



## Work Stress among Support Staff in Private University

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### Article History

Received: 21.08.2022

Accepted: 27.09.2022

Published: 30.09.2022

**Abstract:** Work stress in the workplace can cause an employee to become distracted while performing tasks. Furthermore, employees will also experience depression for a period of time, either at home or at work. However, this is not a new issue and it has a number of questions and debates about existing concepts and theories. As a result, the primary goal of this research is to identify the experiences and challenges that support staff face as a result of work stress. The findings of the study show that there employees who face experiences and challenges such as harassment from colleagues, doing work for other employees, accepting work outside the scope of work, and having to bear excessive work. This research is important for understanding the job stress issues faced by support staff in private universities.

**Keywords:** Work Stress, Support Staff, Private University, Experience, Challenge.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, job stress is one of the scenarios faced by many employees in an organization (Darus *et al.*, 2013). According to Darus *et al.*, (2013) stress has been seen as one of the most recent societal diseases that manifests itself in various forms within an organisation. Stress can also be caused by psychological and physical attacks, which can harm a person's condition and make it difficult for them to adapt to demands that exceed their expectations. However, according to Idris (2011), a moderate level of stress is required to encourage effort and creativity, but an excessive level of stress will deactivate the stimulation of creativity and effort. Furthermore, excessive stress, also known as tension, can have an impact on the competitiveness and performance of employees in an organisation.

In Malaysia, there has been an increase in stress experienced by the community in recent years which leads to depression and if this situation continues it may become a mental illness. Results from the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) in 2019 showed that 2.3% of Malaysians aged 16 and above, experienced emotional depression and mental health problem. In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported in 2004 that depression is the second most dangerous risk factor after heart attack. Similarly, work pressure is thought to be increasing, which is concerning and poses a challenge for employers. This is because work pressure necessitates a lengthy process to restore employees' well-being, and it also has an impact on the organization's survival.

**Citation:** Mohd Firdaus Roslan, Noor Syazwani Ishak, Mad Abas Sahan, Khairul Hafezad Abdullah, Mohd Ridwan Abd Razak (2022). Work Stress among Support Staff in Private University. *Glob Acad J Humanit Soc Sci*; Vol-4, Iss-5 pp- 188-192.

According to Ali *et al.*, (2014), increasing the level of stress among university staff can disrupt the institution's smooth functioning. For example, a university may have undergone large-scale organisational changes such as downsizing, limiting or cutting government funding. As a result of these changes, they will face increased work pressure, which will have a negative impact on both the work environment and the personal lives of employees. According to Ali *et al.*, (2014) several external and internal factors in the education system create barriers for support staff in private universities, interfering with their productivity, psychological state, level of comfort, and motivation.

In addition, Ling (2014) claims that there is a lack of interest in conducting stress studies in the education sector compared to other sectors such as the health, corporate and banking industries. Therefore, five support staff was selected as study respondents because they have characteristics that may be affected by work-related stress. In this study, the respondents may experience work-related stress, such as fatigue from high work demands and interference while performing tasks. According to Demerouti *et al.*, (2001), work-related stress develops as a result of high job demands and limited resource availability, which contributes to a negative work environment that demotivates employees and drains their energy.

This study will focus on the stress experiences and challenges of employees at a private university in the Klang Valley. These support staff are under great pressure to ensure that all activities in the department are completed correctly and in an orderly manner. At the same time, they need to maintain good relationships with students, coworkers and even faculty.

## 2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach through the interview method where the sampling is from participants who have the potential to represent the group to be studied. Five (5) support staff from various departments and faculties at the Klang Valley Private University was selected in an interview to find out their demographics, work stress experiences and challenges of work stress at workplace. The objective of this interview method is to find out the real situation faced by the support staff. According to Burns and Groove (2014); Cardano (2020), using a qualitative approach is suitable for researchers involved in the observation of a person or unit, a group of people, a family, in a class, school and even culture.

This study uses a semi-structured interview method because the nature of this study is relaxed

by giving comfort to the participants to examine and explain the answers to the questions given by the researcher. According to Nowell *et al.*, (2017), the interview session findings will be analysed using appropriate guidelines and reliability criteria. The interview was conducted through video recording on July 4, 2022 (Monday) until July 15, 2022 (Friday), using questions prepared to obtain information about job stress conditions and consent was obtained from the participants before the interview session. The interview questions are listed below:

1. Demographics: gender, age, marital status, academic status and work experience.
2. Do you know about job stress?
3. Have you ever experienced stress at work? Can you elaborate on those pressures?
4. Job stress is a serious issue. What are your views on the challenges faced if facing stress at work?

## 3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3.1 shows the gender, age, marital status, academic status and work experience as support staff for each of the respondents studied. Followed by the findings of the study on stress, experience of experiencing stress and challenges faced. This finding is based on five respondents' interview responses and a discussion.

**Table 3.1: Respondent Profile**

Description	Frequency (n=5)	Percent (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	3	60
Female	2	40
<b>Age</b>		
30 - 40 years	4	80
> 40 years	1	20
<b>Marriage status</b>		
Married	3	60
Single	2	40
<b>Academic Status</b>		
Diploma	3	60
Degree	2	40
<b>Work experience</b>		
5 - 10 years	3	60
> 10 years	2	40

Table 3.1 shows the demographic profile and background of all respondents. There were three male and two female among the respondents. All respondents are 30 years old and above. Three respondents are married while two respondents are unmarried. In terms of education level, three respondents have a diploma and two respondents have a degree. All respondents have at least five years' of support staff work experience and above.

### 3.1 Analysis of Respondents Related to Knowledge of Job Stress

All five respondents have given an explanation related to the knowledge of job stress.

3.1.1 The first respondent stated that:

"Work stress occurs when an employee experiences discomfort while at work."

3.1.2 According to the second respondent:

"For me, the stress of this job is when we have so many assignments that we can't finish them all".

3.1.3 The third respondent said:

"Work pressure occurs when we receive assignments from coworkers that immediately become a burden to us".

3.1.4 The fourth respondent stated that:

"Work stress occurs when there is a disruption at work that has a negative impact on us and our work results".

3.1.5 While the fifth respondent told that:

"Work pressure can occur when we have arranged all the equipment and take good care of it, but there are lecturers who take the equipment without informing us".

The findings of the study mentioned above are supported by the research conducted by Yan, H., and Xie, S. (2016) which states that work stress is defined as a physiological, psychological and behavioral response resulting from the continuous effects of one or more stressors on individuals in the organisation. If there is no strategy in place to deal with pressure effectively, this reaction will undoubtedly have an impact on the employee. While according to Pandey, D. L. (2020), work stress is a response that may occur to employees when they are given work demands that do not match their knowledge and also talents that challenging their ability to overcome them. This often happens to support staff when they are given tasks that are not part of their daily work scope. According to Ivancevich and Matteson (2006) in their study, it is an adaptive response to work demands that causes psychological or physical stress. In general, these three definitions of stress are not much different and will almost certainly result in job stress in the workplace.

### 3.2 Analysis for Respondents Related to the Experience of Stress during Work

All five respondents gave an explanation related to the experience of stress during work.

3.2.1 The first respondent stated that:

"I am frequently bullied by coworkers in the office and while doing work, one of which is when I am late doing something".

3.2.2 According to the second respondent:

"I have to control and manage almost five to seven laboratories at the same time to ensure that the laboratory runs smoothly".

3.2.3 The third respondent said:

"I used to do other workers' work, which is a very bad practise until the worker is not skilled".

3.2.4 The fourth respondent stated that:

"Sometimes lecturers give orders at random and give work instructions that are outside the scope of my work".

3.2.5 While the fifth respondent told that:

"I was accused of failing to care for the laboratory equipment, resulting in its loss, the fact that some lecturers borrow the equipment without informing me".

The findings of the study mentioned above are supported by research conducted by Hsu *et al*, (2019), which found that work stress is a major predictor that affects job satisfaction and has a significant effect on job satisfaction. Employees will feel threatened if their work is disrupted and the level of job satisfaction will be unbalanced. According to Oh and Choi (2020) research, states that one of the determinants in creating a high-performance job is comfort. Employee comfort should be preserved because it can provide balance between work and life. According to Nanda, A., Soelton, M., Luiza, S., and Saratian, E. T. P. (2020) in his study stated that excessive workload can cause stress in a person. This often happens to support staff who are given too much work at once and if the work cannot be completed within a certain time, surely the employee's performance will suffer.

### 3.3 Analysis for Respondents Related to Stress Challenges at Work

All five respondents have given an explanation regarding the challenges of stress at work.

3.3.1 The first respondent stated that:

"The challenge exists, it is excruciatingly painful, and I once cried in the restroom after being bullied by my own colleagues".

3.3.2 According to the second respondent:

"The challenge is fatigue and it doesn't make sense when only one worker has to control more than one laboratory".

### 3.3.3 The third respondent said:

"The challenge is very difficult and I had to leave my current task to help other employees".

### 3.3.4 The fourth respondent stated that:

"The challenge received when some of the lecturers look negatively at me, they seem to no longer trust me".

### 3.3.5 While the fifth respondent told that:

"The challenge is when a small matter is magnified not because of our mistakes and in the KPI (Key Performance Indicators) scoring system also will be affected".

The findings of the study mentioned above are supported by research conducted by Burman, R., and Goswami, T. G. (2018) which is the impact of work stress not only affecting physical and psychological conditions but also affecting work performance and employee productivity. Employee performance will definitely be disrupted and even have an impact on employee morale as well. A study from Irawanto, D. W., Novianti, K. R., and Roz, K. (2021) explains that work stress can affect job satisfaction in a normal work environment. Employees need to maintain their job satisfaction in order to be committed to their work and fulfill their task achievements. According to Gottschalk, M. G., Domschke, K., & Schiele, M. A. (2020) in his study states that individual responses to work stress will harm interactions with the environment and lead to mental disorders. If this problem continues until it affects the employee, it is definitely not good and will affect the performance of the employee to some extent.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Work stress adversely affects the health of employees and they suffer from various related diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, restlessness and others. The findings from the interviews revealed that there are several experiences and challenges faced by support staff, among them are interference from colleagues, doing the work of other employees, accepting work outside the scope of work and having to bear excessive workload. Since this is research based on qualitative methods where findings are obtained from interview sessions that may cause some limitations, it is recommended that future researchers to collect more data from more respondents through quantitative methods. Finally, there should be a secure and pleasant working environment. If this peaceful environment exists, the workers will undoubtedly work well and can improve the quality of their work.

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