.873$, $p < .01$) correlation coefficient after controlling the control variable = $-.709$, $p < .01$

Source: Survey Data (2018)

7. Conclusion

This research was analysed to illustrate the impact of employee stress levels on employee performance in the Hotel sector in Sri Lanka. The analysis was carried out on a specified target sample of 120 employees. Results were analysed using SPSS 23.0. Based on the research objectives that needed to be accomplished for these study relevant statistical models were used such as Cronbach's alpha to test the reliability of the measurement scale, Pearson Correlation to test the significance of the relationships of variables, and Regression to test the validity of the hypothesis studied.

It has been proved a strong negative relationship between independent (workload and work ambiguity) and dependent (employee performance) variables. Therefore, the two hypotheses are accepted. Similarly, according to the international literature from the past research articles from Selye (1956), Jamal (1984), Murphy (1995) and, Rachid and Dominic (2006), it is evident that there has been a relationship between employee stress and performance. Not only that, it is also important to note that the above researchers also have proved negative relationships in which they have concluded that high-stress levels will result in hindering performance. On that note which is similar to the findings of the current research, it can be concluded that there is a negative relationship between employee stress and performance

where performance would decrease as the levels of stress increase, which concludes in line with the past researchers who have conducted similar studies on stress internationally.

However, it can also be observed that most of the researchers have examined the impact of work stress on employee performance in call center employees, apparel sector employees, IT firms, and banking sector; but it seems less or no research has been conducted on the hotel industry in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is worthy to investigate the respective topic among hotel employees.

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