
Psychosocial Stressors and Subjective Well-Being Among Male and Female Bureaucrats

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present research work was to compare and find out the impact of the seven sub variables of psychosocial stressors, i.e., strained interpersonal relationship, excessive responsibilities, financial constraints, marriage related stress, health related problems, adverse situations, and perceived threat on subjective well-being among male and female bureaucrats. The sample comprised of 128 male and 47 female bureaucrats from the state of Himachal Pradesh. The correlation and regression analysis was carried out to analyze the effect of psychosocial stressors on subjective well-being. The correlation analysis revealed that psychosocial stressors in terms of marriage related stress and perceived threats was significantly and negatively related to subjective well-being among male bureaucrats. On the other hand, among the female bureaucrats marriage related stress, adverse situations and perceived threats were found to be significantly and negatively related to their subjective well-being. Furthermore, regression analysis also revealed that marriage related stress, and perceived threats emerged to be the most significant predictors of subjective well-being among both male and female bureaucrats. Thus, it can be concluded that out of the seven sub variables of psychosocial stressors only marriage related stress and perceived threats has significantly suppressed the subjective well-being among both the male and female officers.

KEYWORDS: Psychosocial Stressors, Marriage Related Stress, Perceived Threat, Subjective well-being, Male and Female Bureaucrats.

INTRODUCTION

The modern world, which is said to be a world of achievements in science and technology and remarkable growth of the economy, majority of people all over the world seem to be experiencing moderate to high degree of psychological stress in various spheres of their lives.

Stress is considered as an integral part of modern life. It is the psychological reaction that occurs when an individual perceives an imbalance between the level of demand placed upon him and his capability for meeting that demand. Conditions that cause stress are called stressors or loads. Stressors can be defined as the causes of stress, including any environmental conditions that place a physical or emotional demand on the individual. Stress emanates from a misfit between environmental demands and personal adequacies to meet these demands. Today's life is so busy and complex. Everyone is in a hurry to utilize the most of their time by engaging in some productive work and to compete with the world in all

regards. The constant strive to be the best at workplace, pressure of meeting deadlines at job, group and political pressure at work, the complex life style, increasing price level, increase in tax pays, stringent government policies, etc are contributing towards employees stress at job.

Global Organization for Stress (2015) has categorically mentioned in their report of 2015 that 50 per cent of employees in India are under chronic stress with 30 per cent having problems such as addiction and marital discord and 20 per cent were suffering from depression. As per the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015), one in every five person (20 per cent of the population) in India are said to be suffering from some form of mental distress.

As per the report (WHO, 2015) almost one in every three Indian employees had instituted stress management programmes in 2013 and an almost equal number followed suits in 2014. Major causes of stress, according to the surveyed employees in India, included unclear or conflicting job expectations (40 per cent), inadequate staffing and lack of support, uneven workload or performance in group (38 per cent) and lack of work- life balance (38 per cent).

The performance at work requires mental and physical effort resulting in short term physiological and psychological load reactions that can be experienced as physiological or emotional arousal. In the case when individual's capacity for performing at work exceeds his capacity, the experience is stress and fatigue (Meijman, Mulder, 1998; Sluiter, Frings, Beek, Meijman 2001; Cropley, Zijlstra, 2011). These load reactions can result from psychosocial stressors, a term used to describe aspects of work management and its social and organizational contexts that have the potential for causing psychological or physical harm (Cox and Griffiths, 2005). Psychosocial stress is the result of a cognitive appraisal (an individual's mental interpretation) of what is at stake and what can be done about it. More simply put, psychosocial stress results when we look at a perceived social threat in our lives (real or even imagined) and discern that it may require resources we don't have.

Stansfeld and Candy (2006) found that there are many features of work life that can become stressors. These include authority as used by managers, boredom, issue of structure, no growth situations, disproportionate responsibilities and work load. A person's personal life, i.e., family and friends, health and financial situations can also cause stressors, which affect the subjective well-being of the employee.

Subjective Well-Being (SWB) also shows complex association with current and past health experiences, personal relationships, work, leisure, housing and the experience of education (Dolan, Peasgood, White, 2008; Huppert, 2009; Diener, 2012; Deeming, 2013; Oguz, Merad and Snape, 2013). It has also been reported by Oyuz et al (2013) that psychosocial stressors and strained interpersonal relationship had negative effect on subjective well-being.

In a study conducted by Stanfeld, Shipley, Head, Fuhrer and Kivimaki (2013) it was revealed that psychosocial work environment and personal relationships have independent effect on subjective well-being.

Many researchers think well-being is subjective because it depends on the individual's assessment of the quality of his or her own life (Lee and Brown, 2008). They commonly conceptualize SWB as having main two components: global life satisfaction and positive affect (Diener, Suh, Lucas, Smith, 1999; Land, Lamb, Meadows and Taylor, 2007). Global life-satisfaction, the cognitive component of well-being, refers to an individual's evaluation of his or her life as a whole-how satisfied he or she is with major aspects of life, such as

school or work, home, family and friends. On the other hand, affective component of well-being includes the pleasant and unpleasant emotions an individual attaches to various experiences (Lee and Browne, 2008). More specifically, well-being involves the level of satisfaction with various aspects of life as well as the frequency of positive emotions, such as joy and pride and the frequency of negative emotions, such as anger and sadness. Thus, Subjective well-being includes subjective perception of mood such as happiness and cognitive judgment of happiness coupled with the absence of negative feelings (Diener, 1984; Ryan and Deci, 2001). There are number of factors which effect subjective well-being of employees.

METHOD

Sample

Purposive random sampling approach was employed to select a total sample of 250 bureaucrats. The data was collected from the Himachal Pradesh Secretariat, Directorate of Himachal Pradesh, various Districts headquarters and Blocks. Bureaucrats were approached directly in their offices. Set of questionnaires, pertaining to psychosocial stressors and subjective well-being were given to the bureaucrats at their respective places of work and later collected back. Proper instructions were given to them beforehand. The goal was to choose a sample of 250 bureaucrats from various districts of Himachal Pradesh. But, out of 250 questionnaires 186 questionnaires were collected back and out of those 186, 130 were male bureaucrats and 56 were female bureaucrats. Due to incomplete responses and in certain cases incorrect responses the final sample was reduced to 175 bureaucrats. Out of the total final sample of 175, 128 were male bureaucrats and remaining 47 were female bureaucrats. All the bureaucrats were in the age range of 30 to 50 years.

Table 1: Showing the Sample Distribution

Designation of Bureaucrats	Number of Bureaucrats		Place of Designation
	Male Bureaucrats	Female Bureaucrats	
Indian Administrative Service Officers (IAS)	23	05	Secretariat and Districts Headquarters
Indian Police Service Officers (IPS)	15	10	Police Headquarters and Districts Headquarters
Indian Forest Service Officers (IFS)	12	3	State Forest Department
Himachal Pradesh Administrative Service officers (HPAS)	33	21	Secretariat , Directorate, Districts Headquarters and Blocks
Himachal Pradesh Polices Service Officers (HPPS)	45	08	Districts Headquarters and Blocks
Total Number	128	47	

TOOLS USED

ICMR Psychosocial Stress Scale (Srivastava, 1991-92)

Designed by “Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)” New Delhi, the scale consists of 40 items which covers following areas: Strained interpersonal relationship, excessive responsibilities, financial constraints, marriage related stress, health related problems, adverse situations and perceived threat. The reliability of the scale has been established through Cronback-Alpha ($r = .88$), split half ($r = .88$), test-retest ($r = .72$) and internal consistency ($r = .65$) method. Internal consistency of the tool on its seven subscales ranged from .24 to .77 ($p < .05$). This further established the content validity of the measure.

Chines Happiness Inventory (CHI)

Subjective well-being was measured with the help of Chinese Happiness Inventory (CHI) which was developed by Lu and Shih in 1997. This scale has 48 items measuring subjective experience of happiness. Three basic elements of happiness concept are:- Positive affect, Absence of negative affect and Overall satisfaction towards life. The reliability of the scale has been established through cronback-alpha which is .95, the one month test-retest with the sample of 40 undergraduate students is .66 and the 2.5 year test-retest with community adults is .40. Concurrent validity was evidenced by its correlation of .62 with the life satisfaction scale (Diener, Emmons, Larson & Griffin, 1985), .67 with composite means of domains satisfaction, 0.4 with a measure of positive affect and .52 with a lack of happiness scale.

RESULTS

Correlation and regression analysis were computed on all the variables among male and female bureaucrats. The results are reported in the following tables:

Table-2: Showing Correlation of Seven Sub Variables of Psychosocial Stressors with Subjective Well-Being among Male Bureaucrats

Sr. No.	Variables	Psychosocial Stressors							Subjective Well-Being
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	Strained Interpersonal Relationships	1	.710**	.040	.222**	.494**	.574**	.336**	-.143
2	Excessive Responsibilities		1	.134	.174	.544**	.564**	.478**	-.130
3	Financial Constraints			1	.077	.187*	.249**	.205*	.002
4	Marriage Related Stress				1	.134	.364**	.266**	-.393**
5	Health Related Problems					1	.608**	.429**	-.118

6	Adverse Situations						1	481**	-.125
7	Perceived Threats							1	-.291**
8	Subjective Well-being								1

** p< .01 and * p< .05

Table-3: Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of Seven Sub variables of Psychosocial Stressors as Predictors of Subjective Well-Being among Male Bureaucrats

Independent Variables	R	β	t	R ²	R ² Change	F-ratio (R ² -Change)
Marriage Related Stress	-.393**	-.39	4.73**	.15	.15	22.451**
Perceived Threats	-.291**	-.20	2.37**	.19	.04	14.469**

** p< .01 and * p< .05

Vide table 2, Pearson co-efficient of correlation indicates that in the present study there has been a significant and negative correlation of marriage related stress ($r = -.393$, $p < .01$) and perceived threats ($r = -.291$, $p < .01$) with subjective well-being which indicates that higher the marriage related stress and higher the perceived threats lower was the subjective well-being among male bureaucrats.

Out of the seven sub variables of psychosocial stressors only marriage related stress and perceived threats has significantly suppressed the subjective well-being among the male officers. It is evident from Table 3 that the significant predictors of the subjective well-being scores of the male bureaucrats were the marriage related stress ($\beta = -.39$ and $t = 4.73$, $p < .01$) and perceived threats ($\beta = -.20$ and $t = 2.37$, $p < .01$).

Thus, lower level of subjective well-being was predicted by higher levels of marriage related stress and perceived threats among male bureaucrats. These two variables accounted for 19 per cent of the variance in the subjective well-being of the male bureaucrats. Out of this, the marriage related stress explained 15 percent ($F = 22.451$, $p < .01$) of the variance and perceived threats explained an additional 4 percent ($F = 14.469$, $p < .01$) of the variance in the subjective well-being of the male bureaucrats.

Table-4: Showing Correlation of Seven Sub Variables of Psychosocial Stressors with Subjective Well-Being among female Bureaucrats

Sr. No.	Variables	Psychosocial Stressors							Subjective Well-being
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	Strained Interpersonal Relationships	1	.615**	.262	.212	.227	.615*	.311*	-.217
2	Excessive Responsibilities		1	.150	.252	.560**	.501*	.485*	-.278
3	Financial Constraints			1	.008	.049	.266	.056	-.206
4	Marriage Related Stress				1	.007	.321*	.157	-.337*
5	Health Related Problems					1	.441*	.381*	-.213
6	Adverse Situations						1	.534*	-.292*
7	Perceived Threats							1	-.402**
8	Subjective Well-being								1

** p < .01 and * p < .05

Table-5: Stepwise Multiple Regression analysis of Seven Sub variables of Psychosocial Stressors as Predictors of Subjective Well-Being among Female Bureaucrats

Independent Variables	R	β	t	R ²	R ² Change	F-ratio (R ² -Change)
Perceived Threats	-.402**	-.40	3.04**	.16	.16	9.259**
Marriage Related Stress	-.337**	-.28	2.18**	.23	.07	7.369**

** p < .01 and * p < .05

Table 4 indicates that there has been negative and significant correlation of marriage related stress ($r = -.337$, $p < .05$), adverse situations ($r = -.292$, $p < .05$) and perceived threats ($r = -.402$, $p < .01$) with subjective well-being which indicates that higher the marriage related stress, adverse situations and perceived threats lower was the subjective well-being among female bureaucrats and vice versa.

Furthermore, Table 5 reveals that the significant predictors of subjective well-being of the female bureaucrats were perceived threats ($\beta = -.40$ and $t = 3.04$, $p < .01$) and marriage related stress ($\beta = -.28$ and $t = 2.18$, $p < .01$).

Thus, higher subjective well-being among female bureaucrats was predicted by lower perceived threats and lower level of marriage related stress. These two variables accounted

for 23 percent of variance in the subjective well-being of the female bureaucrats. Out of this, the perceived threats explained 16 percent ($F= 9.259$, $p<. 01$) of the variance and marriage related stress explained an additional 7 percent ($F= 7.369$, $p<.01$) of the variance in the subjective well-being of the female bureaucrats.

Thus, it is obvious from above results that the significant predictors of subjective well-being among both male and female bureaucrats were marriage related stress and perceived threats and these variables negatively influenced subjective well-being among both male and female bureaucrats.

DISCUSSION

In the present study psychosocial stressors in terms of marriage related stress and perceived threats, have been found to be significantly and negatively related to subjective well-being among male bureaucrats which indicates that higher the marriage related stress and perceived threats lower was the subjective well-being among male bureaucrats in the state of Himachal Pradesh.

These results are further corroborated by the results of the regression analysis which indicated that out of the seven sub-variables of psychosocial stressors only marriage related stress and perceived threats have emerged as significant predictors of subjective well-being among male officers.

It is plausible that one's subjective well-being may effect both own and spouse's marital life. People evaluate their circumstances more positively when they are in a happy mood rather than sad mood. Similarly, persons with high levels of negative affect tend to offer more negative accounts of their marriage and are more likely to recall negative information about past experiences (Treasdale, Taylor and Fogarty, 1980). Unhappy persons also are less capable of providing their spouse the love and support they desire, or they may instigate frequent marital conflicts or marriage related stress (Iveniuk, Waite, Laumann, McClintock and Tidet, 2014).

The stress generation model (Davila, Bradhury, Lohen, and Tochluk, 1997) posits that individuals with low subjective well-being encounter stressful interaction with their spouses and that, in turn, leads to even greater decline in subjective well-being, e.g., a wife with low subjective well-being might withdraw from family life, creating tension in her marital relationship and causing arguments with her husband. In turn, this tension might lead to deterioration in subjective well-being.

The second perspective linking marriage related stress and subjective well-being is the marital discord model of depression (Beach, Sandeen and O'Leary, 1990). This theoretical model has drawn from clinical work on depressed individuals who were unhappy with their marriages. This model has posited that low quality marriage lead to an increased risk of depression because spouses are among the most important sources of social support, thus, normally serving as a strong protective factor against stress or depression (Brown, Andrews, Harris, Adler and Bridge, 1986). However, within unhappy marriages this social support is lacking.

Further, the proponents of marital discord model have argued that the stressful and hostile family environment common to unhappy marriages was also the risk for lower subjective well-being. Similarly, they reported that respondents with the lowest levels of initial life happiness were most likely to be in the low marital happiness over time. It is possible that, because respondents were distressed, their marriages followed negative trajectory overtime because of stressful interactions engendered by the distressed spouse. Furthermore, Hawkins and Booth (2005) and Kamp and Amato (2005) found that respondents in the high marriage related stress trajectory had the lowest level of subjective well-being.

Research made by Rabin and Shapira (1997) investigated the different ways married men and women view the level of equality in their relationship and the connection between different indices of marital equality and marital satisfaction. Israeli married couples were questioned about their attitudes toward equality between the sexes, the degree of their role of fairness in the relationship and their marital happiness and tension. Most important was the finding that although equal role sharing and decision making were predictive of women's marital satisfaction, these also predicted men's marital tension.

Eng, Kawachi, Ritzmaurice and Rimm (2005) examined the effect of change in marital status on subjective well-being among men and found that marriage related stress adversely affect health and subjective well-being of men.

Furthermore, another important finding of the present study was that perceived threats was negatively correlated and also emerged as a significant predictor of subjective well-being among male bureaucrats.

Everyone faces challenges in life. These could be due to professional, societal and domestic environment. These challenges vary in intensity and are handled inappropriately by human beings both at physical as well as psychological levels. It results in perceiving them as threats, which in turn generates pressure. When pressure becomes severe human organism gets strained to respond. This in turn affects their subjective well-being (Pestonjee, 1992).

Landsbergis (1988) found that perceived threats including: job insecurity, physical exertion, social support and hazard exposure were found to be associated with low level of subjective well-being.

Jagdish and Shrivastava (1983) examined the relationship between perceived threats stemming from various job demands. The findings of the study offer a strong support for the contention that occupational stress arising from various job dimension- role conflict, role overload, role ambiguity, group and political pressure, under participation, powerlessness and poor peer relations at work were found to be inversely related to subjective well-being of employees.

Desai (1993) studied the relation between stress and mental workload in three levels of management. The results indicated that higher and middle management had higher and similar levels of stress and mental work load, followed by lower management. He also found that the perceived threats of mental workload were the main predictors of stress. Fulcheri, Barzega, Marina, Navara, & Ravizza, (1995) also observed that size of work load, the complexity to tasks and responsibilities are the major perceived threats for employees.

Another noteworthy finding of the present research work was that psychosocial stressors in terms of marriage related stress, perceived threat and adverse situation have emerged to be

significantly and negatively correlated with the subjective well-being among female bureaucrats of Himachal Pradesh.

The regression analysis lend further support to the above findings in which out of the seven sub-variables of psychosocial stressors only marriage related stress and perceived threats have emerged to be the significant predictors of subjective well-being among the female officers.

These findings are supported by the finding of Kapur (1970). He suggested that wife's being employed does make marital interaction a little more complicated and creates more problems in the family and so more efforts on the part of spouses are required to make adjustment and to achieve marital harmony.

Kapur (1970) has also studied the factors that contribute to marriage related stress in the life of educated working women. She has reported that women's happiness in her marriage is determined mainly by what she was when she entered the marriage. If she was maladjusted and resentful to life as a girl, she was more likely to be maladjusted and resentful as a wife. Moreover, she has observed that women whose husbands were earning were better adjusted. On the other hand, among women who always disagreed with husbands on sharing household jobs all of them were maladjusted and had marriage related stress.

The studies on relationship development by Markman (1981) indicated that factors such as poor communication and problem-solving skills and dysfunction with interaction, when they are present pre-marital or early in the marriage, can predict the development of relationship distress later in marriage. The results of Miller and Kanna (1999) also indicated that communication style and decision making attitudes have a direct effect on married life. Open communication between spouses increases marital quality while, dominated decision making has a negative impact. Traditional gender-role attitudes and wife's employment status affected marital quality indirectly by influencing communication style and decision making.

Couple's cognition about marriage and their communication patterns have both been found to be highly associated with marriage related stress. Gordon, Baucom and Shyder (2004) examined the relationships among marital cognition, communication and marital adjustment. Findings revealed that correlation of communication with marital adjustment is higher for women with more relationship focused standards and that this interaction does not occur for men.

Baxter (1986) found lack of spousal support as a major reason for relationship dissatisfaction. Acitiellie and Antoncis (1994) also reported that spouses who reported higher level of support from their partner had higher subjective well-being than those reporting lower level of support.

Sometimes hectic demands and schedules of couple's work life have also limited the amount of time and energy they have to devote to family life and consequently have impacted the married life. Stress and work demands often have negative effects on family relationships and subjective well-being and marital satisfaction (Kessler and McRae, 1982, Benin and Agostinelli, 1988; Voydanoff, 1988; White and Keith, 1990; Rook, Dooley and Catalano, 1991; Sears and Galambos, 1992). Himsel and Goldberg (2003) observed that an unequal division of family work cannot only affect marital happiness but also can affect an individual's subjective well-being.

Further, the results indicate that psychosocial stressor in terms of perceived threats was also negatively and significantly related to subjective well-being among female bureaucrats.

An important aspect that results from organizational culture is the existence of competition which can emerge as a major threat to the employees working in that organization. As organizations decline, especially in relation to downsizing and budget cut, job insecurity, work overload because of unrealistic deadlines, underutilization of employees skills, promotional obstacles and inter and intra group competitions (Jick, 1985), it can adversely effect the subjective well-being of employees. Moreover, many employees feel stressed due to power struggles of office politics prevailing in the organization. Officers who are engaged in power games and political alliance can place stressful expectations and demands on their subordinates (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1999).

Another noteworthy finding of the present study was that psychosocial stressors in terms of adverse situations are also negatively and significantly related to subjective well-being among female bureaucrats. It indicates that higher the stress due to adverse situations lower will be the subjective well-being among female bureaucrats.

Certain features of the structure, climate and culture of the organization in which an individual is working can also cause severe stress to its members (Jick, 1985). Conflict between individuals because of incompatible goals or substantive issues on the one hand and emotional issues on the other can create stress. Parasuraman and Alluto (1981) proposed an integrated model for investigating simultaneously the relationship of contextual, task role related variable to stressors, viz, inter-unit conflict, technical problems, efficiency problems, role frustration, staff shortage and too many meetings in the work environment. They reported that these adverse situations in work settings and a number of non-work or off the job factors are the indirect sources of stress which effects the subjective well-being of employees.

CONCLUSION

From above discussion it can be concluded that out of the seven sub variables of psychosocial stressors (strained interpersonal relationships, excessive responsibilities, financial constraints, marriage related stress, health related problems, adverse situations and perceived threats) marriage related stress and perceived threats have significantly suppressed the subjective well-being among both the male and female officers. Among female bureaucrats besides marriage related stress and perceived threats adverse situations negatively affected subjective well-being.

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