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## DO OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AFFECT EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE? THE CASE OF MIDDLE EAST ORGANIZATIONS

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### Abstract

Human resource is one of the major resources that enables an organization to sustain and grow in the present business era, which is characterized by high degree of competition and internal rivalry among the organizations. One of the major elements that has an influence and impact on the overall levels of employee performance is that of occupational stress. High levels of occupational stress has always a negative impact on the performance of employees. This research aims at making an assessment of the impact of occupational stress on employee performance in organizations in the Middle East. It also aimed to assess the overall levels of occupational stress within the factors that caused occupational stress, and the manner in which occupational stress influences employee performance. The study is also intended to put forward recommendations in order to have effective management of occupational stress. In order to address all these aims, a mixed methodology was deployed. The overall findings of the research indicated that occupational stress had a negative impact on the overall performance of the employee, where occupational stress is majorly defined by the presence of role conflict and role ambiguity as well as the lack of career development within the organization.

**Keywords:** Occupational Stress, Employee Performance, Employee Empowerment, Workplace Environment

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### 1. Introduction

Giving the increasing importance of the employee performance in the success of organizations, both the professionals as well as the academics have been paying considerable attention to this

concept. One of the major issues that have the ability to deteriorate the employee performance to a great extent is that of occupational stress. Occupational stress can have dire impacts on the overall levels of employee motivation, satisfaction, as well as productivity. The levels of occupational stress within any organization can increase due to a range of factors. It is necessary for the organizations to ensure that all of these factors are addressed in an effective manner so as to make sure that the employees can contribute their 100 percent to the progress, profitability, and productivity of the organization.

Occupational stress poses serious problems and issues to a large number of the employees as well as other key stakeholders of any organization irrespective of its industry of operations. It has been suggested by a large number of researchers that occupational stress is a key issue in a number of organizations (Varca, 1999; Ornelas and Kleiner, 2003). The research have also suggested that the cost of managing and eliminating occupational stress from the organization is generally very high for the management. It has also been suggested by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) that inefficiencies associated with the proper management of occupational stress can cost around 10% of the total GNP of a nation state (Midgley, 1996; Rajeshwaran and Aktharsha, 2017). Apart from that, the researches by Merhar (2016), and Babatunde (2013) indicated that occupational stress is one of the major reasons behind high rates of employee turnover in any organization. This not only has a negative impact on the overall corporate image of the company but also incurs bulky costs in the form of recruitment, selection, training, and development.

It has been indicated by the research that occupational stress can be defined as the disruptions in the demands of the occupation and the capacity of the employees to fulfil those demands (Topper, 2007; Vermunt and Steensma, 2005; Ornelas and Kleiner, 2003; Varca, 1999). Botha and Pienaar (2006) indicated that some of the major issues and factors that may lead towards occupational stress consist of perceived reduction in the levels of job security, lack of safety, complexity of repetitiveness and reduction in the levels of autonomy associated with the job. In addition to the above mentioned factors, some of the factors that may cause occupational stress include: lack of equipment and resources at work; work schedules (including late working hours or high degree of overtime) and ineffective climate of organization are regarded as some of the important contributors of stress. Occupational stress, as suggested by the research, can lead towards the development of a number of issues, such as high levels of dissatisfaction among the employees, burnout, poor or ineffective performance, inappropriate interpersonal relations at work, as well as job mobility (Manshor *et al.* 2003).

It has, on the other hand, been argued by Johnson (2001) that the companies are required to take necessary steps for the early determination of stress among the employees. In addition to that, right techniques shall be used to assess the reasons that caused these stressors and finally effective initiatives shall be taken to manage such stressors. The following research questions were chosen for detailed overview and analysis:

- i. What are factors that cause occupational stress in the Middle East?
- ii. What is the current level of occupational stress of employees in the Middle East?
- iii. What is the relationship between occupational stress and employee performance among employees in the Middle East?
- iv. What strategies can be used by organisations in the Middle East for effective management of occupational stress among the employees?

Considering the information and views regarding those separate, yet interlinked factors influencing job-related stress among workers, it can be said that the issue is gaining popularity and becoming worse with the passage of time. The significance of high occupational stress is increased by the fact that it also impacts organizational performance and brand image. Hence the current research aims at making an assessment of the impact of occupational stress on employee performance in select organizations in the Middle East, and also to assess the overall levels of occupational stress within the factors that caused occupational stress, and the manner in which occupational stress influences employee performance. Major factors like work load, relationships at work, conflict of role and ambiguity, career development, employee

characteristics are considered for developing the theoretical construct. The structure of the paper includes an introduction followed by literature review, the methodology, results and discussion and finally the conclusion with references in the end.

## 2. Literature review

Occupational stress, as per the generally accepted definition put by the World Health Organization (WHO), is the way in which workers respond to work load or pressure which requires knowledge and skills that they do not possess or is too exhaustive. Another definition of occupational stress is presented by HSE; it suggests that occupational stress consists of the negative reactions put forwards by people when they are made to cope with extremely high workloads or have to complete tasks which are not covered by their job description and therefore, require extra knowledge and skills. Apart from that, in a study conducted by Divakar (2015), it is suggested that occupational stress among employees is also promoted by other factors prevailing in the organization. Lack of support from other co-workers can also bring about similar results, leading towards occupational stress. This is especially true when employees are faced with tasks which are too difficult or exhaustive. In such circumstances, employees need the support of their seniors, as well as colleagues, and if they are not provided with such support, the pressure on them is worsened, leading towards increased job-related stress (Divakar, 2015).

According to studies conducted upon the matter, a variety of factors influence the onset, severity and persistence of occupational stress among employees. The following section considers six factors, discussing them in detail. These six factors are further divided into four primary factors, namely: amount and difficulty of work, variety of work, work relationships and career development, as well as two secondary factors, including employee turnover and job satisfaction. Babatunde (2013) suggests that each of these factors cover an aspect of an employee's work life and can show that employees suffer from stress and dissatisfaction when they are required to perform tasks which do not match their skillset or job description.

Workload is generally referred to as the amount and type of work which the employees are required to do (Lazuras *et al.* 2009; Rozman *et al.* 2014). Studies conducted upon the matter discuss workload in quantitative, as well as qualitative terms. Qualitative definitions of workload deal with the type, as well as difficulty of work which the employees are supposed to complete. It also considers the abilities and information which the employees possess and whether they match with those required by the workload or not. Quantitative workload, on the other hand, is concerned with the amount of work which the employees are supposed to complete. It deals with the possibility of the work being completed within a given amount of time without excessive exhaustion (Stanyar, 2012; Fugate, 2010).

Ruchi *et al.* (2022) conducted a study to analyze occupational stress and its impact on employee performance in hotels of Varanasi, collected data from 279 employees working in the star and heritage hotels in Varanasi using non-probability purposive sampling, study extracted five antecedents for occupational stress including role ambiguity, workload, interpersonal relations, career development and external responsibilities. Further, four factors for employee performance were extracted including output quality, professional competence, result orientation and work efficiency. The result from multiple regression stated all factors of occupational stress significantly affect employee performance.

Thomas *et al.* (2022) examined the impact of Emotional Intelligence in workplace and its effects on stress coping. It also identified how a workplace restructuring with Emotional Intelligence (EI) helps in coping up with job stress. The findings of the study revealed that the implementation of EI in organizational strategy raises the quality of workforce performance. In addition to that, right techniques shall be used to assess the reasons that caused these stressors and finally effective initiatives shall be taken to manage such stressors.

As per the existing literature on the topic, executive jobs are one of the most exhausting stressful tasks for workers. Nnuro (2012), for example, considered 150 members of an organization, examining and observing the ways in which the levels of occupational stress affected their performance. The outcomes of the research revealed the increased workload

contributes more to occupational stress than any other issue. Other studies also arrived to similar conclusions; El Shikieri and Musa (2012), for instance, based their study on 150 males and female workers at a university and revealed that the majority of employees reported an increased workload as the reason for increased job-related stress. From this, it may be suggested that workload is quite important when it comes to occupational stress and can increase the latter alarmingly, if kept unchecked. Bruggen (2015) suggests that effective management of workload, discussing it with management and higher authorities and being paid and rewarded accordingly after completing it are all factors which motivate employees to respond positively to a high workload and reduce occupational stress. Furthermore, Pikaar (2015) states that any alterations in the amount of work which make it too high or low can reduce the quality of work produced by employees, thereby reducing their performance, while increasing stress levels.

Also, any mismatch in the abilities of employees and the demands of their workload can have many adverse impacts, even if they are overqualified for their job. In such a situation, workers possessing more skills than the requirements of their work are subjected to repetitive and tedious tasks which diminish their sense of responsibility and self-value. This, in turn, contributes to increased work stress since they lack any ambition and have no idea regarding their worth. Eventually, such employees lose their desire to work, as well as their creativity, which further add up to their stress levels (Wang and Chang, 2012). The degree of change and competitiveness in today's financial world continues to increase at an exponential rate. Managers, in an attempt to compete better and increase their organization's chances of survival, are examining the adverse effects of workload, and looking for ways to deal with them. This can allow them to possess a motivated workforce, thereby enhancing the organization's overall performance (Stouten et al. 2011).

As evident from these, the workload present for the employees plays an important role in determining the overall levels of employee stress within the organization. Interpersonal relationships are an integral component of a person's professional life and work environment. For any employee, there are at least two types of workplace relationships, including those with his/her superiors and those with co-workers. Usually referred to as the interactions which occur between an employee and his superiors and co-workers, interpersonal relationships can hugely impact a worker's personality and performance (Patricia, 2015).

Prasad (2020) conducted an empirical study to find the association between motivation, occupational stress, coping and employee performance during covid-19 pandemic. A survey of 1200 employees of the institute consisting of 595 men, 605 women employees were carried out. The two components of motivation intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, four occupational stress-causing factors, work overload, role ambiguity, relations at work, work schedules, three factors, reactions to stress physiological, psychological, behavioral reactions, and two coping strategies approach and avoidance coping are estimated. The results revealed men have low stress compared to women employees, and performance is statistically significantly influenced by the age, intrinsic motivation, approach coping, psychological reactions to stress, experience, and lower-age group employees.

Several studies have linked poor and weak interpersonal relationships with occupational stress (Jarinto, 2011; Naidoo et al. 2013; Naqvi et al. 2013). It is suggested that a lack of healthy relationships with superiors and co-workers can result in feelings of insecurity, loneliness, and high stress. Usually, people who lack good and supportive workplace relationships feel high degrees of stress since they are neither comforted, nor supported during stressful periods of work life. Moreover, such workers may also blame their colleagues and management for their poor situation, resulting in further weakening of relationships and increasing stress levels (Wong and Laschinger, 2015). All these factors may contribute to decrease in organizational performance, reducing organization's commitment to increasing employee turnover. In addition to that, the study conducted by Hassan et al. (2012) showed that interpersonal relationships, particularly with managers and leaders are quite important for mitigating high levels of occupational stress, increasing employee productivity and the level of innovativeness possessed by them. Apart from that, studies suggest that employees who are placed in uniform groups or teamed up with similar workers tend to deal with job-related stress

more effectively than workers who are deprived of this privilege. Therefore, effective relationships, consisting of frequent interactions and 'favor transactions' can help reduce work place stress among employees (Patricia, 2015). Effective interpersonal skills play an important role in determining the overall level of comfort that the employees have within the workplace. The existence of a hostile environment within the workplace can act as an evident factor that may add to the overall levels of stress as it can cause conflicts between different employees of the organization.

As per Yongkang *et al.* (2014) occupational stress is fostered and promoted by increased role conflicts and ambiguity. Role conflict is referred to as the confrontation of a workers with a series of social or work-related expectation which they cannot meet; these expectations may be short lived or last for a longer period of time. Role ambiguity, on the other hand, refers to a lack of sufficient and clear information being provided to employees for the completion of tasks assigned to them. Both these factors are highly influential upon the degree of occupational stress. All employees are different to one another since they possess certain unique characteristics which others lack. Therefore, all employees do not respond in the same manner to variations in the stressors identified earlier and show different levels of stress when exposed to certain conditions. Each person has a unique blend of these characteristics which makes his/her reactions to workplace stress different from others. Gender, for instance has been shown to have a strong impact upon stress management capabilities (Ahmad *et al.* 2015).

Holcroft and Punnett (2009) also provided similar suggestions, stating that males tend to be more psychologically relaxed than females. However, many studies also provide contradictory information, suggesting that no significant differences lie between the degree of occupational stress among males and females. In this regard, it is suggested by Gyllensten and Palmer (2005) that gender seems to have an impact upon the level of workplace stress if other variables, such as multiple roles and deprivation from career building opportunities are not considered. Personality traits are also considered as important factors which determine the impacts of stressful events on a person. Every employee has unique family backgrounds, values, beliefs, norms and experiences and these elements impact the decisions made by workers in response to stressful events. Indeed, the stress vulnerability model suggests that every person has a specific and highly subjective set of biological, social and psychological components which also include his/her abilities to deal with stress (Tariq and Mujeeb, 2013). In a similar context, the studies conducted by Pidgeon *et al.* (2014) and Cann *et al.* (2010) explain that personality traits can strongly impact the level of occupational stress faced by any employee.

According to Merhar (2016), the departure of employees can increase costs significantly- every time a worker is replaced, the organizations has to incur extra expenses in the form of hiring and training procedures which can cost as high as 6 to 9 months of salary of an average worker.

A large number of researches have been conducted to identify the impact of stress on the performance of the employees as well as the organization as a whole. It has however, been suggested by the research of Dawson *et al.* (2016) that all the stress is not harmful, and sometimes stress is necessary for the overall wellbeing of the employees. It has been suggested by the study that an athlete may face stress prior to the start of a sprint, and a singer may also be stressed prior to the beginning of a concert but all of these are positive stress, which is exhilarating, motivating, as well as satisfying.

Pandey (2020) opined that Stress may be a universal element and individuals in every walk of life should face it. This stress results in decreased organizational performance, decreased employees' overall performance, and decreased quality of labor, high staff turnover, and absenteeism. It can cause health problems like anxiety, depression, headache and backache. Eight components of job stress: work type, salary pay scale, and job insecurity, poor communication, work overload, lack of motivation, lack of management support and poor performance evaluation and appraisal system were examined during this study to know the impact of stress on employee performance. The results revealed that each component of stress is significantly decreasing their performance.

It has also been indicated by the research of Le Fevre *et al.* (2003) that the manner in which stress influences the performance depends on the individual employees. Some of the employees may take stress positively while others may take it as a negative influence depending on how they choose to react to it. High levels of stress can lead to very low levels of employee motivation, thereby increasing the rate of employee turnover in the organizations (Yozgat *et al.* 2013).

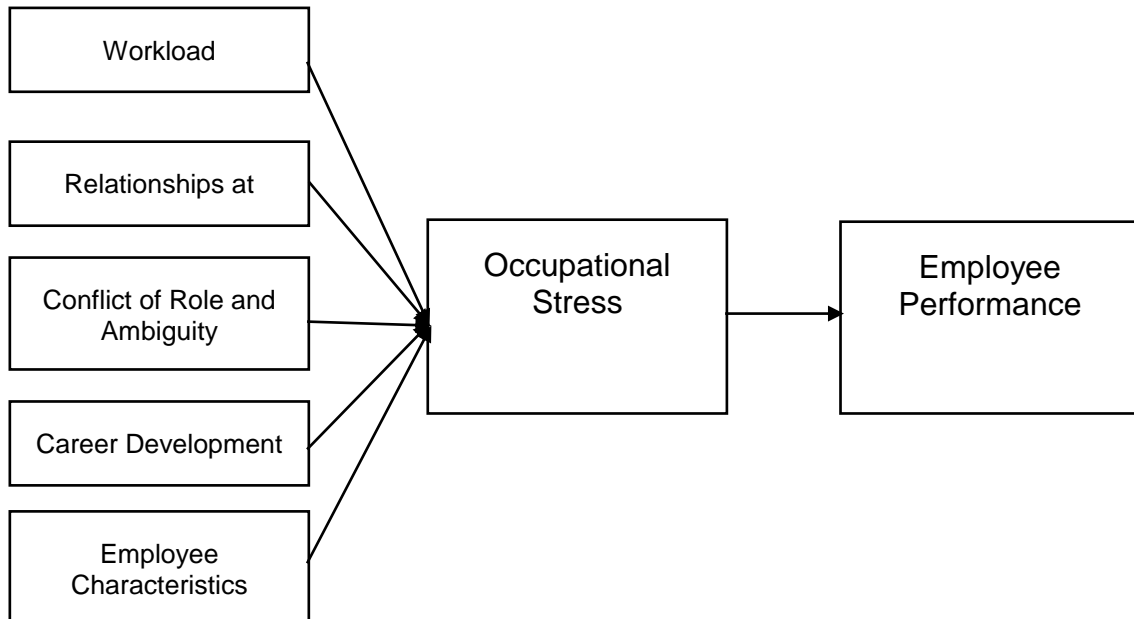
Wushe and Shenje (2019) conducted an analysis to identify the relationship between occupational stress and employee job performance in public health care institutions in Harare. They opined that occupational stress has become a major challenge for employers with potentially damaging physiological and psychological effects on employees as it negatively affects their health and contribution to the effectiveness of organizations. The study found that there is a negative relationship between increase in inflexibility in work hours and job performance, and that there exist a negative relationship between work overload and job performance.

An effective definition of job performance has been put forward by the research of Rossi *et al.* (2006). Out of all the factors that determine the overall performance of the employees, stressors are most likely to have a negative impact on the innate abilities of the employees, such as the level of skills, knowledge as well as the style of thinking. In any of the cases, direct or indirect impact on the overall levels of the employees performance, the manner in which the employees decide to react to these stressors play an important role in determining the overall relationship between employee performance and the overall levels of occupational stress within any organization (Le Fevre *et al.* 2003).

Iskamto (2021) conducted a research to determine the effect of job stress on employee performance. The results indicated that work stress has a significant and negative effect on employee performance. Given the significance of occupational stress and its negative impacts upon an organization, it is essential for firms to come up with effective strategies for decreasing the level of stress among their workers, while simultaneously increasing their level of performance. It is the responsibility of management to create a suitable working environment for its employees and minimize the level of risk. This may be done by putting in special emphasis on activities such as job enrichment training and performance measurement and planning (Olusegun *et al.* 2014). Coping mechanisms are not designed to entirely remove stress factors. Rather, they focus on modifying and tackling stressors so that employees are not overburdened by stress and can manage it in the most effective manner. Due to this approach followed by coping strategies, it is impossible for one mechanism to suit the requirements of all employees. Good stress coping strategies, however, can involve procedures to look for stressed workers and the sources of stress for them. The condition of all employees under stress may be examined and treatment can be given as per the level of stress of each employee (Sarid *et al.* 2010). Burke and Greenglas (2001) argued that reliable management ensure job security of the employees which in turns avoid fear of employee and consequently lead to low the occupational stress. Thomas (2020) mentioned that increased workload and long working hours which in turn can cause stress and tiredness. The employees are unable to manage family and social life and maintain adequate level of leisure and sporting activities even though sport and leisure activities are less important concern of employees.

### **3. Data and methodology**

The workplace can be a tough and challenging area for employees, since it consists of a variety of stress factors which contribute towards increased occupational stress, resulting in declined performance of employees (Uma, 2011). Researchers frequently suggest and recommend the use of stress relieving strategies, such as a flexible work routine and scheduled leaves for workers to protect employees from the adverse impacts of occupational stress, allowing them to put in maximum efforts for the betterment of the organization (Howard *et al.* 2014; Sweet *et al.* 2016; Moen *et al.* 2016). Other measures, such as providing clear work instructions and maintaining strong and positive ties with workers can also improve the situation.



**Figure 1. Theoretical framework**

Employees are subject to high workloads and increasing demands in today's challenging and competitive business environment. These factors result in an increased occupational risk, which can reduce their level of motivation and performance. Several factors, such as workloads and role conflicts and ambiguities can influence occupational stress and need to be considered when dealing with it. Moreover, occupational stress can have drastic impacts upon an organization's performance, and it needs to be combatted with suitable strategies so as to ensure continuous and steady financial growth and performance.

The data were collected from select organizations in the Middle East countries including Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain during the period February 2022 to October 2022. A sample size of 150 employees has been chosen for this research with a response rate of 60%. Regression and correlation analysis has been conducted on the empirical data to measure the impact of occupational stress on employee performance. Moreover, factor analysis has been conducted on empirical data to assess the strength of the impact that the factors causing occupational stress have on job performance of the employees. Qualitative data has been analyzed using categorical analysis technique.

#### **4. Results and discussion**

The sample selected consisted majorly of males. The education of the sample was majorly graduation followed by masters. A great proportion of the sample belonged to the age group 30-35. Overall, the sample has representation from all age groups. To identify the factors that cause occupational stress, a number of factors have been identified in literature review section. To explore the factors that cause occupational stress a set of questions was developed based on previous literature and the results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographic factors**

<b>Gender</b>				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	120	80	80	80
Female	30	20	20	100
Total	150	100	100	
<b>Education</b>				
High School	4	2.7	2.7	2.7
Graduate	56	37.3	37.3	40.0
Masters	52	34.7	34.7	74.7
PhD	34	22.7	22.7	97.3
Others	4	2.7	2.7	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	
<b>Age</b>				
25 – 30 years	28	18.7	18.7	18.7
30 - 35 years	36	24.0	24.0	42.7
35 – 40 years	30	20.0	20.0	62.7
40 – 45 years	34	22.7	22.7	85.3
45 years or more	22	14.7	14.7	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Relationship with co-workers is suggested to be linked with occupational stress (see for example Naqvi *et al.* 2013) hence this section explored this relationship. The result shows that a majority of the respondents agreed that the good interpersonal relationships affect the occupational stress. Overall 82.7 percent respondents agreed on this factor being an important predictor.

The findings are consistent with the literature reviewed for the study. The findings are in agreement with Hassan *et al.* (2012) who reported that there is an inverse relationship between occupational stress and good interpersonal relationships at workplace. Several other authors (Jarinto, 2011; Naqvi *et al.* 2013; Naidoo *et al.* (2013) have also presented a similar findings that better interpersonal relationships reduce the occupational stress. Our findings therefore substantiate the notion that interpersonal relationships are a factor contributing towards occupational stress.

Furthermore, the research conducted by Akande *et al.* (2014) indicated that the presence of hostile environment and inappropriate work relations also contribute to increased levels of workplace stress. These findings were supported by the researches of Jarinto, (2011), Naqvi *et al.* (2013), Naidoo *et al.* (2013), Wong and Laschinger, (2015) that the presence of ineffective work relationships can trigger the feelings of insecurity and lack of motivation among the employees, which can lead towards an increase in the levels of workplace stress.

As discussed in literature review section, compensation structure of employees is an important factor that causes occupational stress. The findings illustrate, a majority (84 percent) of the respondents agree with salary having an impact on the occupational stress. The greater the salary, the lower will be the occupational stress on the employees. This is also consistent with the past literature. Bruggen (2015) also reported similar findings and stated that the management of rewards and the balance between the work done and the reward received reduces the stress. Hence, salary and benefits are an important factor in influencing level of occupational stress. McCann *et al.* (2009) also support this argument.

Based on the results of the survey, good working conditions also appeared to be an important factor in determining occupational stress levels. It is clear from the results that majority of respondents agree with the effect of good working conditions on stress. Kossek *et al.* (2012) also reported similar findings and stated that if workplace conditions change consistently, they have significantly affect stress levels. These findings are further corroborated by Shukla



and Sinha (2013) who reported that the workplace conditions have a significant impact on stress. The findings are therefore in agreement with the previous literature.

Top management support was identified by literature as an important factor contributing to occupational stress and veracity of this proposition has been proved by the survey responses. A majority (85.3 percent) of the respondents agree or strongly agree on top management support being a factor that influences stress, as observed from the results. This finding is also in agreement with the past literature. Hassan *et al.* (2012) reported a similar finding whereby they found that the management support and good relationships between management and employees lead to lower levels of stress. The high rating assigned to management support can be attributed to the fact that the management shows concern for employees.

As evident from the analysis, a majority (88 percent) of respondents agreed on getting enough opportunities to advance in their careers. This is also considered to be one of the important factors. This ties with the available literature as the work of Rahman *et al.* (2014) reported similar results. In addition, Olusegun *et al.* (2014) also reported career development opportunities to be an important factor.

Role conflict and ambiguity for an employee is suggested to be linked with occupational stress as highlighted by Karimi *et al.* (2014). Hence this segment reconnoitred this association. The results show that a majority of the respondents agreed that the role conflict and ambiguity affect the occupational stress. Overall, 82.6 percent respondents agreed on this factor being an important predictor. Similarly, existence of role conflict led to reduce in job satisfaction which in turns cultivate job stress.

As evident from the analysis, 66.6 percent of employees agreed that workload causes occupational stress. Nnuro (2012) also indicated that workload is considered as an important factor causing occupational stress. This claim is also supported by the study of El Shikieri and Musa (2012) as mentioned in the literature review. Besides the factors that cause occupational stress, the study also measured level of occupational stress which appears to be low as per findings of survey, presented in the Table 2.

**Table 2. Stress levels in organization**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	62	41.3	41.3	41.3
Strongly Agree	70	46.7	46.7	88.0
Do not Know	6	4.0	4.0	92.0
Disagree	6	4.0	4.0	96.0
Strongly Disagree	6	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Most of the respondents agreed on having a low stress level. A total of 88 percent of the employees stated that they experience low level of stress. This finding can be attributed to better working conditions, a good salary and benefits structure, management support and better interpersonal relationships among employees. On the other hand, only 8 percent of the respondents reported a high level of stress which can be attributed to poor stress management and coping or some factors beyond the scope of this study.

As discussed, level of occupational stress experienced by employees of ministry is low, which can be attributed to the various factors practiced and adopted by management of various organizations. Considering this fact, the researcher has analyzed some of the factors adopted by the organization. Some of these factors that have led to low occupational stress among employees are discussed here.

Based on the results, a majority of the respondents agreed on the positive relationship between reliable management and job security. A majority of 93.3 percent agreed on this notion and it can be said that the findings of the study are consistent with the literature. This also shows that most of the employees feel security in job and hence less fear of job loss which

ultimately reduce the occupational stress. This is also mentioned in Burke and Greenglas (2001).

Employees are deeply attached and committed to the organization and by virtue of this attachment, they like to work for the organization rather than feeling pressured to do so. While there is extensive literature available that discusses how to build employee commitment and attachment towards organization, it is a factor that has contributed to better stress management. Keeping in view the evidence from results, it can be concluded that a majority of 89.3 percent of the respondents are highly committed to their work in the organization.

The results show that a majority of the respondents felt a strong attachment to their workplace. A total of 93.3 percent agreed on being attached to their workplace. In a similar vein, employees' view of the organization is crucial to their attachment to the organization. In our study, most of the respondents viewed the organization as a good place to work for. Moreover, a majority (92 percent) of respondents agreed on the Middle East as a good place to work. A total of 6.7 percent disagreed on this notion.

One way to create a good image of the organization among its employees and create a deep sense of attachment is through exhibiting concern for the wellbeing of employees. From the analysis, a vast majority of respondents (92%) agreed that management shows concern for employees, which can explain why employees experience low levels of stress and rank management support as highly significant factor towards determining occupational stress.

It is also notable that as per findings of the study, a flexible management style is supportive of employees. It can be argued that a flexible management facilitates in better employee relationships and hence it is the virtue by which occupational stress is reduced. The data shows that a majority (89.3 percent) of the respondents agreed on the positive impact of flexible management on the employee's relation with them.

A total of 90.7 percent respondents agreed on the fact that personal satisfaction motivated them to work harder, as extracted from the results. Babatunde (2013) also suggests the same fact and it can be concluded that the findings are also consistent with literature. This can be stated that by virtue of personal satisfaction employees work hard and contribute to organizational performance without facing occupational pressure.

Another important contributor towards low occupational stress in the Middle East is a good salary structure. Almost 90% of respondents reported being satisfied with their salary package. This finding is consistent with the other findings as well which justify the level of importance employees place in salary and benefits as an important contributor of occupational stress. A high level of satisfaction with salary package thus translates into a low level of occupational stress as the survey data indicates.

The coefficient analysis provides an estimate of the linear relationship between the dependent and the independent variable. As mentioned in Table 3, the relationship between occupational stress and overall employee performance is negative.

**Table 3. Correlation**

		Overall Occupational Stress	Performance at maximum potential in the organization
Overall Occupational Stress	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.293*
	Sig (2 tailed)		0.011
	N	150	150
Performance at maximum potential in the organization	Pearson Correlation	-0.293*	1
	Sig (2 tailed)	0.011	
	N	150	150

**Note:** \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed).

The correlation coefficient of -0.293 indicates and explains that there is a weak negative correlation among the two variables. This, however, does not exclude the impact of other variables and does not provide any hints on causality. In order to circumvent the two issues mentioned, a regression analysis is also carried out on the data.

**Table 4. Model summary (regression analysis)**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R square	Std Error of the Estimate
1	0.293*	0.086	0.073	0.41394

**Note:** \*Predictors: Overall Occupational Stress.

Table 4 shows that the model is able to explain 8.6 percent of the variation in employee performance caused by the independent variable occupational stress. The relationship is significant at 1% level of probability.

**Table 5. ANOVA**

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	1.172	1	1.172	6.837	0.011*
Residual	12.508	73	0.171		
Total	13.680	74			

**Note:** \*Predictors: (Constant), Overall occupational stress. Dep variable: Performance at max potential in the organization.

The ANOVA results shown in Table 5 state that the model is significant with an overall F-value of 6.837 and a significance of 0.011. The analysis further indicates that with a significance level of less than 0.05, and an appropriate F value, the above mentioned model can be regarded as a strong one with very low probability of errors and an ability to depict the variations that may occur in a larger data set. This authenticates the findings of the model and add to the integrity of the recommendations made under the research.

**Table 6. Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std Error	Beta		
Constant	2.305	0.214		10.778	0.000
Overall Occupational Stress	-0.305	0.117	-0.293	-2.615	0.011

**Note:** \*Dep variable: Performance at max potential in the organization.

The regression coefficient associated with the occupational stress is -0.305. This means that with every one unit increase in the occupational stress, the overall employee performance declines by 0.305 units. This explains that there is a negative relationship between the two variables, based on the values in Table 6.

The coefficient is also significant at the 5 percent level of significance. A p-value of 0.011 means that there is only 1.1 percent chance of error. This result is consistent with the correlation analysis conducted in Table 3. This shows that the hypothesis of occupational stress having a negative impact on the performance of employees is not rejected by the data collected for the study. This is also in agreement with the past studies and the work of Bruggen (2015) and Pikaar (2015) have also reported similar findings as mentioned above. This was established by the literature that was reviewed under this research. In addition to that, this element also has a negative impact on the performance of the organization and the brand image.

**Table 7. Component matrix**

	Component	
	1	2
Career Development	0.800	
Role Conflict and Ambiguity	-0.112	0.439
Relationships at Work	0.632	0.539
Work Load	-0.385	0.754

**Note:** Extraction Method: Principal component analysis. (2 components extracted)

To determine the impact of the factors of occupational stress over the employee performance, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted where only four variables were included based on literature explored and few questions were asked from the respondents. The analysis in Table 7 shows that career development is the most influential factor and impacts the levels of employee performance within the current organization.

**Table 8. Correlation matrix**

		Career Development	Role Conflict and Ambiguity	Relationship at Work	Work Load
Correlation	Career Development	1.000	-0.004	0.177	-0.124
	Role Conflict and Ambiguity	-0.004	1.000	-0.009	0.036
	Relationships at Work	0.177	-0.009	1.000	0.042
	Work Load	-0.124	0.036	0.042	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Career Development		0.487	0.064	0.144
	Role Conflict and Ambiguity	0.487		0.470	0.380
	Relationships at Work	0.064	0.470		0.361
	Work Load	0.144	0.380	0.361	

Table 8 shows the correlation matrix between the extracted variables of the research under consideration. As the value of each variable is less than 0.5, this shows there is no correlation among the variables.

**Table 9. Communalities**

	Initial	Extraction
Career Development	1.000	0.640
Role Conflict and Ambiguity	1.000	0.205
Relationships at Work	1.000	0.690
Work Load	1.000	0.717

**Note:** Extraction Method: Principal component analysis.

Table 9 shows the communalities of the initial verses extracted values of the variables. As the values represents the difference of the original variable with the extracted one in the factor analysis. The lowest variation has been noted of the role conflict and ambiguity. On the other hand, the highest variation of work load has been taken into consideration.

**Table 10. Total variance**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1.201	30.014	30.014	1.201	30.014	30.014
2	1.051	26.271	56.284	1.051	26.271	56.284
3	0.988	24.691	80.976			
4	0.761	19.024	100.000			

**Note:** Extraction Method: Principal component analysis

Table 10 shows the impact of four key components of the research that include career development, role conflict and ambiguity, relationship at work and work load. It has been analyzed that the first three variables put large impact due to high value of Eigenvalues. Whereas, the work load does not contribute much in occupational stress and puts least impact over the employee performance within the organization.

This was in alignment with the research conducted by Nnuro (2012), who indicated that overall workload of the employees was one of the most important factors that led towards the development of occupational stress. In addition to that, El Shikieri and Musa (2012) also indicated that effective management of work load led towards the reduction of occupational stress among the employees. The work done by Bruggen (2015), Pikaar (2015), Wang and Chang, (2012), and Stouten *et al.* (2011), on the other hand, indicated that the definition of workload varies from employee to employee and can be triggered by in appropriate job personality fits. The authors indicated that by ensuring that the employees are provided with consistent and manageable workload, the companies can decrease occupational stress considerably.

On the basis of the above mentioned analysis, it was established that the key factors that contributed towards the development of occupational stress within the organization are career development; role conflict and ambiguity; relationships at work; as well as work load.

## 5. Conclusion

The study has explored the factors triggering the occupational stress, measured the level of occupational stress in the organization and talked about the impact of occupational stress on the overall performance of the employees. The research under consideration has assessed the factors that contribute to the development of occupational stress among the employees in various organizations in the Middle East. In addition to that, it also studied the impact of this stress on the performance of the employees. The analysis of primary data under this research showed that 82.7% respondents believed that relationships with co-workers are an important determinant of the stress experienced. A vast majority of respondents agreed that salary and benefits affect the level of occupational stress while 85% stressed the importance of good working conditions for reducing stress. Management support was regarded as of prime importance by 85% respondents while 88% believed career development opportunities are vital in determining occupational stress. 82.6% agreed that role conflict and ambiguity cause the occupational stress while 66.6% confirmed that workload is also important cause of occupational stress.

The factor analysis took into consideration only 4 major factors. As such the most influential variables of the research under consideration are career development, role conflict and ambiguity and relationships at work are some of the areas that can be used by management for managing overall stress levels within organization. This means, these variables contribute in the occupational stress and that consequently, affect the employee performance within the organization. Whereas, the work load does not contribute much in occupational stress and puts least impact over the employee performance.

As the overall analysis of the data clearly indicated that the factors identified that increasing levels of occupational stress can cause demotivation among the employees and can

cause their overall levels of performance to decline. When determining the key contributors of occupational stress, the study of Lazuras *et al.* (2009); and Rozman *et al.* (2014) have indicated that ineffective workload can be one of the primary reasons behind occupational stress. This is because high workload can cause burn out and frustration, whereas, low workload can keep the employees from challenging themselves and attaining higher levels of self-satisfaction. It can also be concluded based on overall analysis that the level of occupational stress within the organizations in the Middle East is not very high. Only 8% employees experienced high levels of stress while 88% were having low stress levels. In addition to that, it has also been identified that the presence of occupational stress within the organizations also has the ability to influence the performance employees in a negative manner. It is also found that job security, high commitment to work, association with workplace, flexible management style, management care for employees, personal satisfaction and salary packages are important factors which can affect the level of occupational stress. The primary data analysis indicates that these factors helped the management to keep the low level of occupational stress of its employees within the organization. So, it can be suggested that the employee performance could be enhanced if the organization goes for implementing strategies that integrate the employees' opinions in the important organizational decisions, such as job security, career development, salary benefits, workload, workplace environment, and job role development.

As evident from the above mentioned analysis, it is recommended that the organizations in the Middle East shall go for consultations with the employees either through face to face interviews or through the development and completion of personality tests before deciding the work load for each of the employees. This is because the perception of workload varies from employee to employee, as some employees are willing to undertake higher workload and may feel stressed if they do not get their desired workload. The HR department of the organizations is, therefore, recommended to ensure that the workload of the staff is as per their qualifications and perceptions so as to ensure that the staff has low levels of stress. In addition to that, the HR shall also ensure that frequent changes in the workload of the employees are not made. This is because the lack of consistency may lead towards the development of confusion among the staff and can become one of the causes of ambiguity that the staff may confront in relation to their roles and responsibilities. To ensure this, the HR shall coordinate with the concerned supervisors and shall go for the development of workloads that are in alignment with the department and company objectives as well as the overall workload of the department. It is suggested also to incorporate a holistic employee feedback mechanism in its processes so as to ensure that the point of view of the employees on the overall initiatives taken by the ministry to manage occupational stress is taken into account. In addition to that, it shall be ensured that the feedback given by the ministry is properly incorporated into the future initiatives that are taken by the ministry in this regard. This, as a result, will enable the organization to design initiatives that best cater to the issue of occupational stress within the organization.

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