

A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKPLACE STRESS AND JOB PERFORMANCE AMONG POLICE OFFICERS

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Abstract. Over the past decade, policing has been identified as one of the most stressful occupations worldwide, and this profession has been widely discussed in the literature. Police officers are a high-stress group that encounters various challenges and act in a high-stakes environment, often dealing with stress, danger, and complex situations. Hence, this paper aims to investigate the relationship between workplace stress and the job performance of Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) officers. This is a quantitative approach that applied a cross-sectional study, for which responses were obtained from 171 police officers through an online survey using Google Forms. Next, this study has adapted the items from existing and previously validated scales to measure the variable of workplace stress and job performance. The partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was applied in data analysis using SmartPLS 3.0. The finding revealed that workplace stress and job performance was negatively associated. Therefore, the finding may be helpful for future researchers and the government, particularly the ministry, as it is essential for developing policies or rules aimed at mitigating workplace stress and improving job performance among employees in Malaysia. Subsequently, it can help create a healthier and more productive workplace, especially for police officers.

Keywords: *workplace stress, job performance, police, Malaysia*

Introduction

In general, stress is a natural response to challenging demands or difficult situations, but prolonged stress can affect a person's health and well-being. Several factors can contribute to stress and work also plays a main role that induces a person's stress. Numerous studies have discovered that work stress is a major workplace issue that has escalated progressively during the past few decades (Bui et al., 2021; Jacobs, 2019; Basit and Hassan, 2017). This issue is challenging to ignore because of the adverse economic, health, and social outcomes. Furthermore, workplace stress can be identified as a silent killer of employee health, communication, productivity and job performance (Bhat et al., 2024). In addition, work stressors can take different forms depending on the characteristics of the workplace and may be unique to an organisation or an industry (Bhui et al., 2016). According to WHO, workplace stress can be referred 'the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope', and elaborated that it can be caused 'by poor work organization (the way we design jobs and work systems, and the way we manage them), by poor work design (e.g., lack of control over work processes), poor management, unsatisfactory working conditions and lack of support from colleagues and supervisors' (WHO, 2020). Essentially, workplace stress may result from excessive demands and pressures that are not matched to workers'

knowledge and abilities, and they may encounter difficulty, strain, anxiety, or worry in this attempt (Maulik, 2017). Hence, the severity of work stress depends on the individual's sense of control or coping strategies in dealing with the stressors they encounter at the workplace.

In the workplace, stressors can cause adverse effects at work because negative emotional states are an immediate reaction to a stressful situation. High workplace stress can lead to poor work, erratic employee behaviour, absenteeism, and disgruntled customers (Bencsik et al., 2019). Besides, this stress can lead to negative employees' emotional reactions to their work, and this unpleasant emotional tension is typically associated with avoidance motivation, which may determine the positive relationship between negative affect and the intention to leave the job or profession (Jasiński and Derbis, 2022). Moreover, employees who suffer from work stress are susceptible to psychological disorders, medical illnesses, family problems and/or behaviour problems, as well as sleep disturbances related to work strain (Quick et al., 2017). Hence, workplace stress is a growing concern that can have far-reaching consequences for employees and organizations.

Problem statement

The long-term adverse effects of workplace stress can lead to a lack of employee commitment, increasing employee turnover. This increased turnover creates additional challenges, leading to higher recruitment and training costs and ultimately hindering organizational stability and growth (Salama et al., 2022). In the context of this study, police have been identified as one of the most demanding and stressful occupations worldwide, as police organizations are tasked with a wide variety of duties that often encounter a variety of acute and chronic stressful events at work (Duran et al., 2019; Violanti et al., 2017). According to Zakaria et al. (2023), police officers in Malaysia are particularly vulnerable to health problems such as Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) due to several factors, such as stress and the physical demands of their work. In addition, a study conducted by the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) found that stress, health status, and the working environment are the three main factors that contribute to suicidal tendencies among its personnel and officers (The Sun Web Portal, 2023).

While existing studies predominantly focused on Police stress, it has been extensively studied, looking at different types of stressors and their effects. Despite an increased number of studies on police stress in China, America, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Zhou et al., 2024; Oliver et al., 2023; Craddock and Telesco, 2022; Kyron et al., 2022), research on police workplace stress in Southeast Asia, especially in Malaysia has been scarcely discussed. Although there is extensive study on the relationship between high-stress employment and environmental health, less is known about the association between job stress and job performance among police officers (Chikwem, 2017). Besides, the exploration of this issue is very crucial as Home Minister Malaysia informed that some suicidal tendencies among the police force lately had been detected as early as 2015 (The Sun Web Portal, 2023). In addition, PDRM performance has been widely discussed among Malaysians due to various offences such as assault (Hassan, 2024), corruption (Sekaran, 2024), including abuse of power (Selvam, 2023).

Research objective

For these reasons, the present study is essential to explore a significant association between workplace stress and job performance among police officers in Malaysia, as their work tasks and job scopes deal with humans. Therefore, this understanding is vital to maintain the integrity of the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM).

Literature review

Over the past decade, one of the most stressful occupations worldwide is policing, and this profession has been widely discussed in the literature (Duran et al., 2019). According to Drew et al. (2024), police officers are a high-stress group that encounters various challenges which act in a high-stakes environment, often dealing with stress, danger and complex situations. Besides, Chen and Wu (2022) mentioned that police officers are known as a "stress group" because they are engaged in a stress-intensive occupation full of risks and adverse events. The duties and responsibilities of police officers dealing with difficult and stressful circumstances may lead to a greater risk of Mental and psychological health problems (Santre, 2024; Jetelina et al., 2020), poor functioning (Galanis et al., 2021), and, worst cases which is displaying suicidal and self-harm behaviour (Chidgey et al., 2019) as well as substance abuse (Singo and Shilubane, 2022). In the context of policing, stressors can be identified as two distinct types: organizational stressors and operational stressors. Several scholars have suggested that organizational stressors, referred to as work context stressors, include the characteristics of the organization and the behaviours of the people in that organization, such as an overly bureaucratic organizational system, conflicts with supervisors/colleagues, lack of material/human resources, work overload, excessive administrative tasks, leadership problems that may produce stress (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022; Queirós et al., 2020a; Purba and Demou, 2019; Shane, 2010). Meanwhile, operational stressors are related to policing specificities such as working in shifts, danger and risk of injury, critical incidents, traumatic events, citizen criticism of police officers' behaviour, perception of policing by society, fear of excessive use of force, aggressive interactions, work-family conflict (Queirós et al., 2020b). In policing, thus workplace stress has led to adverse consequences in physical, psychological and performance among officers due to repeated and prolonged exposure to organizational and operational stressors.

Job performance is an essential indicator of an organization's growth and success, as it measures employees' effectiveness, efficiency, and improvement. In PDRM, Malaysian police officers are no exception, as job performance is a crucial indicator for evaluating achievements, which can be measured through the Key Performance Index (KPI). However, according to a recent report by the deputy inspector general of Police Malaysia, approximately 1,869 police officers have faced disciplinary action for various offences, and 175 were dismissed for severe violations from last year until August 2024 (Malay Mail Web Portal, 2024). This report shows that the performance of police officers is quite worrisome, and it can give a negative perception to the public due to the status of Police work combating crime. Considering this, Chikwem (2017) discovered that police officers' job performance is explained by job stress, indicating that high job stress significantly leads to poor job performance. Thus, the adverse effects of workplace stress may lead to a lack of employee commitment, subsequently committing various offences. In the context of this study, police have been identified as one of the most demanding and stressful occupations worldwide, as police organizations are tasked with a wide variety of duties that often encounter a variety of acute and chronic stressful events at work (Duran et al., 2019; Violanti et al., 2017). High workplace stress can lead

to poor work, erratic employee behavior, absenteeism, and disgruntled customers. Besides, workplace stress can lead to negative employees' emotional reactions to their work, and this unpleasant emotional tension is typically associated with avoidance motivation (Jasiński and Derbis, 2022), consequently affecting job performance. As Ismail et al. (2015) mentioned, the relationship between workplace stress and employee performance is consistent with the workplace stress model. In addition, several studies have discovered that workplace stress among police officers was significantly associated with poor job performance (Cho, 2023; Ratnayake and Gunasekara, 2023; Arujunan et al., 2021; Tsai et al., 2018; Chikwem, 2017). Therefore, workplace stress is one of the antecedents that can affect police officers' job performance, as it may influence employees' psychological and physical states, affecting their work effort levels. The following hypothesis is presented as follows:

H1: There is a relationship between workplace stress and job performance among a police officer.

Therefore, a conceptual framework was proposed, and a hypothesis was constructed in *Figure 1*. The framework shows the relationship between workplace stress and job performance.



Figure 1. A proposed conceptual framework.

Materials and Methods

The research design of this study adopts a quantitative approach and the process of gathering and analyzing data in numerical form. A cross-sectional research approach is used to investigate the objectives of this study in identifying the relationship between two variables. The selected samples of this study are Malaysian police officers from PDRM since there is limited published research on policing in Malaysia. The lack of comprehensive research results in a restricted comprehension of many facets of police work, such as their welfare, job satisfaction, stress levels, and particular challenges (Galani et al., 2021). Next, this study has adapted the items from existing and previously validated scales to measure the variable of workplace stress and job performance. The items of this instrument applied a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The measurement for workplace stress was adapted from The Marlin Company and The American Institute of Stress, the Workplace Stress Scale. Meanwhile, the 5-items of job performance were adapted from Ali-Hassan et al. (2015). The questionnaire was developed using the Google Form platform. It has provided clear instructions and user-friendly formatting, ensuring the questionnaire will be easy for police officers to respond to. Prior to actual data collection, the questionnaire was validated by performing the pilot study, which showed that all the Cronbach alpha values of items of each variable were sufficient, with all the values exceeding the threshold. After that, online self-administered questionnaires were

distributed by filling out a Google form, and all participants were informed that any information they provided in the Google form would be confidential. Five hundred thirty questionnaires were sent to targeted respondents, but only 171 responded, resulting in a response rate of 32.26%. Lastly, for data analysis, this study applied the PLS-SEM analysis, which consists of two stages; as Hair Jr et al. (2017) suggested, the first stage was to evaluate the measurement model, followed by assessing the structural model.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive analysis

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the 171 respondents. In gender distribution, 48 per cent (82) of male police officers, and female police officers constitute 38.7 per cent (89), responded to this questionnaire. For the respondents' race category, most participants are Malay police officers, consisting of 143 (83.6 per cent). Meanwhile, the rest of the police officers are Indian (5.9 per cent), Chinese (2.9 per cent), and others (7.6 per cent). Next, most police officers are Bachelor holders (35.7 per cent), followed by Diploma holders (28.1 per cent), and the highest level of education is PhD holders (2.3 per cent).

Table 1. Demographic information.

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	82	48.0
Female	89	52.0
Race		
Malay	143	83.6
Indian	10	5.9
Chinese	5	2.9
Others	13	7.6
Level of education		
SPM	11	6.4
STPM	12	7.0
Diploma	48	28.1
Bachelor	61	35.7
Master	35	20.5
PhD	4	2.3

Convergence validity and reliability

In general, evaluating the validity of the construct is an essential stage in measurement model analysis by assessing both convergent and discriminant validity. In the PLS approach, Leguina (2015) mentioned that internal consistency reliability was determined by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values, meanwhile the convergent validity was examined by the factor loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE). The result in *Table 2* demonstrated that the values of Cronbach's alpha range from 0.832 to 0.876, and composite reliability from 0.795 to 0.811 have exceeded a threshold value of 0.7 (Hair Jr et al., 2017; Chin, 2009). This proves that the model is internally consistent. Followed by the convergent validity, AVE values range from

0.728 to 0.815, which surpassed 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), indicating a positive correlation between measures of related constructs. Thus, this measurement model has established satisfactory validity and reliability.

Table 2. Result of reliability and validity analysis.

Construct	Internal consistency reliability		Convergent validity
	Cronbach's alpha (>0.7)	Composite reliability (>0.7)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (>0.5)
Workplace stress	0.876	0.795	0.728
Job performance	0.832	0.811	0.815

Discriminate validity

Following the construct validity, the discriminant validity is examined to ensure that reflective constructs are distinct from each other, and indicators exhibit a stronger relationship with their own construct in a hypothesized model (Hair Jr et al., 2017). In the context of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), Henseler et al. (2015) suggested that the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) is an appropriate procedure for discriminant validity assessment. Franke and Sarstedt (2019) stated that the cut-off value of HTMT for conceptually distinct constructions is less than 0.85; meanwhile, conceptually similar constructs are less than 0.9, suggesting that the variables possess satisfactory discriminant validity depending on the context of the study. *Table 3* demonstrates that all values are below 0.85, indicating the establishment of discriminant validity among the reflectively measured constructs in this model.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations.

Construct	Job performance	Workplace stress
Job performance	-	-
Workplace stress	0.806	-

Model assessment

This study employed a nonparametric test using the 5000-bootstrapping technique to assess the structural model by performing the SmartPLS 3.2.8 software (Hair et al., 2011). For this analysis, a relationship between workplace stress and job performance was tested by executing a bootstrapping technique to test the structural model by answering the proposed hypotheses based on the path coefficient of exogenous to endogenous variables, the t-values, and squared multiple correlations (R²) values of explained variance on the endogenous variables and statistical significance. As hypothesized, H₁ was accepted (β=0.516, t=6.809), indicating that workplace stress was significantly associated with job performance among police officers in Malaysia. *Table 4* displays the results of structural analysis and decisions on seven hypotheses.

Table 4. Hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Co-efficient (β)	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-values	Decision
H1	WS -> JP	0.516	0.076	6.809	0.000	Accepted

Note: WS=Workplace Stress; JP=Job Performance

The findings of this study found that there is a negative relationship between workplace stress and job performance since the hypothesis is accepted. This study discovered that most of the police staff experienced workplace stress because of their work tasks and responsibilities. The findings of this study are aligned with previous

studies (Arujunan et al., 2021; Queirós et al., 2020a; Chikwem, 2017; Violanti et al., 2017). This indicates that workplace stress has a major impact on job performance. Police officers in Malaysia have shown that they suffered from workplace stress that negatively affected their job performance. This condition might happen due to multiple facets of life, encompassing developmental and social transformations, financial and housing difficulties, work obligations, and the requirements of job performance. Furthermore, policing has been identified as one of the most demanding and stressful occupations worldwide, as police organizations are tasked with a wide variety of duties that often encounter a variety of acute and chronic stressful events at work (Duran et al., 2019; Violanti et al., 2017). In addition, police officers face various sources of stress, including physical threats, violence, long work hours, lack of support, complexity of a task, environment and burnout (Queirós et al., 2020b). The stress includes dealing with physical threats while on the job, being exposed to violence, suffering injuries related to work, being under pressure, not receiving sufficient support, working long hours, becoming exhausted, and experiencing burnout (Fix and Powell, 2024; Galanis et al., 2021) have led to poor performance.

This study benefits the next researcher by providing a basis of knowledge and suggesting that future researchers enhance and conduct a more comprehensive study. Future researchers are encouraged to use the findings of this study that focuses on different countries with different work cultures, since the current study was conducted in Asian countries. Besides, future researchers also need to increase the sample size of the respondents to get a strong result. By increasing the sample size of police staff respondents, the validity of the findings is enhanced as they become more accurate and representative of the entire population of officers. Additionally, it strengthens the reliability of the research findings by offering more robust evidence for any identified patterns or relationships. Following the next recommendation is the next research that can focus on private and government employees. By focusing on both sectors, it has the potential to bring about improvements in training, support systems, and the general efficacy of police services in various organizational contexts. Lastly, the next study suggests using physical questionnaires to increase the number of respondents, as previously stated in the limitations section, which highlights the difficulties of using an online questionnaire that people tend to ignore.

Conclusion

This study investigates the significant relationship between workplace stress and job performance. Based on the findings, the hypothesis is accepted, showing that it is aligned with prior studies. It is well-accepted that there is a relationship between workplace stress and job performance. The discussion of the findings shows that most of the hypotheses are congruent with prior studies. This study differs from previous works as it integrated one theory to explain the cognitive processes that appear in stressful situations. In addition, the findings provide an essential extension of prior knowledge on conceptual relationships by integrating one prominent theory in understanding the current issue of workplace stress and job performance. The implications of the findings, for organizations in general and the police in particular, include the need to reduce workplace stressors and improve the work environment.

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Conflict of interest

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

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