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A Critical Review of Workplace Stress: Causes, Theoretical Models and Strategic Management Approaches

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Abstract

Workplace stress is a widespread concern in modern organizations, significantly affecting employee well-being, productivity, job satisfaction, and overall organizational performance. This paper explores the multifaceted nature of workplace stress by examining its causes, consequences, theoretical frameworks, and effective management strategies. The study synthesizes insights from established theories, including Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, Person-Environment Fit Theory, Equity Theory, Demand-Support-Control Theory, and the Emotional Overload Model, to analyze workplace stress dimensions. The Cognitive-Behavioral Theory explores how individual perceptions shape stress responses, while the Person-Environment Fit Theory examines stress as a result of misalignment between personal abilities and job demands. Equity Theory highlights the impact of perceived imbalances in effort and rewards, whereas the Demand-Support-Control Theory identifies excessive demands, limited autonomy, and inadequate support as key stressors. Additionally, the Emotional Overload Model emphasizes the role of excessive workloads and poor work-life balance in stress development. Research has found several causes of workplace stress, including excessive workloads, lack of recognition, toxic work environments, tight deadlines, and insufficient support systems. Effective strategies often integrate personal stress management techniques with systemic changes within the organization to create a supportive and balanced work environment. Future research could explore innovative approaches, such as virtual reality-based stress management, to enhance employee well-being, resilience, and overall organizational performance.

Keywords: *Employee Well-being, Stress Management, Work-life Balance, Workplace Stress, Organizational Performance.*

INTRODUCTION

The modern work environment continues to undergo significant transformations driven by rapid technological advancements, changing workforce demographics, and increasing work pressures, making it essential to understand and effectively address workplace stress. Work overload often subjects employees to undue pressure, exacerbated by factors such as toxic work culture, ambiguous instructions from supervisors, tight deadlines, and inadequate support.

Unmanaged workplace stress can lead to decreased productivity and job satisfaction, heightened absenteeism, increased employee turnover, and long-term physical and mental health problems. To tackle these issues, Yamoah and Haque (2024) advocate for timely interventions that promote organizational growth. These measures include reinforcing core workplace values, introducing flexible working arrangements, investing in employee training and development, and fostering a positive work environment.

Sokolova (2015), and Yamoah and Haque (2024) emphasize the competitive advantages of workforce diversity in the evolving global marketplace. A diverse workforce enhances productivity and quality by integrating individuals with varied skills and perspectives from around the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated workplace challenges by increasing technology-induced exhaustion and diminishing subjective well-being, contributing to job burnout, anxiety, and fatigue (Bakken & Winn, 2021; Jimenez-Gomez et al., 2021; Allgood et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022). These factors

negatively impacted employee performance. During the pandemic, international health regulations restricted physical interactions to curb transmission. Lockdowns were imposed in response to surging case numbers, disrupting businesses and cash flow, particularly in developed economies. In many developing countries, low wages, inadequate housing, limited internet access, and insufficient infrastructure compounded these difficulties, preventing organizations from meeting their targets.

In Nigeria, workplace stress has profound psychological and physiological repercussions, manifesting as aggressive behavior, lack of empathy, emotional breakdowns, and stress-related disorders, all of which undermine organizational productivity. Role ambiguity and work overload contribute significantly to brain drain, particularly in the medical sector, where professionals frequently emigrate, leaving a void often filled by unqualified practitioners.

Individual differences, excessive workloads, role ambiguity, and role conflicts are key stressors that foster toxic workplace environments. These conditions can lead to interpersonal conflicts, unhealthy competition, and resentment, intensifying workplace stress (Babapour et al., 2022). Addressing these global stressors is crucial to enhancing employee well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational productivity.

While there is no definitive consensus on the causes and management of workplace stress, this paper aims to advance the understanding of its primary drivers and offer effective strategies to alleviate its impact.

This paper seeks to examine the primary causes of workplace stress, critically assess theoretical frameworks related to the phenomenon, and propose practical strategies for mitigating its impact.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace stress is defined as the physical, emotional, and psychological responses triggered when employees perceive themselves as unable to meet the demands of their jobs. It originates from excessive demands and pressures that surpass an individual's coping capacity (Mbanefo et al., 2019), evolving into a multifaceted issue that detrimentally affects employee productivity and organizational performance.

As described by Adiguzel and Kuculoglu (2019), workplace stress involves a state of tension that induces physiological, mental, and emotional changes resulting from workplace conditions. Workplace stress impacts both employers and employees alike.

This stress emerges when there is a mismatch between job demands and an employee's perceived control over them (Gahlawat, 2022). Workplace stress is particularly critical in developing countries as such issues are frequently overlooked (Yeboah-Kordie et al., 2018). This neglect has led to widespread challenges, including reduced productivity, high turnover rates, absenteeism, and adverse health outcomes (Ajayi, 2018). Stress-related conditions span a range of psychological disorders from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to emotional strains like dissatisfaction, fatigue, and tension (Selye, 1976). These issues over time can result in diminished job performance, increased absenteeism, lower productivity, and even workplace injuries. Prolonged stress is further linked to biological responses that compromise health, potentially leading to cardiovascular diseases or, in severe cases, mortality.

Conversely, some researchers view workplace stress as potentially beneficial, emphasizing its role as a motivational force that can enhance employee performance under certain circumstances (Di Fabio et al., 2018; Brule & Morgan, 2018; Guruge & Ban, 2021).

DIMENSIONS OF WORKPLACE STRESS

Work overload: This arises due to the demands of a job being greater than an employee's skill, enthusiasm, and time. (Tang & Vandenberghe, 2021). In some cases, managers believe this can lead to higher productivity but this tends to be disastrous in the absence of a balance, prompting serious employee grievances (Mujtaba, 2022). This issue has inflicted substantial costs on both organizations and their

workforce (Alfes et al., 2018; Tang & Vandenberghe, 2021) including physical challenges such as hypertension, cardiovascular disorders and psychological challenges such as change in behaviour. However, some researchers argue that work overload can improve initiative, proactivity, and in general, leadership qualities in employees (Kuijpers et al., 2020; Ingusci et al., 2021; Nielsen, 2019).

Role conflict: An emotional conflict arising when competing demands are made on an individual in the fulfillment of their multiple social roles (Awan et al., 2021). It occurs when one's status is in conflict with their role in society (Anand & Vohra, 2020). Furthermore, role conflict has been categorized into two types: inter-role and intra-role conflicts. Inter-role conflict emerges when competing demands arise from different aspects of an employee's life, while intra-role conflict occurs within a single domain, such as managing diverse work responsibilities (Awan et al., 2021; Dai et al., 2019).

Role ambiguity: This refers to a lack of clarity about one's job responsibilities, expectations, or scope of duties within an organization. It occurs when an individual does not understand what is required to perform their role effectively, leading to confusion and potential stress. By that, it is clear that role ambiguity can negatively affect job performance, satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

Role ambiguity is prevalent in the healthcare system particularly due to the overlapping responsibilities of nurses and doctors, exacerbated by doctors asserting a sense of superiority (Germov, 2019). Fortunately, the nursing profession has been adapted to include prescription responsibilities, with research indicating that nurses demonstrate equal proficiency to doctors at prescribing (Boonen et al., 2020; Naseer et al., 2021). This has brought about positive changes in the healthcare profession, including increased collaboration, improved nurse education, and changes to the workplace environment (Everett & Davidson, 2020; Ruiz-Fernandez et al., 2020).

Interpersonal workplace relationship: Interpersonal workplace relationships refer to the interactions and bonds formed among employees within an organizational setting (Anjum & Ming, 2018). Establishing positive workplace relationships is essential for an organization's survival and growth, as they significantly influence employees' morale, motivation, and overall job satisfaction (Abun et al., 2019). Strong interpersonal connections among employees contribute to a supportive work environment, reducing stress levels and enhancing collaboration. Employees who feel valued and supported by their colleagues are more likely to experience job fulfillment, leading to increased productivity and commitment.

Conversely, toxic workplace relationships negatively impact well-being and performance. Conflict, gossip, and favoritism contribute to emotional exhaustion and workplace stress. Toxicity lowers engagement, increases absenteeism, and raises turnover rates (Rasool et al., 2019). Poor interpersonal dynamics can also contribute to role conflicts, misunderstandings, and communication breakdowns.

Healthy workplace relationships not only promote employees' mental health and well-being but also foster a culture of trust, respect, and mutual support (Tran et al., 2018). Organizations that invest in team-building activities, mentorship programs, and open communication channels tend to create more harmonious work environments. Effective leadership plays a crucial role in shaping interpersonal workplace relationships. Leaders who encourage inclusivity, collaboration, and emotional intelligence help cultivate a civil work environment where employees feel psychologically safe and valued (Naseer et al., 2021). By prioritizing positive interpersonal dynamics, organizations can mitigate stress, boost morale, and enhance overall workplace efficiency.

Leadership: Motivating others to achieve goals is a critical aspect of leadership, where leaders inspire their followers to take purposeful actions toward predetermined objectives (Matira & Awolusi, 2020). Key leadership styles include transformational, laissez-faire, servant, and transactional leadership (Kelly & Hearld, 2020). Transformational and servant leadership prioritize values such as honesty, empathy, and ethical behavior, whereas laissez-faire leadership reflects a lack of leadership accountability (Kelly & Hearld, 2020).

Leadership styles significantly influence employee performance, motivation, and behavior, thereby shaping organizational success (Aunga & Masare, 2017; Olayisade & Awolusi, 2021). Evidence indicates that charismatic and democratic leadership styles foster employee productivity, while autocratic and transactional styles often have a detrimental effect (Olayisade & Awolusi, 2021). Effective leaders inspire their teams, enhancing commitment, performance, and overall organizational efficiency (Udovita, 2020; Govindasamy et al., 2021).

Despite these insights, limited research has explored the moderating role of leadership styles in mitigating workplace stress, promoting employee health, and improving performance outcomes (Govindasamy et al., 2021).

Employee performance: Employee performance refers to the evaluation of an individual's contributions toward achieving organizational objectives through assigned tasks (Zangmo & Chhetri, 2022). It encompasses the effort exerted and measurable outcomes based on task quantity, quality, and time investment (Samudri et al., 2020; Yuliantini & Suryantiningsih, 2021; Paramita & Suwandana, 2022). Performance is categorized into task, adaptive, and contextual performance (Saleem et al., 2021) and is assessed using criteria such as punctuality, quantity, quality, independence, and effectiveness (Paramita & Suwandana, 2022).

Employee performance has been linked to productivity, efficiency, and growth, making employees invaluable assets to their organizations (Stanca & Tarbujaru, 2022; Budur & Poturak, 2021; Guruge & Ban, 2021; Abualoush et al., 2018). However, stressed employees often exhibit poor performance, reduced productivity, and ultimately contribute little value to their organisations (Bartels, 2020). Key factors influencing performance include decision-making, the workplace environment, and employee participation in implementation of ideas (Bartels, 2020; Fonkeng, 2018). Managers must address these elements by ensuring adequate resources and support to facilitate employee success (Al-nadesh et al., 2022).

Employee productivity which can be simply put as the relationship between output and input, is typically measured by net value added per employee (Oppong & Pattanayak, 2019; Ezeamama, 2019; Olasanmi et al., 2021). It represents an organizational asset derived from employee expertise and access to essential resources (Ezeamama, 2019). Productivity gauges efficiency when employees are equipped with suitable resources (Abane et al., 2022) and plays a critical role in organizational performance and competitiveness (Kobani et al., 2022). Organizations benefit when employees optimize resources cost-effectively through timeliness, discipline, coordination, analytical skills, and manpower expertise (Leonard, 2018).

THEORETICAL MODELS

1) COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOURAL THEORY:

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984; cited in Devereux, 2009), stress experience is an individual phenomenon and a cognitive process. This theory proposes that individuals in the workplace perceive and interpret their work environment differently based on their inherent aspects. To the proponents of this theory, there is nothing as a stressor by itself, rather if an individual perceives a stimulus as a stressor, it becomes a stressor.

Each employee brings with them a unique set of personal attributes and needs to the job and in turn the characteristics of the job itself and the working environment place demands on the employee. If the employee appraises that they have the capabilities and resources to meet the demands of the job and the working environment also meets their needs, they experience job satisfaction. However, if the employee appraises that they do not have the required capabilities, personal attributes and coping resources to meet the demands of the job or the job itself does not meet the needs of the individual, then occupational stress is likely to be experienced.

The key components of this theory are:

- Cognitive appraisal: Individuals in the workplace process and interpret work demands, available resources, constraints which may lead to a perception of threat or challenge.
- Beliefs and attitudes: Pre-existing beliefs and attitudes of individuals in the workplace can affect how they perceive and respond to work stressors.
- Thought patterns: How an individual thinks in the workplace can increase stress.
- Emotional response: Cognitive appraisal and thought patterns affect emotional response.
- Behavioural response: When workers perceive stressors in the work environment, they respond to it differently. Some can engage in maladaptive coping strategies such as absenteeism, substance abuse, and turnover intention to manage stress.

Ways suggested by proponents of this theory to manage stress in the workplace include:

- Cognitive restructuring: this means identifying and working on the thought patterns of individuals in the workplace.
- Problem-focused coping: organisations should adopt effective problem-solving skills.
- Emotion-focused coping: the morale of workers should be boosted so as to be resilient when challenged in the workplace.
- Relaxation techniques: workers should be taught some stress reduction techniques such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation.

Figure 1 shows the components of the Cognitive-Behavioural Theory.

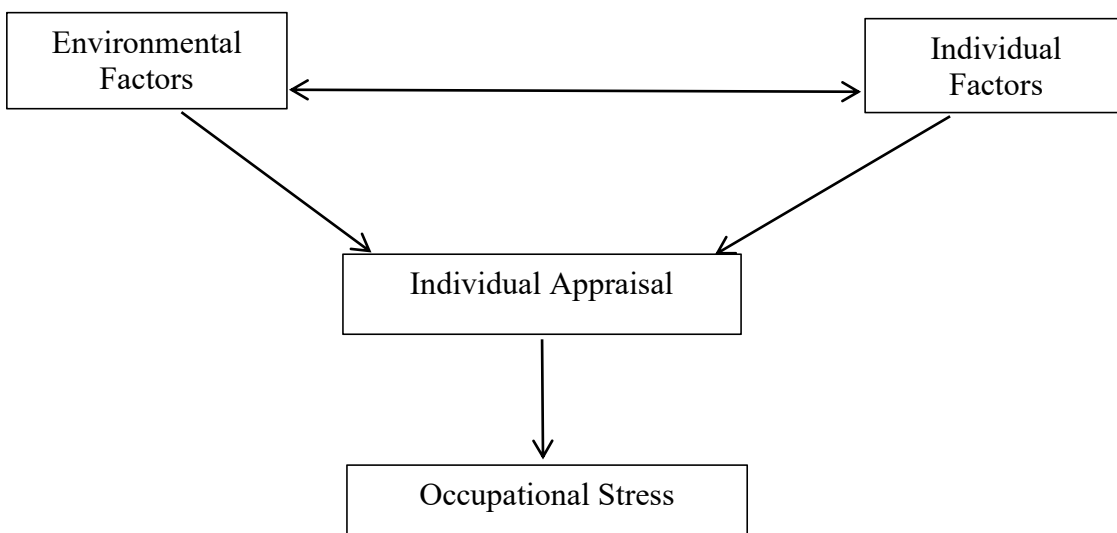


Figure 1: Components of Cognitive-Behavioural Theory

Limitations of Cognitive-Behavioural Theory (CBT)

In as much as CBT is widely used as an effective approach to managing stress in the workplace, it has its shortcomings which include:

1. Overemphasis on individual responsibility: This theory overlooks the organisational and structural factors that contribute to stress.
2. Focus on symptom reduction: This theory lays emphasis on the symptoms of stress rather than the remote cause of stress.
3. Limited attention to power: Organisations is about planned policies, rules and regulations, coordinated activities, power structure and authority delineation. This theory neglects the impact of organisational hierarchy and power imbalance on stress.
4. Physiological responses: CBT dwells on the inherent aspects of the individuals and overlooks the physiological stress responses.

5. Overreliance on self-reporting: Self-reported data can be subjective and should not be relied on solely.
6. Limited generalization: CBT may not be generalized across different populations and contexts.
7. Therapist-client relationship: The effectiveness of this theory depends on a strong therapeutic alliance.
8. Cultural diversity: This theory may not account for diverse cultural backgrounds and norms.

2) PERSON-ENVIRONMENT FIT THEORY (PEFT)

This theory proposes that stress occurs in the workplace as a result of a mismatch between the individuals' innate characteristics and their work environment. According to Cooper et al. (2001), stress results from the level of fit between the person and the environment. These individual characteristics such as abilities, needs, values, personality must be congruent with the characteristics of the work environment such as job demands, job resources, organisational culture and social support. The theory proposes that behaviour and well-being are influenced by the fit between an individual's characteristics (e.g. personality, abilities, values) and the demands and resources of their environment (e.g. work, home, social).

Unlike CBT that focuses on individual appraisal, PEFT focuses on the interaction between an individual's characteristics (e.g. capabilities, attitudes, skills) and their environment. CBT aims to modify maladaptive thoughts and behaviours while PEFT focuses on optimizing the fit between an individual and their environment to promote the well-being of the employees and increase organisational productivity.

For instance, a medical doctor who got employed in a school setting to teach will experience stress because he/she does not have the capabilities to meet the demands of the job. Same thing as employing someone who studied linguistics in the bank. The individual will not be satisfied with the job because of insufficient capabilities to match the job demands. This theory conceptualizes stress as a result of an interaction between an individual and their environment.

Three types of matches exist:

- i. Demand-Ability fit: the individual's abilities must agree with the job demands.
- ii. Need-Supply fit: the job resources must be capable of meeting the individual's needs.
- iii. Value-Goal fit: organisational values must align with individual values to avoid stress, burnout, decreased job satisfaction, poor performance and increased turnover.

Proponents of this theory suggest in fitting the man to the job and fitting the job to the man. They suggest that jobs should be designed to align with the individual abilities and needs. They uphold training and development and finally suggest that the work environment should be modified to accommodate individual values and needs.

PEFT has its limitations. It adopts a static perspective neglecting the dynamic changes in individuals and their environments. It fails to clearly define the boundaries between person and environment, power imbalances and the impact on stress. There's so much emphasis on individual-level fit thereby neglecting team and organisational -level fit. In addition, PEF fails to address the issue of individual and cultural differences in perceptions of fit and how fits can change over time. More research is needed to better explain the complexities of person-environment interactions.

3) DEMAND-CONTROL-SUPPORT THEORY (DCS)

This theory was developed by Robert Karasek (1979). The theory proposes that the interaction between the work demand perception (psychological and physical) such as workload, time pressure, complexity, perceived degree of support (social and organisational resources) including supervisor support, coworker support and organisational support and the perception of control (autonomy and decision-making authority) which include task control, method control and timing control influence the development of work stress.

Support at the workplace can promote general well-being, quality of work life and active coping and as a buffer. The high risk of work stress will be carried by high demand, low control and low support. DCS suggests that organisations redesign jobs to reduce demand and develop support and control with a vision to increase worker productivity and engagement (Theorell, 2001).

DCS theory has been criticized over limited consideration of individual differences, over simplification of complex work environments and difficulty in measuring control and support.

While PEFT focuses on the individual-environment match, DCS offers a more specific framework for understanding the effects of job demands, control, and support on employee well-being.

4) EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD MODEL

This model explains how individuals experience emotional exhaustion caused by prolonged stress, overwork and lack of balance in life outside work. This model throws light on the relevance of emotional demands and resources in the workplace, providing valuable insights for organisations to reduce emotional exhaustion and promote employee well-being through stress management programs, job redesign to mitigate emotional demands and emotional intelligence training.

However, this model is limited in research as it is difficult to measure emotional overload.

Table 1 summarizes the different dimensions of workplace stress, relevant theories, and corresponding research findings.

Table 1: Summary Table Mapping Key Theories and Findings to the Dimensions of Workplace Stress

Dimension of Workplace Stress	Key Theories	Findings
Work Overload	Demand-Control-Support Theory, Emotional Overload Model	Excessive workload leads to burnout, physical health issues (e.g., hypertension), and psychological strain. However, some studies suggest it can enhance leadership and initiative if balanced properly
Role Conflict	Person-Environment Fit Theory, Cognitive-Behavioral Theory	Role conflict arises when individuals face conflicting demands within their roles, leading to stress and reduced performance. It is categorized as inter-role or intra-role conflict
Role Ambiguity	Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, Person-Environment Fit Theory	Unclear job expectations and responsibilities lead to confusion, anxiety, and diminished job performance. Found prominently in healthcare settings.
Interpersonal Workplace Relationships	Cognitive-Behavioral Theory	Poor workplace relationships contribute to stress, while strong social support enhances morale, productivity, and overall well-being.
Leadership	Cognitive-Behavioral	Leadership styles significantly

	Theory, Demand-Control-Support Theory	impact workplace stress levels. Transformational leadership reduces stress, while autocratic leadership increases stress and turnover.
Employee Performance	Person-Environment Fit Theory, Demand-Control-Support Theory	Workplace stress negatively affects performance, job satisfaction, and engagement. Some researchers argue that stress, in moderation, can boost motivation.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Ampofo et al. (2020) analyzed stress-related productivity issues among Ghana Health Service employees in Wa Municipality, using a descriptive survey with 50 participants from a population of 100. The findings showed that stress stemmed from poor job fit and lack of participation in decision-making, resulting in stress-related illnesses, feelings of helplessness, low-performance ratings, and higher turnover intentions. Guruge and Ban (2021), investigating job stress in Sri Lanka's plantation sector, found a significant positive relationship between occupational stress and employee performance ($r = .978$, $p < .01$). Despite heavy workloads causing stress, performance levels remained unaffected.

Naru and Rehman (2020) explored stress-inducing factors among employees in Pakistan's fast-food industry and their influence on performance. The study identified employee stress as a mediating variable and employee performance as the dependent variable. With 350 distributed surveys analyzed through SPSS and SmartPLS, the findings highlighted that work overload and job insecurity (independent variables) significantly influenced employee stress, which, in turn, affected employee performance. Similarly, Daniel (2020) examined the impact of work-related stress on performance, delving into stress types and their effects on employee effectiveness. The study revealed that mismanaged workplace stress undermines performance by increasing absenteeism, turnover, and medical expenses while reducing productivity. It was revealed that stressors negatively impacted employees' efficiency and overall productivity.

Puteh et al. (2021) assessed workplace conditions and their correlation with performance at the PT. Plantation Nusantara IV. Using the Kendall Tau test, the study identified a negative correlation between job stress and performance, with a coefficient of -0.550. Felmban and Khan (2021) examined stress's dual effects on productivity and job satisfaction in private companies in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The findings from 116 participants showed that stress could enhance or diminish both productivity and satisfaction.

Sari et al. (2021) investigated job stress and productivity in Indonesia's manufacturing sector through multivariate regression analysis with 93 employees. The results revealed a statistically significant association between the work environment, stress, and performance, yielding a correlation coefficient of 0.972. Okechukwu (2021) analyzed job stability, role conflict, and workload pressure using the person-environment fit theory. Data from 386 employees demonstrated a negative relationship between productivity and both workload stress and role conflict, whereas job security had minimal impact.

Oseremen et al. (2022) studied the effects of workplace stress on bankers' productivity in Benin City, Nigeria. Using regression analysis with a sample of 400, they identified workload, role ambiguity, and role conflict as significant predictors, explaining 64% of variability in productivity. Workload positively correlated with productivity, while role ambiguity had a negative impact.

Finally, Elsafty and Shafik (2022) explored job stress among employees in an Egyptian private bank during the COVID-19 pandemic. With 51 respondents from a population of 1,100, the descriptive study revealed that job overload negatively impacted performance, whereas role ambiguity and underutilized skills had no significant effect.

STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Some employers and employees perceive stress as a necessary pressure to enhance productivity and profitability. However, research disputes this notion, revealing that stressful work environments often result in higher absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover intentions among employees.

A healthy workplace is characterized by low levels of illness, injury, and disability within the workforce while maintaining competitiveness in the marketplace. To address the adverse effects of workplace stress on productivity, motivation, and employee commitment, many organizations implement proactive measures to create a positive work environment. Addressing stress early is crucial, as prolonged exposure to stressors can lead to more severe consequences (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2020).

To enhance employee well-being and mental health, organizations are encouraged to adopt stress management strategies. Hybrid work models are increasingly popular, offering flexible options to accommodate diverse employee needs. For instance, a fixed onsite schedule where employees work from the office on specific days, such as Mondays and Tuesdays, combined with remote work options for the remainder of the week, can help mitigate stress.

Recognizing employees' efforts, fostering a culture of appreciation, providing career development opportunities, and ensuring management practices align with organizational values are additional strategies to alleviate job stress. Stress management training and employee assistance programs (EAPs) further support employees by equipping them with tools to identify stressors, understand their health implications, and employ techniques like time management and relaxation exercises to counteract them. These programs can reduce symptoms such as anxiety and insomnia, promoting resilience in the workplace. Organizations may also engage consultants to assess and enhance the work environment.

The design and implementation of stress management programs depend on the organization's size, complexity, resources, and specific stress-related challenges. Employees, in turn, play a role in maintaining mental health by practicing relaxation techniques, effective time management, prioritizing tasks, building positive relationships with colleagues, and adopting healthy lifestyle habits like regular exercise and proper nutrition.

While it is unrealistic to eliminate job stress entirely, strategies such as these can significantly reduce its prevalence, enhancing employee productivity, morale, and organizational success. Further research is necessary to identify and refine approaches to managing workplace stress and promoting holistic employee well-being.

METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature. Secondary sources of data used include research journals, published data, published books, relevant documents, online reports, and websites.

The studies reviewed were selected based on their relevance to workplace stress. The studies explicitly examined any of workplace stress, its causes, consequences, and management strategies. Both theoretical and empirical studies were considered, to ensure a balanced integration of conceptual models and real-world findings. Studies reviewed include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic conference proceedings, and reputable institutional reports. To ensure contemporary relevance, studies published within the last two decades were prioritized, although foundational works such as Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress appraisal model and Karasek's (1979) Demand-Control-Support theory were also included. Additionally, research from diverse geographical regions and industries, including healthcare, education, corporate, and industrial sectors, was incorporated to provide a global perspective on workplace stress.

Theoretical models were evaluated based on conceptual rigor, empirical support, scope, applicability, explanatory power, practical utility, and limitations. Each model's grounding in psychological and organizational theories, along with its empirical validation, was assessed to determine its robustness. The ability of a model to explain multiple dimensions of workplace stress, such as work overload, role ambiguity, and interpersonal workplace relationships, was considered crucial in determining its relevance across different occupational settings. Explanatory power was evaluated by analyzing how effectively each model accounted for stress-related outcomes like burnout, absenteeism, and job performance, while practical utility was assessed based on the extent to which a model offered actionable insights for stress management, workplace policies, and employee support programs. Finally, the limitations and criticisms associated with each theoretical model were identified to highlight gaps in addressing contemporary workplace challenges, including remote work and digital stress.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the review of other studies, it was found that role conflict, role ambiguity, leadership style, and interpersonal relationship had negative effects on employee performance, consistent with the existing body of research.

The negative effect of role conflict on employee performance corresponds with the findings of Okechukwu (2021), Dim et al. (2021), and Oseremen et al. (2022). Role conflict arises amidst the presence of different conflicting demands which can lead to stress, frustration, and reduced productivity (Daniel, 2020). Meanwhile, the negative effect of role ambiguity on employee performance is consistent with the findings of Dim et al. (2021), and Zangmo and Chhetri (2022). Role ambiguity arises when employees lack clarity about their roles and responsibilities. This can result in confusion, stress, and decreased motivation. This emphasizes the importance of clear job descriptions, effective communication, and regular feedback from supervisors.

On the other hand, work overload had a positive effect on employee performance, contradicting the findings of Naru and Rehman (2020), Pateh et al. (2021), and Okechukwu (2021). However, this result is consistent with the findings of Guruge and Ban (2021), wherein a substantial positive association was found between occupational stress and employee performance in Sri Lanka's plantation sector. The positive relationship between work overload and employee performance could be attributed to the nature of the employees. Some employees may perceive work overload, up to a certain limit, as challenging and motivating. In addition, the perception of work overload can vary across different organisational contexts and cultural settings.

Furthermore, existence of strong workplace relationships was found to have a positive impact on employees, in alignment with the theoretical underpinnings of the study. Leadership style also had a negative relationship with employee performance, in line with the work of Sucharitha and Basha (2020), wherein it was found that the pressure from leaders on employees to perform better had a rather negative impact on employee performance. Effective leadership is necessary to increase employee motivation, provide clear directions for the organisation, and support the career development of employees.

The findings of this study support the theoretical frameworks and models discussed in the literature review, including the Person-Environment Fit theory, Cognitive-Behavioural theory, Emotional Overload model, and Demand-Control-Support theory.

CONCLUSION

This paper successfully outlined primary causes and dimensions of workplace stress, critically assessed theoretical frameworks related to workplace stress, and proposed practical strategies for mitigating the impact of workplace stress in organisations. The findings revealed that work overload had a significant positive effect on employee performance, while role conflict, role ambiguity, and leadership style had significant negative effects on employee performance.

Workplace relationships and employee performance showed a positive relationship. Furthermore, it was found that a healthy level of workload may motivate employees to perform better but an excessive amount can lead to burnout and in turn decreased productivity. Meanwhile, role conflict and role ambiguity create confusion, frustration, and stress which can reduce an employee's ability to effectively perform his or her duties.

In addition, the study emphasizes the importance of positive workplace relationships and an effective leadership style in enhancing employee productivity. The consequences of supportive interpersonal relationships in the workplace include better communication, collaboration and problem-solving. Meanwhile, effective leadership provides clear directions for employees, fosters career development among employees, and creates a motivating work environment.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge. It provides an in-depth analysis of the dimensions of workplace stress and reveals the interplay between workload, role ambiguity, role conflict, interpersonal relationships in the workplace, leadership, and employee productivity. This review supports the theoretical models, Cognitive-Behavioural model and Person-Environment Fit model discussed. Future research should focus on empirical studies on emerging stress management strategies and the impact of hybrid work on stress levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERS

Clear Task Definition and Recognition: Organizations and leaders should clearly define tasks before assigning them. This ensures employees have a clear understanding of their responsibilities, minimizing ambiguity and preventing undue burden on specific individuals. Recognizing and appreciating employees' efforts and competencies fosters a positive and supportive work environment, boosting morale and motivation.

Transparent Communication: Organizations should ensure to establish a culture of transparent communication between management and employees to help address and manage workplace stress effectively. Open communication channels enable employees to express concerns and seek guidance, creating a sense of trust and psychological safety within the organization.

Strengthening relationships: Leaders should encourage bonding among employees towards achieving a cooperative staff. Friendliness should be encouraged to enhance overall morale of the work environment.

Health and wellness programs: Organizations should provide health benefits and insurance to alleviate concerns about health and well-being. Wellness programs focusing on mental health, stress, and work-life balance should be just as valuable.

Individualized approach: Just as different people respond differently to stress, the needs and preferences for alleviating stress are also unique. Hence, organisations should craft stress management plans tailored to the unique needs of the individuals.

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