

Occupational Stress and Organizational Commitment: Does Sex and Managerial Status Matter?

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate whether sex and managerial status have any effect on occupational stress and organizational commitment in the Ghanaian banking sector. Using a cross-sectional survey design, 327 participants were conveniently selected for the study. Reliable questionnaires were used to collect a heterogeneous sample for the study. The hypotheses were tested with Multivariate statistical test (MANOVA). The analysis showed that males differed significantly in organizational commitment than their female counterparts. However, no statistically significant sex and managerial status difference was found in occupational stress and organizational commitment. This means that, in terms of occupational stress, males did not differ significantly from their female counterparts. Similarly, managers did not differ significantly in their level of occupational stress from non-managers. Further, managers did not demonstrate significantly higher level of organizational commitment than non-managers. The implications of the findings on occupational stress and organizational commitment research have been discussed.

Introduction

Stress permeates every aspect of an individuals' working life (Smith, 2000; Chang & Lu, 2007). Organizational researchers generally investigate the concept of stress presumably to increase our understanding of the effect stress has on work-related attitudes of workers (Jamal, 1990). The human resource of an organization constitutes the backbone of the organization; hence an understanding of how stress affects their commitment levels as well as empirical evidence on individual differences in the experience of stress is a clarion call on researchers (Eddy, 1984). Job Stress is a prevalent problem in modern life (Smith, 2000; Chang & Lu, 2007). Stress has the propensity to disrupt the behaviour of employees in an organization (Nwadiani, 2006). The cost associated with workplace is enormous and both employees and the organization are affected by stress (Hart & Cooper, 2001). Specifically, stress has been found to affect organizational performance and efficiency (Dua, 1994; Brown & Uehara, 2008; Reskin, 2008).

According to researchers, a plethora of studies on stress and stress-related problems exist (Handy, 1991; Payne & Firth, 1987; Wallis & De Wolff, 1988; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Beehr & Franz, 1987; Jamal, 1990). Despite this empirical evidence from the individual difference perspective is somehow limited. Also, empirical evidence on the link between stress and organizational commitment from the Ghanaian context is virtually non-existent. Against this backdrop, we are motivated by the scanty literature on individual differences in the experience of stress as well as the nexus between stress and organizational commitment in current literature to conduct an empirical study in the Ghanaian context to contribute to the scientific understanding of stress and its effect on commitment in organizations as well as individual differences.

Objectives of the Study

- To determine sex difference in organizational commitment and occupational stress
- To investigate the difference in organizational commitment and occupational stress between managers and non-managers
- To ascertain whether a difference exist between organizational tenure of employees, organizational commitment and occupational stress

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Literature Review

Occupational Stress

The term stress is associated with Selye (1964). According to Selye (1964), it is the physical and psychological response to adverse conditions or influences in the workplace setting or environment. Similarly, Nwadiani (2006) defined stress as a disruption of the emotional stability of the individual that induces a state of disorganization in personality and behaviour.

Within the context of work, stress has been conceptualized differently from the notion of reaction to adverse conditions or disruption of the emotional state of an individual. Thus, occupational or job stress has been defined as the inability of an employee to manage job demands due largely to gap between his or her competencies/abilities and the requirements of the job (Holmlund & Strandvik, 2005). Occupational stress has also been defined as the composite of role strain which comprises role conflict, ambiguity and overload (Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

A review of prior literature suggests that occupational stress affects emotional reaction and cognitive role (e.g., Combs & Taylor, 1952; Driskell & Salas, 1991; Easterbrook 1959; Streufert & Streufert, 1981). Stress has been found to lead to negative emotional reactions, such as anxiety, anger, fear, annoyance, tension and frustration, which can vary in intensity (Driskell & Salas 1991; Parasuraman & Alutto 1981).

The effect of stress on employees could be immediate or long term. According to Danna and Griffin (1999), some occupational stress can lead to immediate emotional reactions, while others have a cumulative effect over time. They also stated that occupational stress is a threat to the quality of work-life of employees. Occupational stress has also been found to be a major source of employee disengagement (Cartwright & Boyes, 2000). Prior studies have suggested that negative emotional reactions can lead to job strains, such as job dissatisfaction and low organizational commitment (Parker & DeCotis, 1983; Spector, 1998). On the other hand, the cognitive role of occupational stress may lead individuals to pay less attention to tasks and a reduction in information search, which leads to poor performance (Combs & Taylor, 1952; Easterbrook, 1959; Streufert & Streufert, 1981).

Stress at work is a well-known factor for low motivation and morale, decrease in performance, high turnover and sick-leave, accidents, low job satisfaction, low quality products and services, poor internal communication and conflicts etc. (McHugh, 1993; Murphy, 1995; Schabracq & Cooper, 2000). Moreover, Chusmir and Franks (1988) argued that all the aforementioned problems are related, directly or indirectly, to stress and they have an effect on overall organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment has been viewed as the feelings employees have toward their current organization. For instance, Organizational commitment has been defined as the strong belief in and acceptance of the organizational goals and values, willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and a definite desire to maintain organizational citizenship (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974).

Organizational commitment has been conceptualized as a multidimensional involving affective, normative and continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990, 1996; Boehman, 2006; Canipe, 2006; Greenberg, 2005; Karrasch, 2003; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005). Together, these three dimensions measure organizational commitment as a variable.

Affective commitment refers to the emotional bond and identification of the employees with the organization. Continuance commitment refers to the material benefits gained from being with the organization (Akintayo, 2010). While, normative commitment reveals a feeling of compulsion to continue employment (Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sincich, 1993).

Empirical Literature

A plethora of studies on occupational stress exist. However, the majority of studies were conducted in the Western countries such as Australia, the United States with very few studies coming from the Asian continent. For instance, a study conducted in Australia reported that males differ significantly in organizational stress than their female counterparts (Savery & Luks, 2000). They explained that males tended to work excessive hours than women and those woman also focus more on intrinsic rewards and less on promotion and salary than men.

In another study by Gmelch & Burns (1994) in the United States, women academics were found to experience significantly more stress than their male counterparts in the areas of task-based and professional identity. Similar findings were reported by the Singaporean study of Human Resource Professionals, it was reported that females experienced significantly more stress as a result of organisational politics than their male counterparts (Lim & Teo, 1996). Similar findings were reported in the United Kingdom by Fotinatos-Ventouratos & Cooper (2005) who found that in terms of "relationships with other people" females reported a higher mean score, indicating this to be a source of job pressure. de Smet and co-workers (2005) showed that, adjusting for age, education and occupational groups, men perceived less psychological job demand than women did (although marginal).

Gender-based differences appeared to be larger for job control, with men perceiving higher control at work than women. The deficit of job control in females, however, increased towards less qualified occupations. Job strain was less prevalent in men than in women, without apparent regional heterogeneity (de Smet et al., 2005).

Age has been shown in some studies to have a curvilinear relationship; the older employees being more satisfied than the younger ones (Punnett et al., 2007). In a study conducted in Australia by Dua (1994), younger staff reported more job stress than older staff. That was attributed to the idea that as people get older they become more experienced and more worldly-wise. The study conducted in Malaysia by Manshor (2003) also indicated that age was significantly correlated with sources of stress, in particular with workloads. Workloads become intolerable to a certain range of ages.

Balay (2007) found that as teachers age they are more likely to experience commitment based on internalization of organizational values and identification with those values. Balay (2007) further found that male teachers were more likely to experience stress based on compliance and avoidance of conflict than were female teachers. Rozenblatt (2001) found no simple correlation between age, education or nationality and organizational stress and burnout. Rather, these factors were mediated by participants' skill level and skill flexibility. Rodriguez-Calcagno and Brewer (2005) found that amongst Hispanic professionals females experience higher levels of job stress than do males. Brewer and McMahon (2003) found that while there were a large amount of variance in levels of job stress among industrial education teacher educators, this variance was not explained by demographic characteristics.

Studies by Barkat & Asma (1999) revealed that, older people experience lower life stress and role stress whereas younger people experience more stress as compared to their older counterparts. The greater the numbers of years of service the greater life and role stress. The lower the income, the greater stress experienced *i.e.* stress decreases with increase in income.

Virk, Chhabra & Kumar (2001) concluded that as the position of the worker increases, the stress level also increases. From all previous studies, it can be concluded that the length of service has negative and positive relationship with stress. Even then more studies revealed that individual with lesser experience, experienced more stress as compared to the individual with more service years (Barkat & Asma, 1999; Elahi & Apoorva, 2012; Virk, Chhabra & Kumar, 2001).

On organizational commitment, Mowday et al. (1992) have identified four factors that influence organizational commitment: personal characteristics (i.e. age, gender, education level), role characteristics (i.e. tenure, rank/position, role conflict, promotion opportunities), structural characteristics (i.e. organization size, span of control, existence of union, centralized authority), and work experience (i.e. group attitude, recognition, support from peers). In view of this, we can say that role characteristics particularly role conflict and structural characteristics such as span of control and job size are potential stressors which can affect the commitment levels of workers.

Organizational commitment has been identified as being influential in that it can change the behaviors of employees (Lambert, 2003). Studies have also found out that a high level of organizational commitment is correlated with positive work-related behaviors and attitudes such as improved job performance (Meyer et al., 1989), openness to innovation (Wycoff & Skogan, 1994), worker productivity (Clegg & Dunkerley, 1980), job satisfaction (Meyer et al., 1993; Ford et al., 2003; Becker & Billings, 1993), and positive social responsibility (Witt, 1990), organizational citizenship behavior (Shore et al., 1995; Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2006), low turnover intention (Mowday et al., 1982; Allen and Meyer, 1996). These benefits of

organizational commitment reach not only the organization itself, but also the individuals by developing competence through being coached and personal learning (McLean, Yang, Kuo, Tolbert, & Larkin, 2005; Park, 2007). On the other hand, a low level of organizational commitment is also linked to negative work-related attitudes and behaviors such as turnover intentions (Bashaw & Grand, 1994; Morrow, 1993), occupational deviance (Haarr, 1997), absenteeism (Farrell & Stamm, 1988; Morrow, 1993) and reduced employee effort, theft, job dissatisfaction, and unwillingness to be relocated (Morrow, 1993).

Methodology

Research Design

The researchers used cross-sectional survey design to investigate the effect of demographic variables on occupational stress and employee commitment in the service sector of Ghana. This design was ideal because data was collected from participants of different sex, job position and employment at a single point in time. Further, the researchers tested for the demographic differences in the study. The study was quantitative in nature because we sought to describe the perceived differences quantitatively using questionnaire data.

Sample Size and Sampling

A total of 327 participants were drawn from the banking, insurance, oil and public service of Ghana for the study. A two sampling procedure was adopted. Non-probability sampling method was used to select the organizations and participants in the study. First, we contacted all interested organizations in their respective sectors and those that were interested were selected conveniently. Subsequently, we selected the participants conveniently from the organizations that consented to participate in the study. Three Hundred and Fifty (350) questionnaires were administered, out of which 326 were retrieved and actually used for the analysis. Thus, a response rate of 93.4% was obtained in the study. There were variations in the sample used for the study. **Table 1** shows the sample distribution in the study.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variables		Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex:	Male	204	62.4
	Female	123	37.6
Managerial Status:	Manager	66	20.2
	Non-manager	261	79.8
Employment status:	Permanent	248	75.8
	Temporary/contract	72	22.0
	Outsourced	7	2.1
Organizational Tenure:	2years and below	77	23.5
	3-5years	134	41.0
	6-8years	67	20.5
	9-11years	18	5.5
	12years and above	31	9.5
Level of Education:	Masters	47	14.4
	First degree	150	45.9
	Diploma	100	30.6
	GCE 'A' Level	12	3.7
	SHS/SSCE	18	5.5
Total Number of Respondents (N=327)			

Instrument/Measure

Self-report questionnaires were used to collect data in the study. Occupational stress was measured with a 30-item scale developed by Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1971). The statements were anchored on a seven-point Likert scale with responses ranging from *Very False (1) to Very True (7)*. Sample items on the scale were *"I have enough time to complete my work"; "I perform tasks that are too easy or too boring"* etc. Minimum and maximum scores on the scale ranged from 30 to 210 respectively.

On the other hand, organizational commitment was measured with the instrument developed by Allen and Meyer (1991). The scale contains 20-items measuring the three components of organizational commitment; affective, normative and continuance respectively. The three components together measure organizational

commitment as a whole. Sample items on the scale were “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization”; “I enjoy discussing about my organization with people outside it” etc. The items were anchored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1). Minimum and maximum scores on the scale ranged from 20 to 140 respectively.

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers sought permission from all participating organizations through their Human Resources Department. All the organizations involved in the study were previewed to the nature of the study and the kind of data we were interested in. Copies of the research instrument and the objectives of the study were attached to a cover letter to all the organizations. After permission was granted, we proceeded to seek the assistance of personnel in the HR department of each of these organizations to administer the research instrument on our behalf. The personnel was giving basic training in questionnaire so that he/she could administer the questionnaire professionally. Despite this, we took steps to guarantee the participants of confidentiality of the information that they would provide. Each participant received the research instrument together with an envelope and they were instructed to put completed questionnaires into it and seal. This was done to ensure that only the researchers had access to the information provided.

Results

We examined empirically individual differences in stress and organizational commitment in the Ghanaian context. Accordingly, we investigated sex differences in stress and organizational commitment as well as differences in stress and organizational commitment between managerial and non-managerial workers. Data were collected using standardized measures of occupational stress and organizational commitment. We screened, coded and entered the data onto statistical software to facilitate the analysis. The Statistical Product and Services Solution (SPSS) version 20.0 for IBM was used to facilitate the analysis.

Testing Hypotheses

Multivariate statistical test (MANOVA) was used to test the hypotheses in the study. Using this test, the effect of demographic factors (sex, managerial status and organizational tenure) was tested simultaneously on the two dependent variables (occupational stress and organizational commitment) at once. This type of analysis reduces the chances of committing Type I error which would have occurred if the dependent variables were tested separately.

The result of the analysis is presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2:
Summary of Tests of Between-Subjects Effects of Individual Difference in Stress and Organizational Commitment

Source	DV	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.	Eta
Sex	Commitment	1248.489	1	1248.489		4.156	.042
	Stress	5.377	1	5.377		0.011	.915
Managerial status	Commitment	415.750	1	415.750	1.384	.240	.004
	Stress	194.952	1	194.952	0.413	.521	.001
Tenure	Commitment	2276.467	4	569.117	1.895	.111	.024
	Stress	698.451	4	174.613	.370	.830	.005
Error	Commitment	103163.468	320				
	Stress	155405.789	320				
Total	Commitment	107331.254	326				
	Stress	157088.245	326				

As shown in **Table 2**, a statistically significant sex difference in organizational commitment was found [$F_{(1, 326)} = 4.156, p=.042, \text{Partial Eta Squared}=.013$]. Specifically, males were found to demonstrate significantly high level of organizational commitment ($M=89.829$) than their female counterparts ($M=85.113$). The

partial eta squared values of .013 also suggests that sex contributed 1.3% of the variance in employee organizational commitment.

No statistically significant sex difference in occupational stress was found [$F_{(1, 326)} = 0.011, p = .915$, Partial Eta Squared = .000]. This implies that females did not differ significantly in their experience of stress ($M = 134.460$) than their male counterparts ($M = 135.287$). Sex difference did not account for differences in occupational stress (Partial Eta Squared = .000).

No statistically significant difference in organizational commitment was observed between managers and non-managers [$F_{(1, 326)} = 1.384, p = .240$, Partial Eta Squared = .004]. This implies that, in terms of organizational commitments managers ($M = 86.401$) did not differ significantly from their non-managerial counterparts ($M = 88.541$). Managerial status accounted for 0.4% of the variance in organizational commitment.

The result also showed that, no statistically significant difference existed between organizational tenure and occupational stress [$F_{(1, 326)} = .370, p = .830$, Partial Eta Squared = .005]. This implies that the tenure of the employee did not account for significant difference in the experience of occupational stress.

Discussion

The subject matter of stress is gaining more attention now than before from the scholarly world due largely to the demanding and changing nature of work in recent times. The researchers were motivated by the individual difference factor in stress experience and thus sought to determine the differences in stress and commitment from the perspective of sex, managerial status and organizational tenure.

The evidence gathered in this study showed that, males did not differ significantly in their experience of stress than their female counterparts in the Ghanaian service sector. This empirical finding contradicted previous research outcome (Gmelch & Burns, 1994; Lim & Teo, 1996; Savery & Luks, 2000). Difference in the work setting of participants seems to be a major factor in sex differences in the experience of stress. For instance, Gmelch and Burns (1994) found females experiencing higher level of stress than their male counterparts in an academic-related job while Lim and Teo (1994) also found women differing significantly in stress caused by organizational politics than men.

In terms of managerial status, no statistically significant difference in stress was found between managers and non-managers. This finding disagreed with previous research (Virk et al., 2001). For instance, Virk et al (2001) posited that managerial levels position comes with higher levels of stress. Despite the non-significant difference, we believe that the finding is justified on grounds that every job position comes with some level of stress because every employee irrespective of his/her level or position, he/she has some responsibilities and targets to achieve.

Similarly, the number of years the individual has worked did not determine significant difference in the experience of stress. This finding disagreed with previous research (Barkat & Asma, 1999) which posited that long tenured workers were found to experience less stress than their counterparts with short-tenure.

Sex difference in organizational commitment was also observed in this study with male workers demonstrating significantly high level of commitment than female workers. This finding corroborated previous studies (Abdul-Nasiru et al., 2014).

Limitations of Study

Despite the provision of empirical evidence on the concepts of stress and organizational commitment from the individual perspective in the Ghanaian context, the study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional design utilized in this study only helps understand the association between variables. This means that, the significant sex difference obtained in this study does not suggest a cause-effect link between sex and organizational commitment to the extent that being a male worker necessarily leads to significantly high demonstration of organizational commitment. In addition, the study was limited to the Ghanaian service sector with focus on the banking sector. This makes the ability to generalize the findings to public

sector organizations theoretically and practically impossible. Finally, data on occupational stress and organizational commitment were collected from a single source; this makes common method-bias a problem with this study.

Implications of Findings

What does the finding suggest to organizations in terms of management of stress and commitment levels of workers in organizations? First, the empirical evidence brings to the fore the idea that males and females as well as managers and non-managers are exposed to the same stressors in the work-context. This means that irrespective of your position or sex in the organization, the experience of stress is the same. Thus, focus on reducing occupational stress should not be limited to one sex or job rank but the entire workforce. Second, males were found to demonstrate significantly higher level of stress than their female counterparts. To ensure effective contribution from both sexes in the organization, measures must be instituted to increase and sustain the commitment levels of female workers. To do this, it is imperative that factors that reduce commitment levels of females are identified especially non-work related factors such as family responsibility (i.e. child caring, cooking etc.). In the same vain, the increased commitment levels of male workers should be sustained. Finally, manager's level of commitment was not different from non-managers. This implies that irrespective of the position one holds in the organization, levels of commitment are similar. Therefore, organizations must maintain the current organizational commitment levels of both managers and non-managers since the finding does not suggest a significantly low level of commitment of one level. However, measures can be instituted to increase commitment levels.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings obtained in this study provide fertile grounds for future research. For instance, to understand the subject matter of occupational stress and organizational commitment better, it is important that future researchers consider investigating variables such as supervisor, co-worker and organizational support; worker autonomy; and personality factors such as the Big-Five (i.e. conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, openness to experience and extraversion) on occupational stress. Similarly, organizational commitment can be strengthened by examining variables such as Big-Five personality factors, organizational (e.g., compensation, work climate, working hours, organizational justice etc.) and job-related (e.g., role clarity, job involvement etc.) factors on employee organizational commitment.

Conclusion

The researchers sought to determine sex and managerial status differences in occupational stress and organizational commitment in the Ghanaian banking sector. Evidence obtained in the present study showed that males demonstrated significantly higher level of commitment than their female counterparts. However, sex difference in occupational stress was not observed. Finally, managerial status of a worker did not differ from workers in terms of their commitment to the organization as well as their level of stress experienced.

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