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PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS AT WORK AND THEIR IMPACT ON HEALTH

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Summary. This study examines psychosocial factors in the workplace and their impact on employee health, focusing on a comparative analysis between university lecturers and top-level managers. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys using the standardized Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) with qualitative in-depth interviews to provide comprehensive insights into workplace stressors and coping mechanisms.

The theoretical foundation is grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which distinguishes between job demands (stressors) and job resources (supportive factors). The study explores both salutogenic factors that promote health – such as job autonomy, social support, and work meaningfulness – and psychosocial stressors including work overload, time pressure, and role conflicts.

The quantitative component involved surveying 50 university lecturers and 30 top-level managers using COPSOQ, while the qualitative phase consisted of 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews. The research was conducted at University XYZ during organizational restructuring, providing unique insights into workplace adaptation processes.

Key findings reveal distinct stressors for each group. University lecturers face chronic overload with an average of 50 hours per week, intense publication pressure (85% of respondents), and constant need for professional development (73% spend 10 hours weekly on learning). Top-level managers experience stress from strategic decision-making responsibilities (92% report high stress levels), managing complex problems in rapidly changing environments (85% face difficulties), and continuous innovation pressure (88% feel strong pressure).

Alarming, 53.2% of lecturers report experiencing long-term stress that may lead to burnout, with only 16% showing no burnout symptoms. Both groups demonstrate high stress levels but from different sources – lecturers suffer from chronic overload leading to burnout, while managers face acute stress from crisis situations.

The study identifies effective coping strategies: lecturers benefit from time management, task delegation, and social support networks, while managers employ mindfulness practices, coaching, and emotional intelligence development. The research emphasizes the need for targeted interventions including reducing administrative burdens, strengthening employee autonomy, and implementing comprehensive mental health programs.

Keywords: psychosocial factors, work-related stress, employee health, university lecturers, top-level management.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, attention in the field of occupational health and safety has shifted from traditional physical risks to the psychosocial aspects of the work environment. This shift reflects the growing recognition of the importance of psychological and social factors for the overall health and well-being of employees (Giorgi et al., 2020).

Psychosocial work factors include aspects of work organization, job content, interpersonal relationships, and workplace culture, which can both positively and negatively influence employees' mental and physical health (Cox & Griffiths, 2005; Eurofound & EU-OSHA, 2014). Among the most serious are chronic stress, loss of autonomy, job insecurity, and an imbalance between effort and reward (Van den Broeck et al., 2021).

There is increasing recognition of the role of psychosocial conditions in shaping workers' health and well-being, which has led to a growing number of initiatives aimed at supporting mental health directly in the workplace. Special attention should be paid to academic and managerial environments, where stressors and individual demands are particularly intense.

The aim of this article is to analyze key psychosocial work factors and their impact on employee health, with a focus on university lecturers and top-level management, and to propose strategies for improving workplace well-being.

2. Theoretical Framework

Interest in psychosocial work factors dates back to the early development of industrial psychology. Throughout the 20th century, foundational models were established to describe the relationship between workplace demands and health, such as Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation and Karasek's job strain model (Karasek, 1979). Today, the prevailing framework is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which distinguishes between stressors and supportive factors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Contemporary approaches also incorporate salutogenic perspectives (Antonovsky, 1979), the concept of psychological safety in the workplace (Edmondson & Lei, 2014), and recent trends in employee well-being that emphasize burnout prevention and the promotion of resilience (Kuntz, 2021).

In addition, there has been intensified research into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid work models, and digital stress on psychosocial well-being (De Kock et al., 2022), making this topic more relevant than ever.

Psychosocial Aspects of Work

Psychosocial aspects of work encompass a wide range of factors that influence employees' psychological and social conditions in the workplace. These factors concern the interaction between job content, work organization, management systems, and environmental and organizational conditions on the one hand, and employees' competencies, needs, and personal characteristics on the other.

Psychosocial aspects of work can be divided into two main categories:

Salutogenic factors refer to work characteristics and conditions that positively influence employee health. This concept, originally developed by Antonovsky (1979), focuses on resources that promote health and well-being rather than pathogenic factors that cause illness. In the workplace context, salutogenic factors include several key elements.

Job autonomy enables employees to exercise control over their work tasks and decision-making processes. This freedom enhances a sense of self-efficacy and reduces stress linked to external pressures. Social support from colleagues and supervisors creates a network of relationships that provides emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and informational resources. These relationships act as buffers against work-related stress and contribute to overall job satisfaction.

Meaningfulness of work is another crucial salutogenic factor. When employees perceive their work as significant and worthwhile, it enhances their motivation and resilience to stress. Opportunities for personal development, such as learning, career progression, and skills enhancement, foster a sense of growth and self-actualization. Collectively, these factors create a positive work environment that supports employee health and well-being, increases productivity, and reduces the risk of burnout.

Psychosocial stressors are complex phenomena arising at the interface between the individual and their work environment. Their effects are mediated by a range of psychological and physiological mechanisms. Exposure to stressors activates the sympathetic nervous system, leading to the release of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. Prolonged activation of this system can result in various health problems, including cardiovascular disease, immune dysfunction, and mental health disorders.

It is essential to recognize that the perception and appraisal of stressors are highly individual processes. According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) cognitive appraisal theory, stress responses result from two evaluative processes: primary appraisal (whether a situation is perceived as a threat) and secondary appraisal (whether the individual believes they have the resources to cope). This model explains why individuals may interpret the same situation differently.

The main types of psychosocial stressors in the workplace include work overload, time pressure and deadlines, role ambiguity and role conflict, lack of job control, poor interpersonal relationships, insufficient recognition and reward, job insecurity, and inadequate physical working conditions. Understanding these stressors and how they are perceived by individuals is essential for effective prevention and intervention in the field of occupational stress.

Bakker and Demerouti (2017), in their Job Demands-Resources model, emphasize that understanding and managing psychosocial work aspects is crucial to creating a healthy and productive work environment. Effective interventions in this area can reduce work-related stress, improve job satisfaction, and enhance the overall quality of work life.

3. Methodology

To examine the psychosocial work factors and their effects on employee health and well-being in greater depth, a mixed-methods research design was employed. This approach allowed for both the quantification of key variables and a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of individuals working in different professional environments.

The study focused on two distinct occupational groups – university lecturers and top-level managers – who are commonly exposed to high levels of psychosocial stressors but operate within markedly different organizational cultures. By comparing these groups, the study aimed to identify both shared and specific patterns in perceived stressors, coping mechanisms, and sources of support.

The research was conducted in two phases, a quantitative survey using a standardized tool to capture measurable aspects of the psychosocial work environment, followed by a qualitative phase involving in-depth interviews to enrich and contextualize the findings. This combination of methods provided a robust framework for triangulating data and validating the results across methodological perspectives.

3.1 Quantitative Component

The quantitative component of the study involved a survey conducted among

50 university lecturers and 30 members of top-level management. For data collection, the standardized Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) was used. This tool measures various dimensions of the psychosocial work environment, such as job demands, autonomy, social support, emotional demands, and job satisfaction. COPSOQ was selected for its high validity and reliability in assessing working conditions across different sectors (Kristensen et al., 2005).

The questionnaire data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS (version 27). The analysis included descriptive statistics to summarize the basic characteristics of the sample, independent t-tests to compare differences between the groups of university lecturers and managers, and Pearson correlation analyses to explore relationships between specific psychosocial factors.

3.2 Qualitative Component

The qualitative component of the study consisted of 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews – 10 with university lecturers and 10 with top-level managers. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and focused on participants' subjective perceptions of work-related stressors, their experiences with coping, sources of support, and individual strategies for preventing overload.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis based on the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical process followed six phases: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report.

Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility, transparency, and ability to capture the complexity of subjective experiences of work among both professional groups. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enabled data triangulation and enhanced the overall validity of the research findings.

4. Case Study – University Lecturers and Top-Level University Management

As part of the case study, the research focused on a specific case of University XYZ, which underwent extensive organizational restructuring in recent years. This change provided a unique opportunity to examine psychosocial work factors in the context of organizational adaptation.

The study compared the experiences of university lecturers and top-level management with regard to work-related stressors and coping mechanisms. Special attention was paid to stressors specific to the academic environment, such as pressure to publish and produce research outputs, as well as stressors typical of senior leadership, including strategic decision-making responsibilities and managing organizational change.

The findings of the case study provided detailed insights into the similarities and differences in the perception of work-related stress between the two groups. Identifying shared and distinct factors enabled the formulation of targeted recommendations to improve the work environment across the institution, with a focus on promoting mental well-being and preventing burnout.

4.1 Findings

Analysis of data collected through the COPSOQ questionnaire and in-depth interviews revealed specific stressors faced by university lecturers and top-level managers at University XYZ.

Stressors among University Lecturers

High workload, including teaching, research, and administrative duties, represents a major stressor for academic staff. On average, they dedicate 50 hours per week to work, with 40% of that time spent on administrative tasks. 78% of respondents reported insufficient time to fulfill all work-related responsibilities. This time pressure disrupts work-life balance and may contribute to burnout.

Pressure to publish and secure research grants emerged as another key stressor. 85% of respondents felt intense pressure to publish in high-impact journals, and 62% reported being stressed by the need to obtain external funding. This pressure may lead to ethical dilemmas and a reduction in research quality in favor of publication quantity.

The constant need for *self-education* and staying current with developments in one's field presents another challenge. 73% of respondents reported spending an average of 10 hours per week on professional learning, while 68% expressed anxiety about falling behind. This pressure can lead to feelings of inadequacy and lowered self-confidence.

Stressors among Top-Level Managers

High responsibility for strategic decisions is a major source of stress. 92% of managers stated that their decisions have long-term impacts on the institution, and 78% reported experiencing high levels of stress due to the potential negative consequences of their decisions. This responsibility can result in anxiety and sleep disturbances.

The need to manage complex problems in a rapidly changing environment presents another challenge. 85% of managers reported difficulties in anticipating future trends in higher education, while 73% felt overwhelmed by the volume of information required for decision-making. This cognitive load may lead to mental fatigue and diminished decision quality.

Pressure to continuously innovate and maintain organizational competitiveness is another significant stressor. 88% of managers reported strong pressure to implement innovations in teaching and research, and 76% expressed concern about losing global competitiveness. This pressure can result in risky decision-making and overwork.

These results highlight the need for targeted interventions to reduce stress and improve working conditions for both university lecturers and senior managers in academic settings.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

Both groups under study – university lecturers and top-level managers – demonstrated high levels of stress, though for different reasons. University lecturers often suffer from burnout due to chronic overload (Maslach et al., 2001), while senior managers more frequently face acute stress triggered by crisis situations.

University lecturers are affected by specific stressors that significantly contribute to burnout development. It is evident that more than one-third of academics are at risk of developing psychological issues. Key stressors include high workload encompassing teaching, research, and administration – 78% of respondents reported insufficient time to fulfill all duties. Pressure to publish and secure research funding is another major stressor, with 85% of respondents reporting strong pressure to publish in high-impact journals. The constant need to stay updated in their field also adds to the burden, with 73% spending an average of 10 hours per week on professional learning.

Top-level managers, on the other hand, face different but equally serious stressors. High responsibility for strategic decision-making is a major stressor, with 92% indicating that their decisions have long-term institutional impacts. Managing complex issues in a fast-changing environment poses additional

challenges, with 85% reporting difficulties in anticipating future trends. Continuous pressure to innovate and maintain competitiveness is another major concern.

Consequences and Coping with Stress

Chronic exposure to psychosocial stressors in the workplace leads to various negative outcomes, including mental health disorders, development of psychosomatic conditions, and reduced job satisfaction (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Research shows that an alarming 53.2% of lecturers report experiencing long-term stress that may result in burnout. Only 16% report no symptoms of burnout. These individual emotional and health-related effects translate into broader social and economic costs, as chronic stress undermines the ability to maintain positive relationships, decreases work efficiency, and increases employee turnover.

4.3 Stress Coping Strategies

Stress coping strategies differ significantly for university lecturers and top-level managers due to the distinct nature of their workloads and the specific stressors they face.

Strategies for University Lecturers

Time management and task prioritization include effective scheduling of teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities. Techniques such as the Eisenhower Matrix – used to distinguish between urgent and important tasks – and the Pomodoro Technique – which segments work into 25-minute intervals followed by short breaks – are widely used. These methods help increase productivity and prevent overload and mental fatigue (Cirillo, 2006; Covey, 1989).

Delegating administrative tasks can significantly reduce faculty workload. Involving assistants, doctoral students, or support staff enables lecturers to focus more on teaching and research. However, this approach requires institutional support, which is often insufficient in many academic settings.

Building supportive relationships with colleagues – creating collegial networks and academic communities – provides both emotional and practical support. Research shows that social support is one of the key protective factors against stress and significantly reduces the risk of isolation and loneliness (Thoits, 2011).

Regular rest and healthy sleep routines are essential for cognitive and emotional recovery. Studies indicate that 7–8 hours of sleep per night lowers stress, improves frustration tolerance, and enhances decision-making capacity (Walker, 2017). However, this area is often neglected by academics due to chronic overload.

Clear work-life boundaries help prevent chronic overload and facilitate recovery. Maintaining a consistent routine, setting clear work cut-off times, and consciously engaging in non-work-related relaxation are key factors in burnout prevention (Kreiner et al., 2009).

Strategies for Top-Level Managers

Mindfulness techniques such as meditation, mindful breathing, or body scan training have been shown to reduce stress hormone levels, enhance concentration, and support emotional regulation. These practices, rooted in mindfulness traditions, are increasingly integrated into executive development programs and contribute to managing acute stress and preventing burnout (Khoury et al., 2015).

Coaching and mentoring enhance decision-making confidence, self-reflection, and psychological resilience. Studies show that managers with access to quality coaching are better equipped to handle high demands, feel more competent, and report greater job satisfaction (Grant, 2014). Mentoring also strengthens interpersonal connections within the organization.

Regular physical activity, particularly aerobic exercise performed 3–5 times a week, reduces cortisol levels, improves neurocognitive functions, and supports emotional stability. Organizational leadership should promote physical activity as part of a healthy organizational culture (Ratey, 2008).

Strategic breaks without disruptive stimuli (e.g., electronic devices) help restore mental energy, improve concentration, and allow managers to reflect on problems with perspective. This approach is part of the microbreaks concept, which has proven positive effects on preventing chronic overload (Korpela et al., 2017).

Developing emotional intelligence increases the ability to manage interpersonal conflict, communicate effectively, and handle emotions in high-pressure situations. Emotional intelligence training is considered

one of the most effective tools of modern leadership and can significantly enhance managers' psychological resilience (Goleman, 1995).

These strategies should be implemented systematically and over the long term, ideally within institutional mental health support programs. The goal is not only to manage acute crises but also to foster a work environment that supports sustainable performance, healthy work-life balance, and overall professional satisfaction in both groups under study.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study confirm the crucial role that psychosocial work factors play in employee health and occupational well-being, with particular attention given to two distinct professional groups – university lecturers and top-level managers. The findings revealed that both groups face significant stressors, differing in nature but comparably severe in their psychological and physical consequences. University lecturers struggle with chronic overload, scientific performance pressure, and administrative demands, while managers face high-level decision-making responsibilities, innovation pressure, and the complexity of leadership in dynamic environments.

Identifying the most frequent stressors – such as time pressure, job insecurity, and conflicts between professional and personal demands – provided deeper insights into the dynamics of stress in the academic environment. The analysis of interviews not only uncovered the subjective perception of these stressors but also explored individual coping strategies, contributing to a deeper understanding of psychological adaptation processes.

A key finding is the importance of institutional support, autonomy, and access to preventive strategies, all of which can substantially mitigate the risk of burnout. The research results point to the need for targeted interventions aimed at improving working conditions. Key recommendations include reducing administrative burdens, strengthening employee autonomy, implementing mental health care programs, and promoting a healthy work culture.

Effective stress management strategies – such as time management, emotional intelligence development, mindfulness practices, regular physical activity, and the building of social support networks – should be systematically encouraged at both individual and organizational levels.

Based on the insights gained, it can be concluded that psychosocial work factors have a fundamental impact on performance, health, and the sustainability of the workforce. Future research should focus on longitudinal monitoring of stress impacts and the evaluation of intervention effectiveness. Given the volatility and uncertainty of today's work environment, it is essential to continuously develop and update tools that help employees adapt to the psychosocial challenges of the modern age.

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