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Occupational Stress of Working Women in a Specific Culture

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Abstract

The occupational stress of the working-woman in a specific orthodox socio-cultural milieu and the effects of personality traits, which are considered as preventive, protective as well as assailing factors, that influence the stress in the workplace, is now a burning issue in organizational sectors. Thus the study sought to examine the relationship of personality attributes on the management of occupational role stress in the working woman (N=550) from 11 occupational groups varying in age, level of employment and working hours in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India. For each subject, data were collected on 10 measures of occupational stress, 4 measures of coping resources, and 5 measures of big five personality traits by using Occupational Stress Inventory-R and NEO Personality Inventory-3. Findings of the study revealed that four groups of women employees, namely police professionals, bureaucrats, corporate engineers and employees in the unorganized sector, have both strong maladaptive role stress as well as psychological stress and strain. Bank employees and Government Engineers have mild maladaptive role stress and psychological stress and strain. All other groups namely, doctors, nurses, administrative staff, school-teachers, and college teachers have both normal adaptive role stress and psychological stress and strain. It was concluded that occupational stress and the coping resources of women employees were significantly influenced by their types of jobs, and factors of individual differences. Each of the Big Five Personality Traits have significant influence on occupational stress and coping resources of the employees. While four of the traits namely openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness helped to control and manage occupational stress by enhancing coping resources. Neuroticism increased the stress and decreased coping resources. The study implicates - exploring, prohibiting and managing the cause and effect relationship of occupational role stress of women in a workplace situation.

Introduction

The concept of culture has been widely and deeply analyzed, based on its importance in different strategic levels and implementation levels on human behaviour. Increasing attention has especially been given to culture, its values and the manner in which they affect the work place stress in an organizational set up. Many researches provide linkages between structure, strategy, and changes in the culture with their effects on occupational stress in fostering organizational efficacy (Madoun, 2007; Augusto et.al., 2008).

In addition to the occupational stress of the working woman in a specific, orthodox socio-cultural milieu, the effects of personality traits, which are considered as preventive, protective as well as assailing factors that influence the stress in the workplace are now a burning issue in the organizational sectors. Occupational stress is the ongoing stress that is related to workplace situations. It occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, responsibilities and the needs of the worker. The stress may be due to the conditions based on the work culture and the personality factors. Personality attributes include the person's character traits, aptitudes, skills, values, attitudes,

etc. The measurable indices of personality attributes are many, which include curiosity, honesty, sacrifice, progressiveness, tolerance, innovativeness, responsibility, flexibility, self-correcting, courage, self-confidence, productivity, initiative, communication skills, creativity, experimental inclination, self-education, motivation, sensitivity, alertness of mind, reflective thinking, ambitiousness, industry, energetic, cooperative, sense of humor, positivity and many more. The researchers have synthesized these hundreds of personality attributes into personality types, traits and factors to lend them for better and more comprehensive academic and scientific inquiry. These personality types, traits and factors have been in many ways related towards understanding human behavior and its consequences in different environments, conditions, and situations of life (Mishra, 2014).

A number of research studies have reported that personality attributes (*e.g.*, Grant & Fox, 2006; Layne, 2010; Lin, 2008; Piennar, Rothman, & Vijver, 2009) and emotional intelligence (Augusto, Lopez, Berrios, & Aquilar, 2008; Ismail, Suh-Suh, & Dollah, 2009) of the employees have significant influences on their experience, as well as in managing and disposing of occupational stress. Likewise, gender differences in occupational stress have been documented in numerous research studies, which point out that given similar situations, experiences and management of occupational stress differ widely among men and women (Gyllensten, & Palmer, 2011; Michael *et al.*, 2009; Yang, Wang & Jin, 2007). Again culture specificness on workplace situation also is having a noticeable phenomenon (Early, 1994; Hofstede, 1980; Huo & Randoll, 1991).

Mental health professionals believe that personality type plays a significant role in how people perceive stress in their job. People with 'Type A' personalities, for example, are rushed, ambitious, time-conscious and driven. Studies suggest that this trait, if not properly managed, can create stress-related illnesses. In contrast, the 'Type B' personalities are more relaxed, less time-conscious and less driven. Type B personalities are able to view things more adaptively (Jamal, 2009). They are better able to put things into perspective, and think through how they are going to deal with situations. Consequently they tend to be less stress-prone in their work place.

Gender and personality attributes are significant determinants of occupational stress in consonance with several other socio-cultural factors. Studies also show that men and women handle stress differently — a difference that some scientists attribute not only to estrogen, but also to many socio-cultural and environmental factors. The **estrogen hypothesis** accounts for the fact that women are three times more likely to develop occupational stress in their lives than men (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2011). But women, unlike men, also tend to have stronger social support networks to which they turn during times of occupational stress. These social supports may help explain why women, in general, seem to be better at coping with occupational stress than men.

The studies by Meena Kumari (2008) on personality and occupational stress differ-

entials of high school female teachers in Haryana; by Ngidi (2006) on the relationship between teachers' personality dimensions and their level of occupational stress; by Pienar, Rothmann, and van de Vijver (2009) on occupational stress among police officers of the South African Police; by Margaret (2007) on the relationship between personality hardiness and occupational stress among 100 critical care nurses, by Sharon (2007) on the role of the Big Five traits in the occupational stressor-strain relationship among 211 managers; by Gerard, Fogarty, Anthony, Majella, Albion, Lynette, Sutherland, Gabrielle, Lalor, and Susan (2008) on the relationship between personality traits, coping resources and occupational stress; and by Grant and Fox (2008) on the combined / interactive effect of the Big Five traits in predicting stress, coping, and strain among 340 working women, all clearly address the role of gender in the manifestations of stress in workplace situations.

The above citations from cross-cultural literature precisely suggest that personality attributes, traits, factors, and types significantly determine the nature and characteristics of occupational stress and its consequences on the people. Some cited studies also point to the gender differences in personality make up and the consequent occupational stress. Further, it is also important to understand and explain the occupational stress of working women in any specific socio-cultural environment of our country as they constitute a relatively new work force in the public and private sectors in all the developing countries of the world. Hence, the present study carried out on the working women of Bhubaneswar, bears a practical significance that we will enable us to know the nature and characteristics of occupational stress among women working in different types of jobs in Bhubaneswar. This is a relatively orthodox socio-cultural setting for women and a theoretical significance that we get to relate personality attributes to occupational stress from the data obtained from our large sample of 550 women.

Rationale

Research studies have reported that the personality attributes of the employees have a significant relationship in managing and disposing the correlational stress. Further it has also been found that positive personality attributes impact as strongly as negative personality disposition. Radicalism and conservatism accelerates occupational stress and personality hardiness is predictive of occupational stress as well as burnout. Besides culture has also some effect on the personality attribute and stress provoking component.

Objective

Hence the present study, sought to examine: 1.The relationship of personality attributes, such as Big Five Personality factors and Type A and Type B personality on the management of occupational role stress in the working environment of women in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India. Occupational Role Stress (ORS) here considered on the basis of Role overload, Role Insufficiency, Role Ambiguity, Role Boundary, Role Responsibility and Physical Environment. 2.The analysis of Psychological Stress and Strain

(PSS), Personal Coping Resources (PCR), Recreation and Self Care, Social Support and Cognitive / Rational Coping Factors, relating to the work place situation of Women employees in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India. 3. And the analysis of all these components in a specific cultural milieu.

Method

Sample

In a stratified random sampling of 550 women, with eleven categories of jobs like school teacher, doctors, nurses, administrative staffs, bureaucrats, bank employees, engineers, corporate engineers, police professionals and employees of unorganized sectors, within the age group of 20-40 were used as the subjects. Subjects were also taken from the specific cultural settings of Bhubaneswar.

Tests and Measures

All the subjects were tested by using three standardized measures in 3 to 4 sessions, such as:

- Occupational Stress Inventory-R (OSI-R: Osipow & Spokane, 1998),
- Big Five Personality Inventory (NEO-PI: Costa & McCrae, 1992) and
- Type-A Personality Test-R (Knot & Sperling, 2005).

Results and Discussion

The factor analysis of the 19 variables, point to the fact that each of the big five personality traits have independent spheres of influence on the occupational role stress, psychological stress and strain, and personal coping resources (cf. Table 1). At the same, some two traits compliment each other to deal with the occupational stress. That is, Extraversion compliments with 'Openness to experience' and Openness to experience compliments with agreeableness. Neuroticism negatively affects the extraversion factor and vice versa. However, conscientiousness has come out as an independent factor neither being complimented nor interefered by other traits. Hence, the results of factor analysis point to some significant directions in understanding and explaining the relationships between big five traits and psychological stress and strain among the women employees.

Table 1*Principal Components Analysis with Varimax Rotation on all the Nineteen Variables (N= 550)*

Variables	Factors					h ²
	(Decimal points are omitted)					
	I	II	III	IV	V	
Openness to Exp (OTE)	732	328	224	-215	187	.774
Conscientious (CNS)	237	221	614	-198	223	.571
Extraversion (EXV)	358	217	158	-323	541	.597
Agreeableness (ABS)	293	615	266	-217	325	.688
Neuroticism (NSM)	-144	-173	-243	553	-318	.517
Role Overload (RO)	-566	-177	-332	326	-133	.587
Role Insufficiency (RI)	-193	-455	-247	311	-196	.440
Role Ambiguity (RA)	-591	-237	-388	379	-221	.748
Role Boundary (RB)	-223	-511	-313	176	-364	.572
Role Responsibility (RR)	-188	-165	-611	236	-350	.614
Physical Envy. (PE)	-073	-071	-171	342	-127	.173
Vocational Strain (VS)	-495	-355	-319	384	-216	.667
Psychological Strain (PS)	-367	-411	-446	442	-326	.804
Interpersonal Strain (IS)	-511	-493	-331	316	-319	.815
Physical Strain (PHS)	-144	-378	-107	266	-114	.259
Recreation (RE)	237	214	153	-197	228	.216
Self-care (SC)	245	187	198	-239	107	.203
Social Support (SS)	568	398	279	-346	334	.790
Cog./ rational Coping (CC)	461	154	347	-338	216	.517
Eigenvalue	2.937	2.143	1.969	1.936	1.438	3430
% of variance	15.45	11.27	10.36	10.189	7.568	1908

Conclusion

Occupational role stress for women varies with respect to the kind of job they take up. Psychological stress and strain of the women employees is also significantly related to the nature of their job. Personal coping resources of working-women are also significantly related to the nature of the job they undertake. There is a significant relationship between big five personality traits and occupational stress. The results further substantiated the finding that Type A women are more prone to occupational stress although they were better in acquiring social support.

Implications

The study implicates that steps should be taken to control and prohibit the work place stress of working women by providing social skill training and intervention pro-

grams, so that they can increase their coping resources, and accommodate to their occupational stress.

The employees, employers and family members, should be aware in their selections of occupations suitable for women and should support them in relaxing their occupational role stress and psychological stress and strain, enhancing their coping skills in organizational sectors.

Finally, there is a large number of significant correlations of occupational stress indicators with Big Five personality traits, which points to the implications that use of personality factors should be a part of any job selection program.

In summary, the findings of the present study have great implications for Indian working-women in general, and the working women of Bhubaneswar in particular, conveying the culture specific component of workplace stress. In addition, there is need for further comparative inspections.

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