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FACULTY OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT, UiTM MELAKA
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TUNAS MEKAR UiTM

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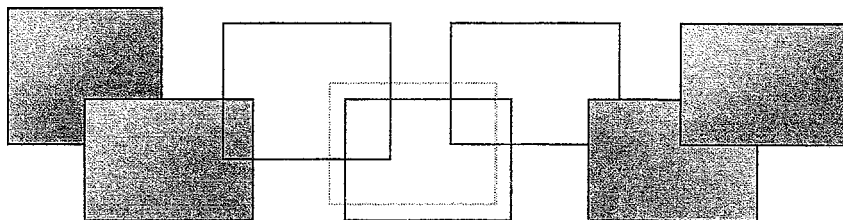
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ABSTRACT

Numerous researches have been conducted in the West seeking to establish a relationship between organizational variables and job stress. However, a study on stress among teachers in Malaysia, specifically in Sabah, has yet to be developed although it may contribute tremendously towards the field. The present study examined the impact of blocked career and time factor on job stress among teachers in Sabah. 177 teachers from Tawau and Lahad Datu participated in this study. The results reveal that teachers in Tawau and Lahad Datu experience low stress levels. This study also found that there is a positive relationship between blocked career and time factors on job stress and gender has no moderating role on the relationships between blocked career and time factors on job stress.

Keyword: Job stress, Blocked career, Teaching facilities, age and gender

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, there have been numerous reports regarding stress experienced by teachers like Ramanathan (1987) as cited in Roselina et al., (2003) Siti (1982), Kassim (1990) and Yafiya (1998). Teachers have a wide range of interpretations on the meaning of the term stress and when they accept or deny the existence of stress in themselves or in their colleagues. Some teachers define stress as anxiety, fear, inability to cope, frustration and unhappiness (Pratt, 1978), while others associate stress with personal weakness and professional incompetence (Dunham, 1984) as cited in Janice (1996).

Ramanathan (1987) as cited in Roselina et al., (2003) reports that teaching is a profession that produces its own assortment of tensions. Teaching carries with it a set of tensions and responsibilities unique to the professions. Due to the situation above, this study is to gauge the extent of the impact of blocked career and time factors on stress.

In the Malaysian context, quality of education is very important in achieving the vision of a developed country by the year 2020. The tremendous growth within the Malaysian education industry has drawn increasing attention to address the issue of the quality of education. The teacher is one of the individuals who is mostly responsible to address the issue. The many challenges in the work environment characterized by heightened competition, lack of time, uncontrollable factors, lack of space, continuous technological development, conflicting

demands from organizational stakeholders (Hall & Savery, 1986) as cited in Aizzat. N, T.Ramayah & S.Kumaresan (2003), increased use of participatory management and computerization (Murray & Forbes, 1986) as cited in Aizzat (2003), greater uncertainty and others have resulted in higher job stress.

Only a few studies have been done to find out the causes and effects of stress particularly among teachers in Sabah. On the other hand, Roselina et al., (2003) reported that in recent years, few major teaching unions were commissioned to carry out studies on teacher's stress. Due to the additional work, pressure, new policy and tension experienced by the teachers due to changes, which have taken place over the years, stress is experienced more among teachers. The purpose of this study is to address the following issues:

- a) To study the extent of job stress experienced by primary school teachers in Tawau and Lahad Datu.
- b) To identify whether blocked career and time factor have a positive relationship with job stress among primary school teachers in Tawau and Lahad Datu.
- c) To determine whether demographic variables moderate the relationship between organizational variables and job stress among primary school teachers in Tawau and Lahad Datu.

Foot and Venne (1990) discovered a positive relationship between barriers to career advancement and job stress. When employees perceived a lack of career opportunities, they will feel uncertain about their future in the organization, which in turn, are likely to induce stress. For many workers, career progression is of overriding importance. By promotion, people do not only earn more money but gain increased status and experience new challenge.

Hypothesis 1: Blocked career will have a positive relationship with job stress.

According to Cooper (1998), time has been proposed as an important variable in occupational stress processes (e.g. McGrath and Beehr, 1990), but the study of it remains sketchy. It stands to reason that the longer one is exposed to a potentially noxious event, the stronger the consequences will be. There have been discussions, however about acute, time-limited stressors versus chronic, long-term stressors. In addition to the duration of the uncertainty specifically, it would also be relevant to see whether the same stressor over longer duration has greater effects on strains. Both acute, short-term occupational stressor (e.g. nurses dealing with patients for the first time; Eden, 1982) and chronic, long term stressors (e.g. role ambiguity and role conflict) have been found individually to predict strains, although the bulk of the research has focused on chronic stressors.

A study done by Humphrey (1998) found that twenty-three percent of the teachers identified various factors relating to time as a serious cause of stress. Of this number, 53 percent said they were put under stress because of insufficient time for planning. As might be expected, this condition was much more prevalent at the elementary school level where in some instances teachers are with the students all day long with little or no time at all for any kind of planning. This is of course due to the differences in organizational structure of the elementary school as compared to the secondary school. Twenty nine percent of the teachers who identified the time factor as stress inducing simply said that there was just not enough time in the school day to do the kind of job expected from them. Class interruptions for various reasons were considered by 18 percent of the respondents to be an unnecessary infringement on the time of teachers. Those in this category also complained that it took a great deal of time to get lessons back on an even keel because of such interruptions. Unreasonable deadlines also were a cause of stress and that they were victims of the "get it in tomorrow" syndrome (Humphrey, 1998).

Hypothesis 2: Time factors will have a positive relationship with job stress.

The issue of aging and work capacity is increasing in importance because of these demographic trends. The work capacity of older people is often incompatible with work demands and this situation can lead to stress, health problems and high mortality. Age-related changes occur in human physiological and psychological functions, in attitudes and ways of learning and in the acquisition of new skills. Such changes may have negative impacts on stress and well-being, depending on the way changes and learning possibilities are arranged (eg. Czaja, 1988; Huuhtanen and Leino, 1992;) as cited in Keita & Hurrell (1999).

In this study, age plays an important role in determining whether it has a moderating effect on the teachers experiencing a higher or a lower stress. From general observation, the younger the teacher, the more likely they will experience stress at work. This could be due to the lack of life experiences to deal with their students or deadlines. As a result, the turnover rate for younger teachers is relatively high, this observation is supported by the results carried by Kyriacou & Sutcliffe (1979) and Chaplain (1995) which concluded that stress reduces as age increased.

It should be noted that even if female and male employees experience the same level of role stress, its consequences may differ across genders (Babin and Boles, 1998). Previous study done by Trocky and Orioli (1999) indicates that women do have more symptoms of distress than men, these symptoms arise from both work and personal environments, and that there are certain coping strategies and cognitive outlooks that appear to act as buffering agents between stressors and symptoms.

Hypothesis 3: Demographic variables (age and gender) will moderate the relationship between organizational variables (blocked career and time factors) and job stress.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is stress?

Teachers have a wide range of interpretations on the meaning of the term stress and when they accept or deny the existence of stress in themselves or in their colleagues. Some teachers define stress as anxiety, fear, inability to cope, frustration and unhappiness, while others associate stress with personal weakness and professional incompetence (Dunham, 1984). Job stress has been defined as the nonspecific response of the body to any demands made upon it (Selye, 1976). It is considered to be an internal state or reaction to anything individuals consciously or unconsciously perceive as a threat, either real or imagined (Clark & Watson, 1991).

Work stress is also known as occupational stress, job stress or stress in organization. It is a condition in which the job related factors interact with the worker to disrupt his or her psychological or physiological conditions that cause him or her to deviate from normal functioning (Beehr & Newman; 1978). Previous findings in UK indicated that 19.2 million working days in UK were lost during 1955 due to work-related illness such as stress, anxiety and depression. Job stress has been defined as the nonspecific response of the body to any demands made upon it (Selye, 1976). It is considered to be an internal state or reaction to anything individuals consciously or unconsciously perceived as a threat, either real or imagined (Clarke & Watson, 1991). Robbins (2001) defines stress as a dynamic condition in which the

individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint, or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important. Stress can be caused by environmental, organizational and individual variables (Matteson & Ivancevich, 1999; Cook & Hunsaker, 2001). Stress in the job could be described simply as various degrees of incompatibility between the individual and his or her work environment. More specifically, job stress is concerned with work-related conditions that contribute substantially to the onset of the stress response. There are many stress-related conditions connected with one's job, and it is well known that some kinds of employment are highly stressful, while others are considered relatively stress free. Various studies comparing such groups have indicated that those in highly stressful occupations tend to have a higher incidence of serious diseases, possibly resulting from stressful conditions on the job.

A nationwide investigation into stress among teachers in the UK found teachers to be reporting stress-related problems which were far higher than those of the population norms and other comparable occupational groups. Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) as cited in Janice (1996), in a study of 700 comprehensive school teachers in England found that 25 per cent of the sample recorded their job to be "very stressful" and "extremely stressful". Spooner (1985) cited in Janice (1996) found that 19 per cent of his sample of 294 teachers reported their work to cause "much stress" or to be "extremely stressful". The extent of the problem of teacher stress is further emphasized by Hodges' finding that the number of male teachers dying while approaching the end of a career in teaching had doubled in the previous ten years and the number qualifying for a breakdown pension had more than trebled. In Malaysia, there have been numerous reports regarding stress experienced by teachers like Roselina (2003), Siti (1982), Kassim (1990) and Yahya (1998).

Teachers as the backbone of formal education are facing so much stress due to the nature of their work. The implications of such studies throw concern on staff reactions to work pressure and the effect of stress on teachers' health and wellbeing. This study will focus to primary school teachers in Sabah. Primary Education in Malaysia consists of 6 years of education, referred to as Standards 1 through 6. Students enter primary schools at the age of 7 and leave at the age of 12. Students are promoted to the next Standard, regardless of their academic performance. Until 2000, the *Penilaian Tengah Sekolah* (PTS) or Middle School Evaluation test was given to students in Standard 3 who passed a qualification test. Excellence in this test allow students to skip Standard 4. However, the test was removed from 2001 onwards due to concerns that parents and teachers were unduly pressuring students. Some have alleged that the demographics of those who scored well on the PTS are ethnically skewed. At the end of primary education, students in national schools are required to undergo a national standardised test known as the *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR) or Primary School Evaluation Test. The subjects tested are Malay comprehension, written Malay, English, Science and Mathematics. In 2002, the government announced that from 2003 onwards, the teaching of Science and Mathematics would be done in English, in order to ensure that Malaysia will not be left behind in a world that is rapidly becoming globalised.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants in this study were the primary teachers in Lahad Datu and Tawau. Tawau and Lahad Datu are located at the east of Sabah. Tawau Education Department consists of two districts, Tawau (59 schools) and Semporna (40 schools) while Lahad Datu Education Department consists of three districts, Lahad Datu (42 schools), Kunak (15 schools) and Kinabatangan (32 schools). Most of the schools in Tawau and Lahad Datu Sabah are located in rural area where facilities for teachers like accommodation, water, electricity, teaching facilities and internet are not well provided.

The respondents of this study were selected by using the technique of convenience sampling among the teachers. According to Sekaran (2003) sample sizes of larger than 30 and less than 500 are appropriate for most research, whereby the minimum sub-sample size is 30. He proposes that the sample size in the multivariate research including multiple regression analysis is estimated to be at least ten times as larger as the number of variables in the study or a minimum sample size of 30 for each category. Since this study involves a total of three non-demographic variables, the minimum sample size is at least 30 respondents. However, this study has targeted at least 150 respondents in order to increase the power of the test of the hypotheses testing and other statistical procedures.

Questionnaires are used to gather primary data in this study. All questionnaires were distributed only in the Malay language. The summary of the questionnaire design and its sources are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Summary of questionnaire and its Sources

Section B		
Variables	Number of questions	Source
Blocked career	1,2,3 & 4	NIOSH, 2002
Time factors	1,2 & 3	Humphrey, 1998 (Q:11) NIOSH, 2002 (Q: 12 & 13)
Section C		
Job stress	1- 22	Maslach, 1986

A seven point likert scale is used to determine and measure job stress felt by teachers to the given questions and statements listed in the questionnaires. The range of Likert Scale is on a 7-point measurement with the following (for section B and C).

The summary of the statistical tools for hypotheses testing are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Hypotheses testing and the statistical tools

No	Item analysis	Statistical tools
1	To investigate the reliability.	Reliability analysis (Chronbach's Alpha)
2	To investigate the relationship between organizational variables and job stress.	Regression
3	To investigate the moderating effect of age and gender and job stress	Hierarchical regression

RESEARCH RESULT

This study distributed 250 questionnaires equally to teachers in Tawau and Lahad Datu. A total of 186 were returned but only 177 were useable and therefore the response rate was 70.8% (177/250). The majority of respondents were from Lahad Datu which comprise 112 (63.3 %) and the number of respondents from Tawau were 65 (36.7%). In terms of gender, 104 (58.8 %) of them were males and 73 (41.2%) were females. Most of the respondents were married which comprise 111 (62.7%) while 66 (37.3%) were single.

In order to assess the consistency and stability of the measurement scales, the reliability test using Cronbach Coefficient Alpha was undertaken. The results of the reliability test can be seen as in table 3.

Table 3: Reliability coefficients

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	Number of items	Number of Items deleted
Job stress	0.858	13	7
Blocked career	0.884	4	None
Time factors	0.878	3	

The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for all variables were obtained to test the accuracy of measurement in this study. The utilization of Cronbach's Alpha to determine the reliability of the results, which is the extent to which a variable or set of variables is consistent in what it is intended to measure (Gefen et al., 2000). Sekaran (2003) stated that the closer the reliability coefficient value to 1.0, the better. Reliability that is less than 0.60 are considered to be poor, those in the 0.70 range is acceptable, and those over 0.80 are good (Sekaran, 2003 & Hair et al., 1998). As presented in table 3, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for job stress is 0.858 after deleting 7 items. Therefore, in general the reliability of measurement for job stress in this study is considered good. The Cronbach Alpha for blocked career is 0.884 and time factors is 0.878. Therefore, the reliability of measurement for each organizational variable is also considered good.

Table 4 shows the overview of the scores of all the variables and job stress.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of variables

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Organizational variables (mean)			
Blocked career	.00	6.00	1.2684
Time factors	.00	6.00	2.4313
Job stress (mean)	.00	4.20	1.4960

From the result (table 4), it may be seen that the mean for blocked career is rather low (1.2684 on 7 point scale). It indicates that most of the respondents experienced blocked career several times a year or once a month. The mean for time factors (2.43 on 7 point scale) is also low. This indicates that most of the respondents are not really experiencing blocked career, and shortage of time factors.

The minimum of 0 indicates never and the maximum of 6 indicates everyday. The mean on job stress also low (1.49 on 7 point scale). It indicates that the stress level among teachers in Tawau and Lahad Datu was low. This may be due to the situation where, the study was conducted only among primary teachers which have low number of students, good working conditions and good student behaviors. Table 5 shows the hypotheses testing.

Table 5: Hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Test	Sig.	R ²	Accepted or rejected (sig. level=0.05)
H1:Blocked Career*Job Stress	Regression	0.00	0.425	Accepted
H2:Time Factors*Job Stress	Regression	0.00	0.201	Accepted

The significance value for this model is 0.00 which is lower than 0.05. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is accepted. In other words, there is a positive relationship between blocked career and job stress. A total of 42.5% of the variation in job stress is explained by blocked career. Means, there are other additional variables that are important in explaining job stress.

Hypothesis 2 is also accepted which means that there is a positive relationship between time factors and job stress. The R square value is 0.201. This indicates that, the higher the score in

work overload, the higher the job stress experienced by the teachers. It can be seen from table 5 that 20.1% of the variance in job stress can be explained by time factors.

Table 6: Hypotheses testing for moderator (age and gender)

Hypotheses	Test	Sig.	R ²	Accepted or rejected (sig. level=0.05)
H3a:Blocked Career*Job Stress (age)	Hierarchical Regression	0.651	0.459	Rejected
H3b:Time Factors*Job Stress (age)	Hierarchical Regression	0.379	0.206	Rejected
H3c:Blocked Career*Job Stress (gender)	Hierarchical Regression	0.449	0.457	Rejected
H3d:Time Factors*Job Stress (gender)	Hierarchical Regression	0.038	0.211	Rejected

In table 6, it can be seen that age and gender do not moderate the relationship between blocked career and job stress. Age and gender as well not moderate the relationship between time factors and stress. Therefore, hypothesis 3a, 3b, 3c and 3d are rejected

CONCLUSION

Both of the organizational variables have been found to have a positive relationship with job stress among primary teachers in Tawau and Lahad Datu. As explained earlier the variables of blocked career and time factors were found to be able to explain around 45% and 20% respectively of the variance in stress. This is in line with previous research conducted by Greenhaus et al., (1987), Cooper (1988) and Pelsma et al., (1989). However, both of the demographic variables have been found do not serve as a moderator which not in line with previous researches conducted by Kyricou and Sutcliffe (1979), Chaplain (1995), Babin and Boles (1998) and Trucky and Orioli (1999) These inconsistency findings may be due to low level of job stress experienced by teachers.

The low level of job stress experienced by primary school teachers in Tawau and Lahad Datu is good news for the teaching profession. This low level of stress may lead to better teaching quality among teachers in these two areas. It is interesting to note that the low scores on job stress was obtained even though the teachers were faced with the new education policy where they are required to teach mathematics and science in English.

It is suggested that future research be done on a profession where higher stress levels could be observed to observe the relationship of the variables used in the study and to validate the results of the study. Future research may be conducted to investigate the impact of other variables like job tenure, salary, job satisfaction on job stress.

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