

YOUNG AND STRESSED: WORK PRESSURE VERSUS MOTIVATION AMONG FRESH GRADUATES IN SELANGOR

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(Received 24th July 2024; revised 26th October 2024; accepted 03rd November 2024)

Abstract. Transitions from education to work caused work stress, affecting the fresh graduate's working motivation. Work stress is caused by a variety of factors, including severe workloads, job conflict, and organisational climate. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of work stress levels on job motivation among fresh graduate employees in Selangor. This quantitative research utilised the Work Stress Questionnaire (WSQ) and Motivation at Work Scale (MAWS) inventory to measure work stress level and job motivation among the targeted population. In conducting this research, the 127 respondents were recruited through purposive sampling based on the specific criteria set. The acquired data has been analysed using SPSS version 27 for both descriptive and inferential analysis. Using linear regression analysis, the results showed a statistically weak positive relationship between work stress and job motivation among fresh graduate employees in Selangor. Hence, there is a meaningful impact of work stress on job motivation among fresh graduates in Selangor. Examining the relationship between work stress and job motivation among fresh graduates provides valuable insights into enhancing well-being and job satisfaction upon entering the workforce.

Keywords: *work stress, job motivation, fresh graduates, Selangor*

Introduction

Employees' mental health is crucial to maintain a good quality of work and feelings of emotion. Though stress is a natural response to life's challenges, when it interferes with regular functioning, it may become harmful as it might cause physiological alterations that impact almost all bodily systems, thus affecting an individual's emotions and actions. As determined in a study by Ab Aziz et al. (2023), workplace stress is characterised by negative physical and psychological reactions that arise when an employee's needs, resources, or abilities are not met by the demands of their employment. It was demonstrated that work-related stress impairs an employee's performance by decreasing productivity, raising job insecurity, and resulting in more serious health problems (Ab Aziz et al., 2023). It is vital to acknowledge that stress can induce a range of mental health concerns, including anger, depression, tension, and irritability, and can negatively damage employees' family life and professional performance, posing a significant risk to organisations, as mentioned by Hemdev (2023). Khuong and Linh (2020), motivation is a process that addresses individual expectations and requirements and is recognised as an important driver for organisational success since it encourages individuals to perform well. To achieve an organization's objectives, the employer relies on their employees' performance (Bhat and Patni, 2023). According to Nurdiansyah et al. (2020), motivation is a collection of actions, attitudes, values, and beliefs, as well as other factors of interest that are inextricably linked to one another. Workplace motivation can be simply defined and assessed in terms of the level of intensity, responsibility, and creativity that an organization's employees bring to their jobs (Liu et al., 2022). An imbalance between

work and life would also have a detrimental impact on employee motivation, job satisfaction, and job loyalty (Khuong and Linh, 2020).

In Malaysia, it was revealed that the prevalence of anxious, depression, and stress symptoms came out to be the greatest among youth population, especially those aged 18 to 25 years old, while the COVID-19 epidemic has put a pressure on their mental health (Han, 2023). Murugaiah (2021) stated that stress at work is a result of an employee's capacity to manage how successfully they fulfill work responsibilities. A crucial component of successful career preparation among graduates is the ability to adapt to challenging industrial settings (Idris and Bacotang, 2023). Similarly, job-related and employability skills have become propensity assets to adapt to the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) landscape in different workplaces (Omar et al., 2021). However, for first-employment groups, this might trigger anxiety and work-related stress as they are not fully conscious of the real working environment. This might happen due to the fact that most graduates are only provided with industrial training technically but are not really given the opportunity to drive themselves in the real adaptation of the organization's politics, the organization's inner problems, and, most importantly, being assigned to the piling tasks and works (Ali and Muhammad, 2018). Fresh graduates are constantly worrying about finding a job and figuring out how to live in a competitive world (Ali et al., 2024). Graduate employability has grown in importance for recent graduates, aspiring grads, and even seasoned workers as the nation struggles with the COVID-19 epidemic. There is little question that employers, business leaders, and legislators have discussed this issue frequently. Stress at work can quickly arise when a person is unable to handle the demands of their daily work. In today's business world, the major causes of stress may be found in poorly managed work organisations, poorly managed work designs, inadequate leadership and management, subpar working environments, and competitive work cultures (Harshana, 2018).

Literature review

Work stress

In today's businesses, work stress is a major worry because it can have an influence on productivity and employee health. According to research, industrial workers' work stress and hypertension are strongly correlated, with stressed people having a noticeably greater prevalence of hypertension (Rengganis et al., 2020). Environmental, organizational, and individual factors can all have an impact on work stress, which can then have an impact on feelings and cognitive processes (Rukhayati and Prihatin, 2023). According to Sørensen et al. (2021), a comprehensive Danish study, workers in high-stress occupations had a marginally increased risk of chronic illnesses and a minor reduction in their life expectancy free from disease. Computational models based on allostatic load theory have been developed by researchers to gain a better understanding of the causal relationship between work stress and disease. In addition to producing fresh predictions regarding the influence of workweek configurations on disease development, these models can faithfully replicate previous findings on cortisol swings and the relationship between job stress and cardiovascular disease (Benthem de Grave et al., 2022).

Job motivation

Employee performance and organizational success are highly dependent on job motivation. Motivation and engagement are increased in a work environment that values openness, opportunity for advancement, and employee appreciation (Bhat and Patni, 2023). Employee performance and job satisfaction are positively impacted by work motivation (Nurdiansyah et al., 2020). Maintaining employee happiness and retention requires the use of effective motivating strategies, including as coaching, flexible work hours, and monetary and non-monetary incentives (Pârjoleanu, 2020). The fulfillment of fundamental psychological needs is greatly impacted by job features, and this has an impact on both autonomous and controlled motivation. Employee affectivity moderates and mediates the association between basic psychological needs satisfaction and job qualities and motivation. When creating employment to maximize motivation, managers should take personality factors into account (Liu et al., 2022). In general, in order to improve employee performance and organizational success, firms should place a high priority on developing a happy work environment and putting customized motivational techniques into practice.

Materials and Methods

This study utilizes a linear regression analysis and descriptive research design to examine the impact of work stress on job motivation among fresh graduate employees in Selangor. The primary method of utilizing quantitative data collection is through a questionnaire. This research design will be used to test the hypothesis of this study by determining the impact of work stress on job motivation among fresh graduate employees in Selangor. This research has chosen a non-probability sampling method, where a purposive sampling method will be used to collect data from the sample. It is defined as the process of choosing the number of component sets roughly approximates the same estimation or percent as the population, as the questionnaire will be distributed to the targeted population, which is the working fresh graduates via Google Form. Additionally, the survey incorporated the demographic information of respondents on age, gender, and education level. The 21 items in the Work Scale Questionnaire (WSQ) cover four main themes: work to leisure time interference, influence at work, individual demands and commitment, and unclear organisation and conflicts. The first two themes' questions have answers. 'Yes, always', 'Yes, rather often', 'No, seldom', or 'No, never'. The questions are followed by a question to determine the degree of stress on the items in the first two topics. Is it something you find stressful? The respondent provides a rating of how stressful things are by responding 'Not stressful', 'Less stressful', 'Stressful', or 'Very stressful'. One can respond to the things in the second two topics with 'Yes, always', 'Yes, rather often', 'No, seldom', or 'No, never'. The *Motivation at Work Scale* (MAWS) is to incorporate the satisfaction of the psychological demands for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, as well as perceived organisational support and optimism, were shown to be associated with autonomous motivation (Gagné et al., 2010). The total of 12 items were constructed with a 5-point Likert scale starting from 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, and 5-strongly agree to gauge with their job motivation level at the workplace.

Results and Discussion

The objective of this study was to ascertain the impact of work stress and job motivation among fresh graduate employees in Selangor. There are three distinct analysis utilized to examine the impact of work stress on job motivation among fresh graduate employees in Selangor. The result presented will support the study's in-depth understanding and analysis. Based on *Table 1*, it translated information about participants based on gender. Among the 127 respondents, 30 (23.6%) were male and 97 (76.4%) were female. This gender distribution indicates a higher participation rate among female fresh graduates in the study. The majority of respondents, 80 respondents (63.0%), were aged between 21-23 years, 30 respondents (23.6%) were between 24-26 years, and 17 respondents (13.4%) were between 27-30 years (*Table 1*). These age ranges are common for fresh graduates entering the workforce. We can conclude that most respondents held a Bachelor's Degree with a total of 82 respondents (64.6%), followed by Diploma holders with 44 respondents, which equals 34.6%, and a small percentage with a Master's degree, which is 1 respondent, which equals 0.8% (*Table 1*). This distribution shows a significant representation of individuals with higher education qualifications. Based on *Table 1*, the analysis revealed that 83 respondents (65.4%) experienced moderate levels of work stress, while 42 respondents (33.1%) experienced high levels of work stress, and only 2 respondents (1.6%) reported low levels of work stress. This indicates a prevalent issue of moderate to high work stress among fresh graduates in Selangor. *Table 1* proved that, similarly, 83 respondents (65.4%) exhibited moderate levels of job motivation, 42 respondents (33.1%) showed high levels of motivation, and 2 respondents (1.6%) had low levels of motivation. This suggests that while work stress is high, motivation levels are also moderate to high among these employees. *Table 2* shows the regression analysis conducted to examine the impact of work stress on job motivation. The model showed an R value of .390 and an R square value of .152, with an adjusted R square of .145. The standard error of the estimate was .60640. The R square value of .152 indicates that approximately 15.2% of the variance in job motivation can be explained by work stress. This significant impact suggests that as work stress increases, job motivation tends to decrease among fresh graduate employees in Selangor.

Table 1. Frequency of gender, age, education level, work stress, and job motivation level among fresh graduate employees in Selangor.

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	30	23.6
Female	97	76.4
Age		
21-23	80	63.0
24-26	30	23.6
27-30	17	13.4
Level of education		
Diploma	44	34.6
Bachelor degree	82	64.6
Master	1	0.8
Work stress level		
Low	2	1.6
Moderate	83	65.4

High	42	33.1
Job motivation level		
Low	8	6.3
Moderate	99	78.0
High	20	15.7

Table 2. Linear regression analysis of work stress on job motivation among fresh graduate employees in Selangor.

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std error of the estimate
1	.390	.152	.145	.606

According to *Figure 1*, workplace stress is categorised as an independent variable and job motivation as a dependent variable. Workplace stress has significantly contributed to employees’ job motivation at the workplace, which has also impacted their mental health and well-being. Hence, the arrow signifies the relationship between the two factors that are correlated to each other and will have an impact on outcomes, including the quality of work produced by recently graduated employees and their job motivation level at work. The outcomes between these factors will be analysed in this research.

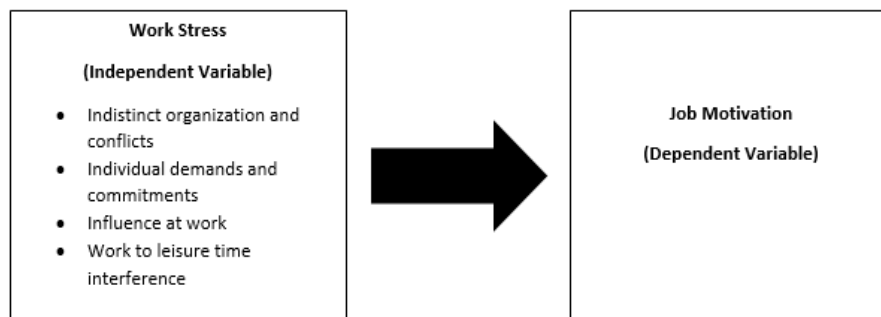


Figure 1. Conceptual model of work stress on job motivation.

The research aimed to investigate the impact of work stress on job motivation among fresh graduate employees in Selangor. Linear regression analysis established these connections within a framework. The findings supported the idea and concept that an increase in work stress levels could impact fresh graduate employees’ job motivation at the workplace in Selangor. This study contributes to the former existing framework of evidence, but from a new perspective and dimension, highlighting the role of work stress on job motivation. Stress at work is a serious problem that can cause a number of health issues in workers. Prolonged exposure to stress in the workplace can have negative impacts on an individual's physical and mental well-being. Han (2023) asserts that job stress has a direct impact on fresh graduate employees' health issues, aggravating pre-existing disorders and causing the emergence of new ailments. Workplace stress can have physical effects such as headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, and reduced immune systems that leave people more vulnerable to infections (Erawati et al., 2019). Chronic job stress negatively impacts mental health by causing anxiety, sadness, and burnout, all of which worsen general wellbeing.

Based on the descriptive data analysis of this research study, the highest corresponding level of work stress is moderate, with frequencies of 83 and a percentage of 65.4%, while the frequency table of job motivation level also showed a moderate level of job motivation, with a frequency of 99, which equals 78% of the participants felt moderately stressed by work and moderately motivated at the workplace. Considering the outcome, among recent graduates who are starting their careers, there is a particularly strong correlation between workplace stress and motivation (Dodanwala and Santoso, 2022). Since recent graduates are frequently in the early phases of their employment, they may encounter particular difficulties navigating organisational dynamics, reaching performance standards, and transitioning to new responsibilities. Excessive work-related stress can have a detrimental effect on employees' motivation, which can then result in a decline in engagement and job satisfaction. Stress may make one feel overwhelmed, affecting the passion and energy that recent graduates have for their profession, which can have a negative effect on their performance and ability to advance in their careers (Mahayani and Suwandana, 2015). Hence, a certain amount of stress at work can be a motivating factor that improves performance among fresh graduate employees in Selangor, even if it can also have serious health effects and negatively affect job motivation. Fostering a healthy and productive work environment is crucial, especially for recent graduates entering the profession, and requires an understanding of and ability to manage the balance between stress and motivation regardless of age, gender, or education level. A certain amount of stress, known as eustress, can be advantageous to motivation, even if excessive stress is typically bad for it. Stress may serve as a driving factor, inspiring people to take on obstacles and realise their objectives. Plus, according to Asmini and Haerani (2022), fresh graduate employees' motivation and performance might be positively impacted by a reasonable amount of job pressure. Employee attention, motivation, and competitiveness may all be improved by reasonable pressure. This ideal stress level can promote creativity, productivity, and problem-solving. But it's important to keep this balance since too much pressure at work can cause burnout and poor performance. The reliability and generalisability of the study's conclusions can be strongly impacted by the small number of respondents. The ability to draw general conclusions is limited, and results may be distorted when the sample size is small since the data may not fairly represent the larger population. It may be challenging to identify significant effects or differences in research with small sample numbers due to an increased margin of error and decreased statistical power. Insufficient sample sizes can cause major biases and inaccuracies (Faber and Fonseca, 2014). To obtain precise epidemiological data, Kessler and Üstün (2008) stress the significance of conducting broad studies.

Conclusion

Neglecting certain personality qualities or coping strategies that affect motivation and stress might lead to an inadequate comprehension of the effects these variables have on workers. People respond differently to stress; some people can handle pressure well, while others could find it difficult. Resilience, emotional stability, and individual coping mechanisms are important moderators of the negative impacts of work-related stress. Ignoring these individual variations might result in results that are unduly generalised and neglect to take into consideration the complex interactions between motivation and stress. To address these challenges, an excellent method to get in contact with recent

graduates directly is through professional groups and university alumni networks. These networks keep contact details fresh and can help bring together prospective respondents who are just starting their professions. Graduates are more likely to engage in research if it has credibility, thanks to collaborations with professional associations and alumni offices. Researchers may guarantee a more representative sample and a greater response rate by utilising these networks. Plus, comprehending individual variations is vital in the study of work-related stress and job motivation. Integrating personality tests, like the Big Five Inventory, can shed light on the ways in which individual characteristics and behaviours affect how people react to stress. Using this method, researchers can identify particular characteristics that either mitigate or intensify the impact of occupational stress. People with stronger emotional stability or resilience scores, for example, may be able to handle stress better and remain more motivated than people with lower scores in these areas. Interventions can be more successfully customised to accommodate various personality types if these subtleties are understood.

Acknowledgement

We are deeply grateful for the support and welcoming research environment provided by Universiti Selangor (UNISEL). We also sincerely thank the staff members and associates whose steadfast cooperation and insightful advice made this endeavor feasible.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that no conflict of interest is involved with any parties in this research.

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