Original Article

Effect of Gender, Marital Status and Family Type on Occupational Stress among Employees amid COVID-19 pandemic

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Received: 19.04. 2021 **Revised:** 23.05. 2021
Accepted: 15.06. 2021 **Published:** 27.06. 2021

Access this Article online

Website : www.jpsw.co.in

DOI: http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5105515

Quick Response Code

How to cite: Kumar, S., & Biswas, J. (2021). Effect of Gender, Marital Status and Family Type on Occupational Stress among Employees amid COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Psychosocial Wellbeing, 2(1):51-58.*

Abstract

Background: Occupational stress is becoming an issue of concern for employees and employers across sectors. Though employees are working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, they are overloaded with work and are stressed out. Amid the emergence and re-emergence of Covid-19, and with the advent of the mass work-from-home, distance between office and home has blurred, which, in many ways, is taking its toll on employees. **Objectives:** Hence, this study aims to assess the effect of gender, marital status and family type on prevalence of occupational stress among employees in Delhi-NCR during COVID-19 pandemic (work from home) situations. **Methods:** Data was collected from 60 employees using Occupational Stress Index Scale (OSI Scale) and demographic information sheet. Continuous variables were presented in the form of mean (±sd) and categorical variables were presented as number (%). To find the association between categorical variables, the Chi-Square test was used. A p value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. **Results:** The participants had a mean age of 38.62 (SD=8.79) years. 71.7% (n=43) were male and 28.3% (n=17) were female, 70% (n=42) were married and 30% (n=18) were unmarried. Further, 65% (n=39) were living in a nuclear family and 35 (n=21) in a joint family environment. Majority of the participants had moderate and high levels of occupational stress. A significant association was found between marital status and occupational stress but gender and family type were not significantly associated with occupational stress. **Conclusion:** The results indicate that married employees seem to experience more occupational stress than unmarried employees. Policy makers of the organisations should make efforts to reduce occupational stress among the employees, especially for married employees.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Marital Status, Gender, Family Type, COVID-19

Introduction

Stress, a natural mental and physical reaction to everyday pressures, is quite a common phenomenon that every individual experience from time-to-time. A fairly normal occurrence in one's daily life, long-time stress, can, however, lead to mental and physical health problems (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2021). While, physically, chemical shifts caused by stress can raise heart rate, blood pressure and blood sugar levels, it can also manifest itself in the form of anxiety, anger issues and/or depression (National Cancer Institute, n.d.).

Among the many stress-inducing factors in one's life, one of the most common of all is workplace stress. When the laid-out requirements of a job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of a worker, it leads to stress that can, in turn, bring in poor health for the individual. On the flip side, job stress of employees can lead to overall poor performance of an organization. Further, the pressure to fulfill a daily target, sudden must-do projects arriving without warnings, coworkers not taking responsibility on a shared assignment, sudden change of supervisor, management style, work culture, working condition, work environment, job role, scarcity of promotion, training and support from superiors etc. are some of the factors that lead to stress of an employee, which, in turn, leads to higher rate of absenteeism, low productivity, poor product quality, etc. for the organization (Harshana, 2018).

At an individual level, there are a number of factors that add up to work stress. Age, gender, qualification, marital status, type of family, number of children, duration of employment, sector of employment, type of employment, salary structure etc. are some of them.

Also, with the sacred line between work hours and home hours disappearing, self-isolation, uncertainty, and prolonged working hours and increased workload have led to a large number of employees suffering from stress related issues. And, with office and home overlapping, it has been women, especially working mothers, who have been facing the heat of both world — dealing with kids, household chores along with adjusting to the new work schemes (Khanna, 2020). Ibarra, Gillard and Premuzic (2020) also point out that the flexi working hours might actually lead to work/ family conflict.

Bruck, Allen and Spector (2002) emphasized the negative effects of work-family conflict and family-work conflicts. Research works at personal level (Allen et al. 2012; Byron, 2005; Frone et al. 1992; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998; Premeaux et al. 2007) focused on work-family or family-work conflicts. At the same time research on organizational level focused on the influence of work-family practices on an organization.

Another aspect that can also influence stress at work is gender. On gender disparities in mental health, the World Health Organization (WHO) revealed that gender influences a person's social position, status and treatment in society. In a way, gender dictates varying stress factors in men and women, and how they react to it. Experts have pointed out that men and women respond to stress in different ways. While the causes of stress might differ from person-to-person, the obstacles men and women face in managing stress vary widely. Traditionally, women handle more family responsibilities like caring for children and elderly members, among others. For a working woman, the pressure multiplies if the organization she is associated with lacks a support system to begin with.

The balance between private and professional life has always remained an elusive factor in a worker's life. And, with time, managing a stressful job and dedicating quality time to family has become more and more challenging for both men and women employees. For those in corporate employment with family obligations, maintaining work-life balance has always been an issue that has been viewed as women's problem (Parasuraman and Simmers, 2001; Hardy and Adnett, 2002; Felstead et al., 2002), But, further researches suggest that work-life balance is a prime concern for working men too. In families with shared childcare, it can be seen that men might experience the same levels of work-life conflict as women (Duxbury and Higgins, 2008). Also, it has been reported that married couples with children show higher level of stress than couples without children. Employers can play a major role in managing these conflicts by creating a family-friendly organizational culture.

Occupational stress can affect both men and women. The COVID-19 pandemic is taking a toll on the emotional well-being of India's working women as nearly 50% of India's working women are feeling increased stress (PTI, 2020). Nevertheless, women may be disproportionately exposed to stressors as women have greater exposure to monotonous tasks than men and are less likely to do jobs involving problem solving or learning (Torres et al., 2013). Rajshekhar & Thomas (2015) also found that there are no statistically significant gender differences in occupational stress. But, males who have less years of work experience, generally have higher occupation stress as compared to the females (Gaur, 2013). Tien (n.d.) mentioned that in the construction industry, men experience slightly higher levels of stress than women. Men in this industry appeared to suffer more stress in risk-taking, implications of mistakes, redundancy, disciplinary matters, career progression etc. On the other hand, women in this industry stressed more over opportunities for personal development, keeping up with new ideas and business travel.

Further, marital status could also significantly influence the overall stress as a study done by Vimala et al. (2019) found that the overall stress and other dimensions of stress were relatively higher among the married women than others. Biswas & Naidu (2019) revealed that the working women showed more perceived stress than working men. Further, they found that there is no significant difference in the level of perceived stress by married and single individuals. The findings of another study done by Gayen & Lakhotia (2021) supported their findings as they also found that there is no significant difference between married and unmarried males on their levels of occupational stress. The research done by Aziz (2004) found significant differences in the level of stress between married and unmarried employees on several role stressors. However, level of education does not emerge as a significant differentiator of stressors (Aziz, 2004).

Family environment, be it nuclear or joint family, plays a vital role in the well-being of an employee. Indian families are capable of fulfilling the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of its members; initiate and maintain growth, and be a source of support, security and encouragement to the patient. The Indian family, which often feels bewildered in these times of changed values, changed roles, changed morality and changed expectations is in need of support and is ready for family therapy. If developed enthusiastically, family therapy might be the right tool to not only help the families in need but also to develop a huge resource in community-centered treatment of mental-health problems (Chadda & Deb, 2013).

While there are a number of studies and survey reports exploring occupational stress among employees, only a few studies provided a detailed investigation into gender, marital status, family type and occupational stress specially during COVID-19 pandemic where employees are working from home environment. This is an area of potential research for which employees and employers can identify areas where stress can be reduced and quality of life can be improved. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess the effect of gender, marital status and family type on occupational stress among employees during COVID-19.

Materials and Methods

A descriptive research design was adopted for this study. 60 employees from Delhi-NCR participated in this study. The participants included were between the age group of 25-60 years, both male and female employees. The sample is representative of the population from which it was drawn in terms of gender, marital status and type of family. The participation was completely voluntary. The questionnaire was shared using Google form consisting of two sections, namely socio-demographic data and Occupational Stress Index scale.

Occupational Stress Index scale

In the present study, Occupational Stress Index scale (Srivastav & Singh, 1984) was used. The scale consisted of 46 items, each item can be rated on the five-point scale. Out of 46 items, 28 are —true keyed and 18 are —false keyed. In this scale minimum 46 and maximum 230 score could be obtained based on the 5 options set in the scale. The scoring was done as 5 for 'Strongly Agree', 4 for 'Agree', 3 for 'Uncertain', 2 for 'Disagree', 1 for 'Strongly Disagree'. The interpretation was done as; if the score is below 122, the employee has low stress, if it is between 123 to 155, the stress is moderate and if it is more than 156, the employee is highly stressed. The reliability index ascertained by the split half(odd-even) method and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for the scale as a whole were found to be 0.935 and 0.90 respectively. The validity of the instrument was determined by computing coefficient of correlation between the scale on the OSI and various measures of job attitudes and job behaviour.

Demographic Information Sheet

Demographic information sheet was used to collect various demographic information about the sample including age, gender, type of family, qualification, and marital status. Apart from that, information of other variables like no. of children, sector of employment, employment type, years of experience, duration of employment, any illness and working mode during COVID-19 pandemic were also collected.

Statistical Analysis

The data was analyzed using statistical software SPSS (version 20.0). Continuous variables were presented in the form of mean (±sd) and categorical variables were presented as number (%). To find the association between categorical variables, the Chi-Square test was used. A *p* value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

Table 1:

Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

Sociodemographic characteristics	*n*	*%*
Gender		
Female	17	28.3
Male	43	71.7
Marital status		
Unmarried	18	30
Married	42	70
Family type		
Nuclear family	39	65
Joint family	21	35

Note. Participants were on average 38.62 (SD=8.79) years old.

The study results showed that the mean age of the participants was 38.62 (SD=8.79) years. 71.7% (n=43) were male and 28.3% (n=17) were female, 70% (n=42) were married and 30% (n=18) were unmarried. Further, 65% (n=39) were living in a nuclear family and 35 (n=21) in a joint family environment (Table 1).

It was observed that among all the employees, 13.3% employees had low stress level, 75.0% had moderate stress level and 11.7% had high stress level on OSI scale (Table 2) with mean score of 138.40 and Standard Deviation of 17.46 (Table 3).

Table 2

Occupational Stress Levels

OSI Level	Gender (%)		Marital Status (%)		Family Type (%)		Overall Score (%)
	Male (n=43)	Female (n=17)	Unmarried (n=18)	Married (n=42)	Nuclear (n=39)	Joint (n=21)	
Low	16.3	5.9	5.6	16.7	12.8	14.3	13.3
Moderate	67.4	94.1	66.7	78.6	79.5	66.7	75.0
High	16.3	0.0	27.8	4.8	7.7	19.0	11.7

As shown in Table 2, gender distribution indicates that 16.3%, 67.4% and 16.3% males had low, moderate and high levels of occupational stress respectively and 5.9%, 94.1% and 0% females had low, moderate and high levels of occupational stress. This indicates that the majority of males and females had moderate level of occupational stress.

Marital status distribution shows that 5.6%, 66.7% and 27.8% unmarried participants had low, moderate and high levels of occupational stress respectively and 16.7%, 78.6% and 4.8% married participants had low, moderate and high levels of occupational stress. This indicates that the majority of unmarried and married participants had moderate level of occupational stress.

Similarly, family type distribution shows that 12.8%, 79.5% and 7.7% participants who live in nuclear families had low, moderate and high levels of occupational stress respectively and 14.3%, 66.7% and 19.0% participants who live in joint families had low, moderate and high levels of occupational stress. This indicates that the majority of the participants

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviation and p Value

Category		Mean	Standard Deviation	p Value
Gender	Male (n=43)	139.25	17.68	0.086
	Female (n=17)	136.23	16.77	
Marital Status	Unmarried (n=18)	137.78	21.91	0.028
	Married (n=42)	138.67	15.15	
Family Type	Nuclear Family (n=39)	136.70	15.81	0.401
	Joint Family (n=21)	141.58	19.78	
Overall OSI Score		138.40	17.46	-

who live either in nuclear families or joint families had moderate level of occupational stress.

Overall, the majority of the participants had moderate level of occupational stress.

The data presented in Table 3 shows that the mean score of male 139.25(SD=17.68) is more than female 136.23(SD=16.77) but there is no significant association ($p>0.05$) of gender with occupational stress. Mean score of unmarried participants 137.78(SD=21.91) is less than married participants 138.67(SD=15.15) and also has significant association ($p<0.05$) with occupational stress. Further, the mean score of the participants who live in the nuclear family 136.70(SD=15.81) is less than the mean score of participants who live in a joint family 141.58 (SD=19.78) and has no significant association ($p>0.05$) with occupation stress.

Discussion

The current study examined the association between gender, marital status, family type and occupational stress. Most of the participants were male (71.7%), married (70%) and live in a nuclear family (65%). In this study the majority of the participants had moderate occupational stress and 11.7% participants experienced high occupational stress.

We found the mean score of male 139.25(SD=17.68) which was higher than female 136.23(SD=16.77) but there is no significant association ($p>0.05$) of gender with occupational stress. Rajshekhar & Thomas (2015) also found that there are no statistical significant gender differences in occupational stress.

A significant association ($p<0.05$) between marital status and occupational stress with mean scores of unmarried participants 137.78(SD=21.91) and married participants 138.67(SD=15.15) was found. This finding correlate with the findings of Vimala et al. (2019) who reported that marital status could significantly influence the overall stress. But, Biswas & Naidu (2019) found that there is no significant difference in the level of perceived stress by married and single individuals. The results of research done by Gayen & Lakhotia (2021) revealed that there is no significant difference between married and unmarried males on their levels of occupational stress.

Gender distribution showed that 83.7% male participants had moderate or high levels of occupational stress whereas 94.1% female participants moderate or high levels of occupational stress. PTI (2020) has also reported that nearly 50% of India's working women are feeling increased stress as COVID-19 pandemic is taking a toll on the emotional well-being of India's working women. Further, Biswas & Naidu (2019) had also found that the working women showed more perceived stress than working men. According to Torres et al. (2013), women may be disproportionately exposed to stressors as they have greater exposure to monotonous tasks than men and are less likely to do jobs involving problem solving or learning.

Further, our study revealed that the mean OSI score (SD) of participants who live in the nuclear family is 136.70(SD=15.81) which is less than the mean score of participants who live in a joint family 141.58 (SD=19.78) and has no significant association ($p>0.05$) with occupational stress. 87.2% participants who live in nuclear families had moderate or high occupational stress whereas 85.7% participants who live in joint family environments had moderate or high level of occupational stress. Chadda & Deb (2013) mentioned in his study that family environment, be it nuclear or joint family, plays a vital role in the well-being of an employee.

Conclusion

The results of this study revealed that 11.7% participants had high occupational stress. Gender distribution showed that male participants had more occupational stress than female participants. The mean OSI score of marital status indicated that married participants experienced more occupational stress than unmarried participants and a significant association ($p<0.05$) was observed between marital status and occupational stress among employees. No significant association was found between gender & occupational stress and family type & occupational stress. Further, the participants who live in a joint family had more occupational stress than the participants who live in a nuclear family. Hopefully, the results of this study will set the stage for conducting further studies on larger samples to evaluate the effect of gender, marital status and family type to reduce occupational stress and increase quality of life among employees.

Implications

The results of the study show that marital status is significantly associated with occupational stress of employees. Efforts should be made by the employers to reduce occupational stress among the employees.

Limitations of the study

The sample size for this study was restricted to only 60 and the data collection was done online due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation which might affect certain factors in the outcome of the research as the responses were recorded under an uncontrolled environment. There may be sampling issues as the data was collected online using Google form due to COVID 19 pandemic i.e. there are chances of participants not providing accurate information. Some participants might have hidden their true expression or misrepresent their identity or their true feelings about the content of the questionnaire. This study suggests that some further studies should also be done across states of India on a larger population.

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