

## Examining Work Stress And Employee Performance Among Public Servants: Evidence From Terengganu, Malaysia

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### Abstract

Work stress can be attributed to various variables, including heavy workloads, role conflict, and the organizational environment. It impacts the performance of employees by diminishing productivity and efficiency. The objective of this study was to investigate the correlation between occupational stress and the productivity of employees. Stratified sampling was used to guarantee the inclusion of diverse groups and levels within the population. The analysis comprised a total of 137 respondents from a public agency in Terengganu. The analysis was performed using SPSS software. Pearson's correlation analysis and mean analysis were utilized to assess the associations between independent and dependent variables. The study's findings demonstrated a notable correlation between work-related stress and employee performance. In the future, it is important to explore numerous aspects that require improvement in further research. Exploring additional factors contributing to work-related stress could prove advantageous. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that this current investigation is constrained by the utilization of closed questionnaires, which might fail to encompass all pertinent data.

**Keywords:** Work Stress; Workloads; Role Conflict; Organizational Environment; Employee's Performance

### Introduction

Work stress refers to the interaction between job-related elements and the worker, resulting in changes to the worker's psychological or physiological state, which in turn forces the individual to depart from their normal functioning (Newman & Beehr, 1979). Stress is the condition that occurs when the demands of external tasks surpass an individual's available resources, resulting in a feeling of imbalance that negatively affects behaviors, attitudes,

emotions, and physical health (Akgunduz, 2015). Within the work stress literature, the evidence of such detrimental effects is clear. High levels of work stress include job-related anxiety, chronic exhaustion and health complaints and is harmful to a person's well-being (Zhong et al., 2009). Stress can be referred to physiological and psychological condition that prepares us to adapt to hostile and harmful environmental conditions (Mc Vicar, et al., 2013). Work stress, alternatively referred to as occupational stress is a recognized phenomenon. The relationship pertains to the job itself, as well as the personnel and their performances (Zhu et al., 2017). The presence of job stress significantly affects employees and their performance, and it is pervasive in their everyday lives (Vijayan, 2017). Around 40 to 60% of workers have a significant impact on their health and family balance. Stress can have a detrimental effect on individuals, leading to a drop in their performance (Ehsan & Ali, 2019). Additionally, it can negatively impact organizational performance by raising the turnover rate and the number of absences due to health issues (Abbas & Kumari, 2021).

Work stress occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities of the employee. Work stress also results from the interaction of the employee and the conditions of work. Work stress will affect employees personally and their job performance (Khan et al., 2022). It is important for employees and organizations to manage stress effectively. Stress is an adaptive response to a situation that is perceived as challenging to a person's wellbeing (Mc Vicar et al., 2013). Meanwhile, stress is defined as a pressure to sharpen concentration while completing tasks (Carr, et al., 2011).

It was highlighted that employees experiencing high levels of workplace stress are likely to have negative reactions when they are given a large amount of work (Idris et al. (2009). Work stress arises from organizational pressures and manifests differently in each employee (Wickramashinghe, 2012). Furthermore, an organization with a high level of mismanaged job stress will have a significant impact on an individual's productivity, creativity, health, and work-life balance (Ling & Mok, 2022; Wickramashinghe, 2012).

This paper focused on examining the relationship between work stress and employee performance among public servants in Terengganu. Basically, there are many variables of work stress in the organization such as job insecurity, interpersonal conflict, inadequate training, workload, role conflict, job control, and relationship with colleagues. However, this paper only focuses on three variables in which workload, role conflict and organizational environment. Besides, questions in the questionnaires were focused on the perception of employees and not actual experience.

### **Problem Statement**

Research has shown that managing work stress ineffectively will lead to attendance problems and reduce productivity among employees indirectly can create loss for organizations (Devonish, et al., 2012). A model of work stress process in that focused on perceived work-related stressors influence emotional reactions and negative health outcomes has been proposed (Devonish, et al., 2012). Besides that, there are some diseases associated with job stress such as neuroses, coronary artery disease, cancer asthma, hypertension, backaches and alimentary conditions (Billing & Steverson, 2013).

Work stress is expected to have a negative relationship with job satisfaction for most individuals (Yadollah & Zahra, 2010). The World Health Organization has reported that about 450 million individuals around the world have been affected by the stress related disorders in an organization (Gamble et al., 2010). Factors of work stress such as workloads, organizational

politics and lack of job control influence employees to experience work related stress in Malaysia (Mohd Awang, et al., 2010).

Job-related factor has been reported to be the most common factor causing stress among people (Mosadeghrad, 2013; Halkos & Bousinakis, 2008; Dolan et al., 2005). The main source of work stress is work overload and no authority but added responsibility (Thomas, 2008), increase in the workload, work schedule or working hours (Houtman et al., 2007). The theory of work design (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) discusses the two important aspects of the work environment, namely, job demand and job control. Job demand includes the psychological stressors involved in completing the tasks, workload and the stressors related to unpredicted tasks. Job control referred to the autonomy and control the employees have in their tasks during the day (Landy & Conte, 2016). The job itself, which includes the responsibilities, heavy workload, role conflict and role ambiguity are considered to be a source of stress for the employees (McGowan, 2000; Michie & Williams, 2003; and Smithers & Robinson, 2003; Maertz et al., 2011). An increase in job demand with less job control leads to stress among employees. Therefore, this paper aimed to examine the relationship between work stress and employee performance as follows:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between workload and employee's performance.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between role conflict and employee's performance.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between organisational environment and employee's performance.

## **Literature Review**

### **Work Stress**

Work stress can be defined as an employees' awareness of personal dysfunction result from the conditions that happen in the workplace. Work stress will impact on individual psychological and physiological reactions that can cause uncomfortable, undesirable or the feeling of threat with the workplace environment (Barney & Elias, 2010). There are several factors related to the work stress in an organization. It consists workload, role conflict and organizational environment.

### **Workload**

Workload can be defined as having too much or abundant of work in organization. (Avery et al., 2010) stated that work overload is one of the major sources that make employee work under pressure. It may cause from management policy, too many duties, unnecessary tasks or insufficient support from team members. Besides, number of working hours is one of the reason may increase employees' workload. When employees are forced to work over time, it is stressful and it requires mental, physical and emotional readiness (Avery, et al., 2010). Workload is influenced by a combination of organizational and individual factors. From an organizational perspective, workload can be affected by factors such as ineffective task distribution, unrealistic deadlines, insufficient resources, and poor communication. On the other hand, individual factors also play a role in workload. Personal time management skills, prioritization abilities, and work habits can contribute to how individuals perceive and manage their workload.

An imbalanced workload can wreak havoc on personal lives, feeling burnt out and overwhelmed. Excessive demands at work can lead to little energy or time to invest in

personal relationships, hobbies, or self-care (Sharma & Srivastava, 2022). Striking a harmonious relationship between workload and work-life balance is essential for overall well-being. When workloads are managed effectively, employees can dedicate sufficient time and energy to their personal lives, fostering healthier relationships and a greater sense of fulfillment.

### **Role Conflict**

Role conflict is a common phenomenon experienced by individuals in various work settings, and it can significantly contribute to work-related stress. When individuals face conflicting expectations, demands, or responsibilities within their roles, they experience role conflict. This conflict arises when the expectations from different roles clash, leading to confusion, frustration, and a sense of being overwhelmed. The consequences of role conflict extend beyond personal well-being, affecting employee performance, job satisfaction, and overall organizational effectiveness (Chak et al., 2022).

Role conflict refers to responsibilities and authorities of an individual in making decisions pertaining to the work (Tourigny, et al., 2010). Employees suffer from higher work stress because they have less opportunity to participate in important decisions affecting their job scope. The notion of control integrates the workers' authority to make decisions on the job with their skills (Avery, et al., 2010). There are a few examples of role conflict in workplace such as scheduling individual rest breaks, utilizing flexi-time, choosing holiday leave and personalizing work areas.

### **Organizational Environment**

Another factor of work stress that is discussed in this paper is the organizational environment. Organizational environment elements that might contribute to work stress include the conditions of the workplace, the physical surroundings, and the processes in place for carrying out work tasks. The office environment encompasses the social dynamics that comprise the organization's culture, operations, and interpersonal connections. The non-supportive peer members or team members and a feeling of not being heard in the organization also result in stress accountable to the workplace environment (Thomas, 2008). Work stress is not just limited to the tasks and the job but also includes the organization structure, its policies and practices, which may lead to stress (Chen et al., 2006). Organizational policies such as long working hours, no proper breaks, inadequate training, challenging assignments, job insecurity, lack of career opportunities and inadequate salary can cause stress among the employees (McCann et al., 2013; Mosadeghrad, 2013; Schmitz et al., 2000).

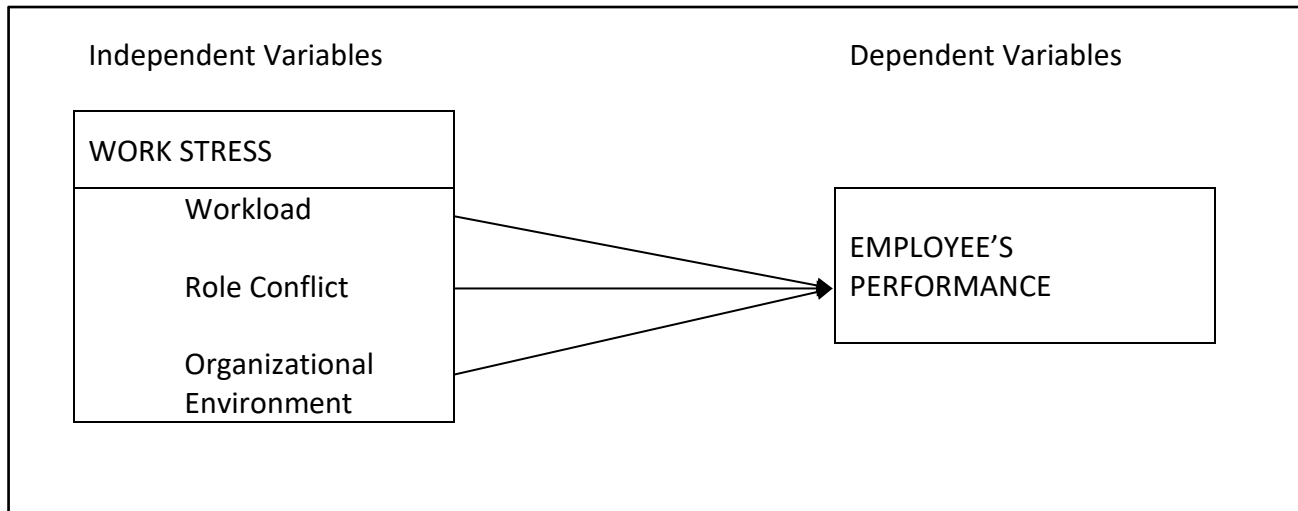
### **Employee Performance**

Employee performance refers to the total output of employees give to the organization (Ali et al., 2014; Bashir & Ramay, 2010). It is the sum total of abilities, opportunities, and motivation. It is also known as the ability of individuals to complete their goals, meets expectations, achieve benchmark or attain organizational goals. There are three types of performance in productivity, rating and self-appraisal (Chen et al., 2006). Firstly, the measure of productivity charge, quantity of sales over a given period of time and the construction of a group of workers reporting to supervisor. Secondly, the type of measure of performance involves ratings of persons by somebody other than someone whose performance is being measured. Lastly, types of performance measures are self-appraisal and self-ratings. As a result, the adoption of self-appraisal and self-rating techniques are useful in encouraging

employees to take an active role in setting his or her own goals. Employee performance measures the level of accomplishment of company, social objectives and tasks from the standpoint of the judging gathering. Employee performance as the measure to any employees perform tasks, responsibilities, and assignments (Knight et al., 2006).

Figure 1

*Conceptual Framework for the Relationship between Work Stress and Employee Performance*



(Adapted from Bashir & Ramay, 2010; Chen & Silverthorne, 2008)

### Methodology

This paper intended to examine the correlation between the dependent and independent variables in this quantitative study. Data was gathered via a survey questionnaire to public servant in Terengganu. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences 24.0 versions was implemented for data analysis, including Pearson Correlation was deployed to assess the hypotheses.

The population for this study is 214. It includes employees from 16 organizations of the public sector in Terengganu. The sampling technique used in this study is stratified sampling. It is the most suitable to ensure that the strata in the population are fairly represented in the sample (Salkind, 2012). According to table Krejcie (1970), the sample size of this study is 137 respondents from 214 employees.

### Analysis and Results

The sample for this study includes 85 (62%) female respondents and 52 (38%) male respondents. The majority of respondents are between 30-39 years old which is 60 (43.8%) respondents, followed by age ranged 20-29 years old with 46 (33.6%) respondents, age ranged 40-49 years old with 16 (11.7%) respondents, and age range 50 years old and above with 15 (10.9%) respondents.

Most of the respondents had been working in this organization for 6 to 10 years are 56 (40.9%) respondents. Followed by 38 (27.7%) respondents who had been working for 1 to 5 years, and 28 (20.4%) who had worked for 11 years and above. Meanwhile, 15 (10.9%) respondents work less than 1 year. Table 1 represents the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1  
*Demographic Profile*

Variable	<i>n</i>	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	52	38.0
Female	85	62.0
<b>Age</b>		
20-29 years old	46	33.6
30-39 years old	60	43.8
40-49 years old	16	11.7
50 years old and above	15	10.9
<b>Length of Service</b>		
Less than 1 year	15	10.9
1 to 5 years	38	27.7
6 to 10 years	56	40.9
11 years and above	28	20.4

### Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 presents the descriptive result in measuring research variables. Mean and standard deviation describe the level of variation there is from the mean. A low standard deviation indicates that the data point tends to be close to the mean, whereas a high standard deviation indicates that the data is spread out over a large range of values. According to (Geisser, 1974), the mean score between 1.00 to 2.00 is considered low, 2.01 to 3.00 medium low, 3.01 to 4.00 medium high and 4.01 above is high. In this study, mean scores for variables are acceptable and considered medium high.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Analysis*

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Workload	3.92	0.532
Role Conflict	3.98	0.590
Organizational Environment	3.99	0.618

### Correlation Analysis

The hypothesis test indicated that there is a significant and weak relationship between workload and employee performance ( $r = 0.349^*$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus,  $H_1$  is supported and it can be concluded that workload and employee performance have a positive relationship.

The hypothesis test indicated that there is a significant and moderate relationship between role conflict and employee performance ( $r = 0.561^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus,  $H_2$  is supported and it can be concluded that role conflict and employee performance have a positive relationship.

The hypothesis test indicated that there is a significant and moderate relationship between organizational environment and employee performance ( $r = 0.346^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus,  $H_3$  is

supported and it can be concluded that organizational environment and employee performance have a positive relationship. Table 3 represents the correlation analysis for the variables.

Table 3  
*Correlation Analysis*

		Workload	Role Conflict	Organizational Environment
<b>Employee Performance</b>	Pearson Correlation	.349**	.561**	.552**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	137	137	137

**\*\*.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4  
*Hypotheses Results*

Hypotheses	Remarks
H <sub>1</sub> : There is a significant relationship between workload and employee performance.	Accepted
H <sub>2</sub> : There is a significant relationship between role conflict and employee performance.	Accepted
H <sub>3</sub> : There is a significant relationship between organizational environment and employee performance.	Accepted

## Discussion

Based on findings, it showed that there is a significant and weak relationship between workload and employee performance. This finding supported by Aparna & Sahney (2023) stated that heavy workload may become the prime source of anxiety and stress in an organization, negatively affecting the quality of their work and morale. Organizations with moderate workloads are more likely to work effectively than faculties with higher workloads (Ayeni & Amanekwe, 2018). In the case of higher workloads, organizations tend to perceive fewer organizational resources like organizational support and justice (Nyunt et al., 2022). It can be concluded that role conflict has a moderate relationship with employee performance. This finding is supported by Akgunduz (2014) who stated that role conflict occurs when employees are confronted with expectations for different roles, such as when two roles should be performed simultaneously or when performing one role prevents performing the other one. Role overload increases when the fulfillment of a role becomes impossible for the individual because of time, energy, or resources. All these three elements, role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload, are significant variables influencing the functions of organizations. This may cause discontent, a lack of confidence in the organization, tense interpersonal relations, low productivity, low performance, low achievement, and fewer interpersonal relationships. It is also supported by Ali et al. (2014) who stated that when role requirements of an individual are antithetical, it gives rise to role conflict. It is a critical situation because adherence to the requirements of one's role makes it difficult to adhere to the requirements of another. It shows that, role conflict has a significant impact on job performance of employees.

The finding indicated that there is a significant and moderate relationship between organizational environment and employee performance. McCorman (2014) supported this finding that the quality of the organizational environment affected employee performance. A positive organizational environment boosts employee retention, attracts top talent, and improves teamwork. A comfortable and well-designed environment can increase productivity and reduce stress. Positive relationships and effective communication promote employee performance.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This paper aimed to examine the relationship between work stress and employee performance among employees in the public sector in Terengganu. In order to provide accurate results, correlation analysis has been used. It can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between workload, role conflict, organizational environment, and employee performance.

Work stress exists in any situation regardless of with whom or which organization employees worked. The most important is employees must know the effective ways to manage job stress. The first recommendation is through the medium of communication. In this context, an organization should provide full encouragement through communication so that there will be no role of ambiguity or conflict among the employees (Sourabh, 2014). It means an organization especially the top management should be a good listener to their employees when they have any uncertainty in performing their job and giving sufficient explanation to them. As a result, it would reduce the level of stress and could increase the degree of job performance among the employees.

Employers play a vital role in creating a healthier workload that promotes work-life balance. Encouraging open communication between employees and management can help identify individual capacities and distribute tasks accordingly (Chak et al., 2022). Implementing flexible work arrangements or remote work options can provide employees with more control over their time and reduce the strain of commuting. Employers should also foster a supportive work environment that values employee well-being and promotes a healthy work-life balance. By striving for a healthy workload, employers can cultivate happier and more engaged employees.

Managing workload stress is crucial for both employees and employers. By implementing effective time management techniques, engaging in stress reduction practices, and leveraging technology tools, employees can cope with and optimize their workloads (Chen et al., 2006). Striking a harmonious relationship between workload and work-life balance is vital for overall well-being, and employers have a responsibility to create a healthier workload that promotes employee satisfaction and productivity. With a healthy workload, employees can thrive, finding fulfillment in both their personal and professional lives.

Recognizing workload as a pivotal factor in work stress is essential for fostering a positive work environment. Employers should prioritize workload assessment and management, implementing strategies to reduce excessive workload and promote work-life balance. Equally important, employees should adopt effective coping mechanisms and prioritize self-care to manage workload-related stress. In order to encourage harmonious balance between workload and well-being, organizations can enhance employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall organizational success. Organization must emphasizing a healthy workload is a shared responsibility that can contribute to a more positive and thriving work culture.



Other than that, organizations need to cultivate a culture that values work-life balance and recognizes the importance of clear communication. When employees feel comfortable discussing their concerns and conflicts openly, it's like a weight being lifted off their shoulders. This not only helps in reducing role conflict but also fosters a sense of belonging and teamwork.

Leadership has a profound impact on employee well-being. Supportive leaders who show empathy, listen to their employees' concerns, and provide the necessary resources and support can help reduce stress levels (Ling & Mok, 2022). By fostering a positive work environment and ensuring clear communication, leaders can contribute to employee well-being and create a more resilient workforce.

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential in preventing employee burnout and reducing stress. Organizations should encourage flexible work arrangements, promote time management strategies, and provide resources for employees to prioritize their personal lives. Organizations must adopt culture that supports work-life balance, encourages open communication, promotes strong leadership, and organizations can create an environment that values the well-being of their employees (Khan et al., 2022).

### **Future Research**

Researchers could delve deeper into the specific factors that contribute to role conflict, such as conflicting goals or ambiguous expectations. Understanding these factors can help organizations modify their interventions to address the root causes effectively. Furthermore, technology's influence on work and the increasing prevalence of remote work could introduce new challenges related to role conflict. Exploring how technology impacts roles and exacerbates conflicts can provide valuable insights for designing strategies that fit the modern work landscape.

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