

# Investigation on the role of workplace conflict and occupational stress in job performance among staff of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the role of workplace conflict and occupational stress in job performance among staff of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences. The method of the current study was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population of the present study consisted of 1500 employees of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences in 2015. In this regard, 200 employees were selected as the sample through applying the convenience sampling method. To collect the data, the Paterson Job Performance Inventory, the Occupational Stress Scale (HSE), and the Workplace Conflict Questionnaire were used. To analyze the obtained data, both descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (the Pearson correlation coefficient and regression analysis) were used via SPSS22. The results demonstrated that there was a significant and negative relationship between workplace conflict and job performance among the employees of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences. Additionally, occupational stress was significantly and negatively related to job performance.

**KEY WORDS:** WORKPLACE CONFLICT, OCCUPATIONAL STRESS, JOB PERFORMANCE, EMPLOYEES

## INTRODUCTION

Due to their responsibilities for providing healthcare for patients, health associate professionals are under the influence of numerous stressful factors (Mehrabati &

Ghazavi, 2005) and these chronic and persistent stressors lead to their job burnout which as a physical and mental syndrome brings about a number of issues, including dropouts, frequent absences, and poor job performance, to these professionals. Besides, several

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symptoms, such as dealing with headaches, sleep disorders, lack of concentration, and temper tantrums, which result from stress are prevalent among these people (Malazem et al., 2005).

In 2002, a study conducted by Noorbala et al. indicated that 7.4% of nurses refused to go to work because of job burnout or stress-related disabilities. This absence rate is 80% more than that of other jobs. Moreover, a study carried out by Kalagari et al. in 2002 aimed at determining the level of stress among operating room staff at hospitals in Gorgan revealed that the majority of subjects under study (54.4%) experienced low levels of stress and among all the environmental stressors in operating rooms, unpleasant odors was the most stressful factor (76%) and inappropriate collaboration during group work was the least stressful factor (7.29%). In another study, Malakouti and Valizadeh examined occupational stress in educational and therapeutic centers in Tabriz and reported high levels of stress and lack of job satisfaction among the nurses and midwives working in these centers. This indicates the necessity of training the method of reducing occupational stress to these people. Furthermore, a study conducted by Hingley and Marks on occupational stress confirmed high levels of stress among nurses. In the same line, in 2005, Khodaveisi et al. reported that nurses working at intensive care units and operating rooms experienced the highest level of stress and those working at psychiatric wards and nursing stations experienced the least level of stress. In another study conducted in Thailand, Aoki et al. classified 26.2% of the subjects under study as people who experienced severe occupational stress.

Human capital is a critical strategic element and a significant method to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in an organization and it results in the development and progress of the community (Woolridge, 2000). Nowadays, the importance of employees as the most important resources of an organization is quite evident. Hence, employees' behaviors can also be of significant importance. Certainly, human resources, as effective elements of economic, social, and cultural developments, play key roles in advancing a society. Even through spending a lot of money and employing good technology and facilities, organizations cannot reach their goals without productive and motivated human resources. Today, organizations need effective and efficient employees to be able to grow, develop, and achieve their goals. However, numerous factors including social and environmental conditions affect quality of working environments and their employees' performance.

Throughout life, people must constantly adapt themselves to and make peace with internal changes and changes that occur in their surrounding environments. Unfavorable social and environmental conditions are

among important factors that create mental pressure (stress) and threaten people's mental health (Abdi et al., 2001). Job satisfaction and organizational commitment are key factors in achieving career success. When people have to deal with high levels of job satisfaction, they certainly experience low levels of occupational stress. This increases their efficiency and personal satisfaction. Since occupational stress affects people's health and reduces their quality of life (Halkas, 2010) and given the fact that healthcare professionals play key roles in providing healthcare services for people, high levels of occupational stress among these people affect their efficiency and performance and have significant and destructive impacts on them. According to what was mentioned earlier and given the significance of the issue, the present study aimed at examining the role of workplace conflict and occupational stress in job performance among staff of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences.

## OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective of this study was to examine the role of workplace conflict and occupational stress in job performance among staff of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences. To this end, the present study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a significant correlation between occupational stress and job performance?
2. Is there a significant correlation between occupational stress and workplace conflict?

## METHODS

The method of the current study was descriptive followed by a correlational design. The statistical population of the present study consisted of 1500 employees of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences in 2015. In this regard, 200 employees of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences were selected and studied as the sample through applying the convenience sampling method. In the current study, the data collection tools were three questionnaires on job performance, occupational stress, and workplace conflict.

## RESULTS

In this section, using both descriptive and inferential statistics, the research hypotheses were examined. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of occupational stress, job performance, and workplace conflict. As Table 1 demonstrates, the means and standard deviations of occupational stress, job performance, and work-

Table 1. The means and standard deviations of occupational stress, job performance, and workplace conflict			
Variable	N	Mean	SD
Occupational stress	200	118.53	17.57
Job performance	200	60.24	10.21
Workplace conflict	200	65.16	18.60

place conflict were respectively 118.53 and 17.57, 60.24 and 10.21, and 65.16 and 18.60.

**The First Research Question:** Is there a significant correlation between occupational stress and job performance?

To answer this question, the correlation coefficient test was used, the results of which are presented in the following table.

Table 2. The results of the correlation coefficient test between occupational stress and job performance	
Variable	Job performance
Occupational stress	-0.339**
N	200
Sig	0.0005
**P<0.01	

The results of the correlation coefficient test indicated a significant and negative correlation between occupational stress and job performance. This means that an increase in occupational stress leads to a decrease in job performance.

**The Second Research Question:** Is there a significant correlation between occupational stress and workplace conflict?

To answer this question, the correlation coefficient test was used, the results of which are presented in the following table.

Table 3. The results of the correlation coefficient test between occupational stress and workplace conflict	
Variable	Workplace conflict
Occupational stress	-0.327**
N	200
Sig	0.0005
**P<0.01	

The results of the correlation coefficient test indicated a significant and positive correlation between occupational stress and workplace conflict. This means that an increase in occupational stress leads to an increase in job performance.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results obtained from examining the relationship between workplace conflict and job performance among staff of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences indicated that workplace conflict was significantly and negatively related to job performance among staff of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences. This means that an increase in workplace conflict leads to a decrease in job performance. A decrease in job performance brings about irreparable consequences, including reducing job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, efficiency and effectiveness, and organizational efficiency, to an organization and its staff. Through employing appropriate solutions, managers must be able to properly apply workplace conflict and guide it in a constructive and creative way. They can use it as a positive driving force for promoting performance, effectiveness, and innovation and for creating positive changes. Workplace conflict can be used as a means to alter the power structure and to change the pattern of relationships within groups. Conflict management must maintain the desired level of conflict among employees. Low levels of conflict in an organization lead to intellectual stagnation of employees and high levels of workplace conflict strongly involve employees and create confusion in administering organizations. These are both unfavorable for organizations and disrupt the process of performing tasks. Therefore, to resolve workplace conflicts, managers have to balance these forces and create lasting motivations in employees through applying interactional and friendly methods. On the other hand, stress or mental pressure is an acute issue with which organizations deal. Stress puts employees' physical and mental health in jeopardy and imposes additional costs to organizations. A group of experts in organizational behavior believed that work-related stress can be considered as the most prevalent disease of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, this century can be regarded as the super stress era in which people are exposed to a lot of stressors and many issues and difficulties surround them.

The results obtained from this hypothesis are in line with the results of Khazaei, Khazaei, and Sharifzadeh (2006) and Mehrabi and Ghazavi (2005). In a study conducted by Khazaei, Khazaei, and Sharifzadeh, the results determined that 35.5% of the people under study experienced mild levels of emotional exhaustion, 54.2% of them experienced severe levels of depersonalization, and 37.5% of them experienced severe levels of lack of personal accomplishment. They mentioned that job burnout depended on a number of factors including workplace environment, work experience, high workloads, mental pressures, job satisfaction, and difficult working conditions and they suggested that identifying

these factors may aid us in preventing and decreasing job burnout.

Several researchers used the results of this study in the discussion and conclusion of their studies to integrate the body of knowledge. The results of Mehrabi and Ghazavi (2005) demonstrated that considering somatization, the majority of female nurses (92.4%) were in a range from healthy to being suspected to have a disease. With regard to anxiety, 90% of them experienced moderate anxiety, 78.8% of them were healthy considering the symptoms of anxiety, and 68.8% experienced moderate social dysfunction. Moreover, in terms of general health status, 55.3% of these nurses were suspected to have disorders and only 44.7% of these people were healthy. Finally, the authors recommended that individual and organizational management strategies should be applied to promote general health among nurses.

The results obtained from investigating the relationship between occupational stress and job performance among staff of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences showed that occupational stress was significantly and negatively related to job performance among staff of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences. This means that an increase in occupational stress among employees leads to a decrease in their job performance. This decrease reduces organizational efficiency and creates difficulties in achieving organizational goals. Employees spend many hours at work; hence, job dissatisfaction which is followed by stress makes employees sick within a few years. Accordingly, experts and managers are highly recommended to pay significant attention to occupational stress. They can identify people with stress and train them to efficiently cope with it. Moreover, as a preventive action, they can eliminate stressful factors from the workplace. Would the managers prefer to have healthy and happy employees or employees full of stress with heart diseases and high blood pressures? Through employing practical methods, managers and employees of various organizations can attempt to promote tolerance and individual and organizational adaptabilities, improve their workplace environment, and develop mental health among their employees.

In this way, all the energy that they have to spend on dealing with organizational stressors can be used to improve the quantity and quality of organizations and to fulfill social responsibilities of organizations. The results obtained from this hypothesis are consistent with the results of Asai et al. (2007), Piko (2006), and Sahraeeian, Fazlzadeh, Mehdizadeh, and Toubaei (2008). The results of a study carried out by Asai et al. (2007) indicated that 22% of the respondents experienced high emotional exhaustion, 11% of them experienced high depersonalization, and 62% of them experienced low personal accomplishment. 20% of the subjects

under study suffered from mental illnesses. Moreover, the results indicated that the clinical oncologists experienced higher levels of mental illnesses compared to the clinical care physicians. Being sure of having enough time to communicate with patients was associated with all the subscales of occupational stress. In this study, low levels of personal accomplishment among Japanese doctors were higher than that mentioned in previously conducted studies.

In addition, Piko (2006) demonstrated that the scores of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were greater than those mentioned in Canadian, Norwegian, and American subjects. Occupational stress, particularly emotional exhaustion, is significantly and strongly related to job dissatisfaction. Job dissatisfaction is a negative predictor of the subscales of job burnout and conflict plays a positive role as a contributing factor for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The results of a study conducted by Piko (2006) laid emphasis on the important role of psychosocial work environments and the relationships among occupational stress, role conflict, job satisfaction, and mental health among Hungarian healthcare staff. Although the statistical population of this study was different from that of the current study, the same measurement tools were used to examine the variables. That is why this study was mentioned.

In a study carried out by Sahraeeian et al. (2008), 22.8% of nurses obtained scores higher than 26 on emotional exhaustion, and 5% of them obtained scores higher than 9 on depersonalization, and 20.6% of them obtained scores higher than 34 on personal accomplishment. In this study, the mean score of emotional exhaustion was  $25.8 \pm 0.87$ , the mean score of depersonalization was  $5.90 \pm 0.34$ , and the mean score of personal accomplishment was  $29.56 \pm 1.07$ . In total, 25% of the subjects under study had the criteria of job burnout. These researchers found a significant relationship between stress and various units of hospitals in which nurses worked. The scores of job burnout demonstrated that the scores of emotional exhaustion in the burn units and the scores of depersonalization in the psychiatric units were significantly high. 70% of the nurses under study experienced some symptoms of mental illnesses (using identifying scoring of greater than 4). These researchers reported that having mental illnesses was not significantly related to depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

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