

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB STRESS, CO-WORKER SUPPORT AND ORGANIZATION-BASED SELF-ESTEEM: A SURVEY ACROSS DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between co-worker supports, job stress and organization based self-esteem (OBSE). The independent variables are job stress and co-worker support, while organization-based self-esteem is the dependent variable. A survey was conducted on 190 respondents from different occupational background. The respondents were randomly selected from different employment background. The study revealed that only co-worker support was significant in predicting organization based self-esteem.

Keywords: Job stress, Co-worker support, OBSE.

INTRODUCTION:

Stress stems from the relationship between a person and the surrounding environment and can be considered as an unpleasant emotional situation that a person experiences when work-related requirements cannot be counter-balanced with his/her ability to resolve them and prolonged or intense stress can have a negative impact on an individual's mental and physical health (Health and Safety Executive, 2001; Cooper et al., 2001). According to Johnson et al, (2005) the amount of stress a person experiences at work is likely to be a result of the interaction of a number of factors such as the type of work they are doing (their occupation), the presence of work stressors, the amount of support they receive both at work and at home and the coping mechanisms they use to deal with stress. It is not possible therefore, to say that all people working in a certain occupation will experience the same amount of stress. It is however, reasonable to state that employees working in high-risk occupations will have an increased likelihood of experiencing negative stress outcomes.

Stress results in organizational inefficiency, high staff turnover, absenteeism due to sickness, increased costs of healthcare and decreased job satisfaction (Wheeler & Riding, 1994). Cooper and Marshall's (1976) five sources of stress are (1) Intrinsic to the job, including factors such as poor physical working conditions, work overload or time pressures;(2) role in the organisation, including role ambiguity and role conflict;(3) career development, including lack of job security and under/over promotion;(4) relationships at work, including poor relationships with your boss or colleagues, an extreme component of which is bullying in the workplace (Rayner and Hoel, 1997); and (5) organisational structure and climate, including little involvement in decision-making and office politics.

Rapidly changing global business scene is increasing the pressure on the workforce to produce maximum output and enhance competitiveness. Indeed, workers are required to perform multiple tasks in the workplace to keep abreast of changing technologies (Cascio, 1995; Quick, 1997). According to Idris, Dollard and Winefield (2010) in Malaysia, for example, employees reported that they experienced stress that is provoked by several factors such as workloads, organizational politics and a lack of autonomy in the workplace.

Against the backdrop of the uncertain economic situation, it is apparent that the level of support, in the context of social support, as provided by the employees' co-workers and the job stress experienced by the employees would play an important role in determining an individual's self-esteem. The effects of co-worker support and job stress are crucial, especially for organizations as it will affect the quality of production, productivity, creativity and innovation.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

JOB STRESS:

Job stress or occupational stress has received substantial attention in past research (Fisher, 2001; Bernardi, 1997; Patten, 1995; Choo, 1987). Job stress is very much an individual reaction and is different from general stress as it is also organization and job related (Montgomery et al., 1996). Sauter et al., (1999) defined job stress as the harmful physical and emotional responses which occurred when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can be defined as an employee's awareness or feeling of personal dysfunction as a result of perceived conditions or happenings in the workplace, and the employee's psychological and physiological reactions caused by these uncomfortable, undesirable, or threats in the employee's immediate workplace environment (Montgomery et al., 1996).

Although researchers tend to use the term stress differently, it is usually categorized into four dimensions: role ambiguities, role conflict, work overload and resource inadequacy (Rizzo, House, & Litzman, 1970). Thus, job stress can be defined as the physical and emotional responses that occur when the employee's capabilities and resources cannot satisfy their job demands and requirements (Malik, 2011). Therefore, the presence of job stress among employees leads to physical and psychological risks for both individual and organization.

It is a well-known fact that a person's ability to cope with stress is related to the individual's self-

esteem (Newman, & Rucker-Reed, 2004). According to Gardner, Dyne, and Pierce (2004), self-esteem has been positively correlated with job performance and yet not widely studied in the police field. A research study by Harris and Cameron (2005) concluded that higher self-esteem among a cohort of 247 employees in various high stress occupations, which included police officers among others, had statistically significant and higher ratings of life satisfaction and lower job stress ratings. Low self-esteem has been associated with anxiety, neuroticism, vulnerability to stress, lack of initiative and poor performance (Tharenou, 1979). Specifically, Iwasaki et al. (2002) conclude that male and female workers in across all industries of work with higher self-esteem ratings showed statistically significant and lower job stress ratings.

CO-WORKER SUPPORT:

Kwok and Wai (2005) state that the literature on social support that has accumulated over the past two decades suggests that social support can have a direct impact on psychological well-being (e.g. Billings and Moos, 1984; Holahan and Moos, 1981). Beehr and McGrath (1992) define co-worker's social support as co-workers willingness to help one another (e.g., caring, friendly, warm relation, empathy, cooperation, no back biting and gossiping, appreciation, respect and support) in performing daily tasks and handling of upsetting and threatening situations to create healthy environments in the workplace (Frone *et al.*, 1997; Mansor *et al.*, 2003). As Hodson (1997) convincingly argued, the social relations of the workplace may make a key contribution to employees' job satisfaction, productivity and well-being. The current study emphasis on co-worker support refers to co-workers assisting one another in their tasks when needed by sharing knowledge and expertise as well as providing encouragement and support (Zhou & George, 2001). In an environment where co-worker support is high, employees are able to discuss ideas more openly and honestly and there is a positive relationship to job satisfaction (Bateman, 2009).

However, there are contradictory views regarding to the positive effects of co-worker support on employees, where, co-workers behaviours may be viewed as political or self-enhancing and therefore it may not always be associated with constructive work attitudes. Accepting support from co-workers may also suggest incompetence on behalf of the person accepting the support (Bateman, 2009). According to Ng and Sorenson (2008) the negative views regarding co-worker support stems from the perception that, because peers are usually regarded as equal, support from co-workers may suggest a lack of ability or independence. Despite this, there is overwhelming evidence that co-worker support has many positive effects in the work place (Babins & Boles, 1996).

Social relationships are important in maintaining an individual's self-esteem, as it fosters a sense of social support. According to House, Umberson and Landis (1988) social support is the quality of social relationships as perceived by an individual and it is distinct from concepts such as social integration, social network structure and social regulation. Functional social support refers to behaviours, such as emotional and instrumental support, that are exchanged between individuals. Emotional support conveys such as caring and empathy, while instrumental support is concerned with providing assistance with problem solving or information exchange (Semmer, Elfering, Jaconshagen, Perrot, Beehr & Boos, 2008). Both types of support are equally important, as they form the dimensions in co-worker support.

A study in Malaysia by Teoh and Afiqah (2010) using 200 university students, through a questionnaire survey, examined whether personality traits and social support are associated with self-esteem. Their findings revealed that all the personality and social support factors were associated with the level of self-esteem.

ORGANIZATION- BASED SELF ESTEEM (OBSE):

According to self-verification theory (e.g. Swann, 1983), self-esteem – and, by extension, OBSE – basically serves a self-regulatory function. This theory states that 'people are motivated to verify, validate and sustain their existing self-concepts' (Leary, 2007: 324). La pointe, Vanderberghe and Panaccio (2011) citing Stinson et al. (2010) as an example of the operation of self-verification theory, where, Stinson et al. (2010)

demonstrated that when the environment's feedback (e.g. feedback concerning one's relational value to others) is consistent with one's self-esteem, people experience feelings of authenticity, control and certainty. In contrast, when the feedback is inconsistent, feelings of discomfort are generated, resulting in efforts to solve the discrepancy between feedback and self-esteem. Over time, these efforts ultimately draw on one's emotional resources. Furthermore, self-verification has been shown to operate the same way with OBSE as with generalized self-esteem (Wiesenfeld et al., 2007). The sociometer theory considers self-esteem to be essentially a psychological meter, or a gauge that monitors the quality of people's relationship with others (Leary, 1999). Researchers regard the maintenance and enhancement of self-esteem as a primary motive of human behaviour (Brown and Dutton, 1995).

Building upon the notion that self-esteem is a hierarchical and multifaceted phenomenon, and Coopersmith's (1967) observation that self-esteem indicates the extent to which the individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant, and worthy; Pierce, Gardner, Cummings and Dunham (1989) introduced the concept of organization-based self-esteem. *Organization-based self-esteem* (OBSE) is defined as the degree to which an individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant, and worthy as an organizational member (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Dyne et al. (2000) argues that OBSE is the self-perceived value that individuals have of themselves within a specific organizational context. It reveals people's sense of their own value and how they view themselves in the organizational settings and how their level of self-esteem changes while working for the said organization. The employees with high self-esteem think of themselves as 'valuable' for the organization (Alam, 2009).

According to Qureshi et al. (2011) self-esteem is the basic appraisal one makes of oneself, as it concerns the overall value that one places on oneself, as a person. Creed et al. (2001) argues that belief in one's capacity to change one's own situation is a major determining factor in the level of self-esteem. The basic underlying theoretical tenet is that individuals will develop attitudes and behave in ways that will maintain their level of self-esteem. Moreover, self-esteem can also be defined as 'a construct expressing the global relations toward the self' (Classen et al., 2007)

Korman's (1970) view that an individual's self-esteem is shaped by one's experiences, it can be hypothesized that the experiences one has within the organization will consequently have an impact on one's level of OBSE and the attitudes that are developed as a result of how they perceive they are treated by the organization. Studies have indicated that the organizational context as a whole influence OBSE (Pierce et al, 1989, 1993). This conclusion seems to reinforce Korman's view (1970) that the environment in which an individual works in does in fact influence the beliefs that an individual has about his or her value and worth in the organization (Elloy & Patil, 2012).

The construct holds considerable importance in an organizational context. At the individual level, research has shown that persons high in OBSE have greater work motivation and intrinsic motivation (Hui & Lee, 2000), and achieve higher performance ratings (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004; Pierce et al., 1993; Gardner, Pierce, Van Dyne, & Cummings, 2000; 1992; Marion-Landais, 2000) than do persons low in OBSE. Concerning the organizational level, scholars have also discovered that OBSE correlates negatively with turnover intentions and with turnover (Gardner & Pierce, 2001). Some studies have examined the relationship between OBSE and stress and found a negative relationship (Tang and Ibrahim, 1998). Jex and Elacqua (1999) in their study found that OBSE was negatively related to frustration and depression and physical strain.

According to Kanning and Hill (2012) OBSE is an important psychological construct as shown in various studies. For instance, positive correlations were proven between self-esteem and intrinsic performance motivation, performance at the workplace, general job satisfaction as well as identification with and commitment to one's own organization (Gardner & Pierce, 1998; Kanning & Schnitker, 2004; Tang & Gilbert, 1994). Persons with high organization based self-esteem show a stronger career orientation or are less interested in slowing down on the job than people with low self-esteem (Carson, Carson, Lanford & Roe, 1997).

METHODOLOGY:

This paper outlines research into the experience of co-worker support, job stress and OBSE within

diverse set of occupations. The independent variables are job stress and co-worker support, while, OBSE is the dependent variable in this study. In order to analyse the relationship between co-worker support, OBSE and stress, we performed a study on a random sample of 190 individuals. The population of our study consists of 190 employees working in private enterprises and public organisations in Penang, Malaysia. A summary of this information is presented in Table I. The entire population was used in order for the sample to be representative, random and as large as possible. Respondents were chosen randomly and the survey was conducted to collect primary data using self-administered questionnaire.

QUESTIONNAIRE SCALES

ORGANIZATION BASED SELF ESTEEM:

Pierce et al. (1989)'s measurement of organizational-based self-esteem contained ten items and displayed a good reliability ($\alpha = .91$), was used for the purpose of data collection. Respondents were asked to indicate from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for the items about organizational-based self-esteem. An example item of Pierce et al. (1989)'s ten-item instrument using a seven point Likert scale includes "I count around here".

CO-WORKER SUPPORT:

The Social Support scale designed by O'Driscoll (2000) was used to measure co-worker support. This scale has a reliability of 0.89 (O'Driscoll, Brough & Kalliath, 2004). An example of an item is, "indicate how often your co-workers provide you with clear and helpful feedback". Respondents were asked to indicate from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale consists of four items and has a maximum score of 24 and minimum score of 4. A higher score indicates higher levels of co-worker support.

JOB STRESS:

Job stress was measured using four items derived from Crank, Regoli, Hewitt, and Culbertson (1995) and had a Cronbach alpha of .82. Respondents were asked to indicate from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

RESULTS:

Table 1: Frequency of Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Bank Officers	16	8.4
Teachers	79	41.6
Engineers (Manufacturing)	75	39.5
Nurses	17	8.9
Supervisors (Manufacturing)	1	0.5
Technician	1	0.5
Sales Executive	1	0.5
Total	190	100

Table 1 shows that 41.6% of the respondents are teachers, 39.5% respondents are engineers in the manufacturing sector, 8.9% respondents are nurses, 8.4% respondents are bank officers, 0.5% respondents are supervisors, 0.5% respondents are technicians and 0.5 % of the respondents are sales executives.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics According to Occupations

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Job Stress	1.00	5.00	3.6825	0.7962
Co-Worker Support	1.50	5.00	4.0289	0.6422
OBSE	2.30	5.00	3.7289	0.4419

Table 2 indicates that the minimum value for Job Stress is 1.00 and the maximum is 5.00. The mean for Job Stress is 3.6825 with a standard deviation of 0.7962. The minimum value for Co-worker Support is 1.50 and the maximum is 5.00. The mean for Co-worker Support is 4.0289 with a standard deviation of 0.6422. The minimum value for OBSE is 2.30 and the maximum is 5.00. The mean for OBSE is 3.7289 with a standard deviation of 0.4419. By comparing the mean value this signifies that the value for Co-worker support is the highest among the three variables.

Table 3: Results of Regression

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Job Stress	.044	.039	.080	1.130	.260
Co-worker Support	.179	.236	.260	3.689	.000*

Dependent variable: OBSE

Regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of both Job Stress and Co-worker Support on OBSE. In other words, the results of the regression analysis would provide a more accurate picture, which of the two variables are more significant in influencing the employees' perception of their OBSE. As depicted in Table 3, the results indicate that Co-worker Support has a significant effect on OBSE. Therefore Hypothesis 2 is supported. The results also indicate that Job Stress has no significant effect on OBSE. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is refuted.

DISCUSSION:

The result clearly indicates that Co-worker support has a positive and significant impact on OBSE. Therefore, it can be concluded from this study that individuals who experience higher levels of emotional support, such as caring and empathy and instrumental support, such as assistance in problem solving or information exchange; perceived themselves to a valued member of the organization. Thus, this consequently leads to employees having positive and high level of self-esteem. While job stress is positively related to OBSE but its non-significance could indicate that while it is present but does not influence the employees' self-esteem.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION:

This study proves that variables such as job stress, co-worker support and OBSE are a global phenomenon. It also highlights that employees whether in Malaysia or in the Western hemisphere share similarities. This study indicates that Malaysian employees have similar understanding and perception of job stress, co-worker support and OBSE as in the West. Despite the similarities only co-worker support is significant in its impact on OBSE. This could be an indication the co-worker support reduces the effect of job stress on the employees' self-esteem. This result can also be attributed to a different work culture environment in Malaysia compared to the Western countries. Clearly, this study has provided evidence that co-worker support creates an environment where one's self-esteem is favourably impacted; hence, the employees will develop positive attitudes and engage in behaviours which are favourable to the organizations.

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