



Stressful Symphony: Exploring the Role of Work Stress on the Employee Commitment and Job Performance of Sri Lankan IT Professionals

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Abstract

Work-related stress is a natural part of life and is connected to employment. While stress can be negative, it can also be beneficial, as employees need some stress to stay content, inspired, engaged, and productive. IT professionals face higher levels of workplace stress, although it affects all industries. The research aims to explore the role of work stress in determining employees' commitment and job performance among IT professionals in Sri Lankan private sectors. This quantitative study follows a descriptive cross-sectional survey. The final sample consisted of 328 private sector IT professionals aged between 20-45. Data was collected through structured questionnaires such as the Work Stress Screener (WOSS-13), TCM employee commitment survey, and the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire to measure work stress, employee commitment (EC), and job performance (JP), respectively. Multiple regression analysis indicates that eustress positively predicts JP ($\beta = .33, p < .001$) and EC ($\beta = .24, p < .001$), while distress negatively predicts EC ($\beta = -.25, p < .001$), but no prediction on JP ($\beta = -.06, p > .001$). The Pearson correlation analysis shows that there is a weak positive relationship between EC and JP, which was also statistically significant $r(326) = .15, p = .006, p < .05$. These findings imply that employees who had high levels of eustress tended to feel more committed and perform better in their organizations. Also, it suggests that high EC increases a worker's productivity, which benefits the company and organization as well as the

individual personally.

Keywords: work stress; eustress; distress; employee commitment; job performance

Introduction

Work stress (WS) arises when an employee encounters job demands and circumstances that exceed their capabilities and resources. Stress is a natural part of life; each employee experiences it differently (Aluthge & Rathnayake, 2021). It is vital to remember that not all stress is negative, and that stress contributes to the personal development (Gupta, 2016). For instance, there are two types of stress: eustress (positive stress) and distress (negative stress). Eustress is the stress that results in positive behavior, while distress is defined as excessive stress that is uncontrollable and has negative effects (Usman et al., 2023). Eustress and distress both negatively and positively impact employee's commitment (EC) and job performance (JP) (Bonache, 2022). Therefore, increasing awareness is essential, as work stress leads to governing EC and JP.

Over the past few decades, the growth of contemporary technology has made the IT industry larger than any other industry (Aluthge & Rathnayake, 2021). Studies also highlight that even though stress affects all industries, professionals in the information technology (IT) industry encounter higher workplace stress in comparison to other professional industries

(Subikshaa & Jasmin, 2018). Moreover, People in this industry must constantly update their skills and capacities, and use their expertise, creativity, and innovativeness to the fullest extent possible (Amarasooriya, 2022). Arasu et al. (2019) also reveals that lower stress among IT employees indicates an improvement in EC and JP. In that sense, it is evident that a desirable amount of stress could help employees to work efficiently.

WS can have a considerable impact on EC (both favourably and adversely) which directly affects JP and the success of IT professionals (Weerasekara et al., 2020). EC is loyalty to the company, and it is a crucial issue in any organization (Karacsony, 2019). Highly committed employees are more likely to be enthusiastic, satisfied, and make clear contributions to the company's objectives (Srikala & Namasivayam, 2020). JP is the measure of employees' effectiveness and contribution in enhancing company's assets and achieving work-related goals (Dinc, 2017). JP is influenced by job demands, organizational goals, mission, and organizational beliefs, which determine the value placed on behaviour (Weerasekara et al., 2020). Studies also demonstrate that WS affects both negatively and positively on JP (Dinc, 2017; Ireferin and Mechanic, 2014; Usman et al., 2023). Also, studies indicate that employee commitment directly contributes to job performance. Research also suggests that EC has a considerable positive impact on performance (Ali et al., 2011; Ireferin & Mechanic, 2014; Stackhouse et al., 2022;). This suggests the significance of EC in enhancing organizational effectiveness.

The Statement of the Problem

Work stress has become a major challenge for organizations in complex environments. This research investigates the impact of work stress (WS) on both positive (eustress) and negative (distress) aspects on the private sector IT professionals' job performance (JP) and commitment (EC) in Sri Lanka. It aims to fill the gap in research on WS in Sri Lanka by considering both eustress and distress and how they affect IT professionals. The findings can help IT companies

develop strategies to manage WS, improve employee retention, and enhance productivity.

Research Objectives

To examine the relationship between employee commitment and job performance

To evaluate the role of eustress and distress in determining employee commitment

To evaluate the role of eustress and distress in determining job performance

Method

The study designs

This study aimed to examine the role of WS in determining EC and JP among IT professionals in the Sri Lankan private sector. This quantitative study utilized a cross-sectional design to collect, interpret, and analyze data. The predictor variable was work stress and the outcome variables were employee commitment and job performance. Additionally, eustress and distress were the two main components which were considered under WS.

The following research hypotheses are designed to address and understand how work stress and its two sub-components determine the EC and JP of IT professionals.

H1: There is a relationship between employees' commitment and job performance

H2: Eustress and distress predict employee commitment

H3: Eustress and distress predict job performance

Participants/Sampling

Participants were IT professionals in the private sector who were between 20 and 45 years. The sample size was calculated using the unknown population sample size equation ($n = (Z)^2 * P(1-P) / (e)^2$). According to the formula the sample size was 385.

Materials

The following measures were used in this study. The instruments were translated, and face-validated in Sinhala language which is an official language in Sri Lanka. The work stress screener (WOSS-13) was used to measure work stress. This assesses both eustress and distress forms of work stress. Employee commitment was measured using the TCM employee commitment survey. Job performance was measured using the individual work performance questionnaire.

Procedure

Google Forms were used to distribute online surveys. The survey link was shared via social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Facebook. Once participants agreed to participate in the study, they were given the participant information sheet, including the study objectives and types of information to be gathered. Consent was gained for their participation by the consent form. The collected data was kept confidential and anonymous. The participants completed a demographic information sheet and three other questionnaires (WOSS -13, TCM, and IWPQ) which were used to assess work stress, employee commitment, and job performance. After completing the survey, the participants were once again debriefed on the research objectives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained before the commencement of the data collection. Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Ethical Review Committee of the School of Psychology at the Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology.

Methods of Analysis

SPSS version 25 was used to analyse the data. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between employee commitment and job performance. Finally, multiple regression analysis was used to analyse whether eustress and distress predict employee commitment and job performance.

Results

The study hypothesized that there is a relationship between employee commitment and job performance. A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between EC and JP. The results indicated that the relationship between EC and JP was significant and showed an insignificant positive correlation between the two variables, $r(326) = .15, p = .006$.

Table 1

<i>Regression Analysis Summary for Work Stress Variables Predicting Employee Commitment.</i>						
Vari-ables	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Eustress	.05	.01	.24	4.54	.000	[.03, .07]
Distress	-.09	.02	-.25	-4.81	.000	[-.12, -.51]

Note. $R^2 = .15$ (N= 328, $p < .001$), CI = confidence interval for B

To test the hypothesis that eustress and distress predict employee commitment, as Table 1 shows, multiple regression analysis was computed. The R^2 value of .15 revealed that eustress and distress predicted 15% of the variance in the EC with $F(2,325) = 28.59, P < .001$. The findings revealed that eustress positively and significantly predicted EC ($\beta = .24, P < .001$) whereas distress negatively and significantly predicted EC ($\beta = -.25, P < .001$).

Table 2

<i>Regression Analysis Summary for Work Stress Variables Predicting Job Performance.</i>						
Vari-ables	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Eustress	.05	.01	.33	6.12	.000	[.03, .06]
Distress	-.01	.01	-.06	-1.14	.254	[-.04, .01]

Note. $R^2 = .12$ (N= 328, $p < .001$), CI = confidence interval for B

The study hypothesized that eustress and distress predict job performance. Table 2 shows the multiple

regression analysis computed to assess whether eustress and distress predict job performance. The R² value of .12 revealed that eustress and distress predicted 12% of the variance in the JP with $F(2,325) = 22.16, P < .001$. The findings revealed that eustress positively and significantly predicted JP ($\beta = .33, P < .001$) whereas distress is not a significant predictor of JP ($\beta = -.06, P > .001$).

Discussion

This study examined the role of work stress in determining EC and JP among IT professionals in Sri Lanka. According to findings, eustress positively predicts JP and EC, while distress negatively predicts EC, but there is no prediction of JP among IT professionals. The association between EC and JP was also statistically significant. These outcomes of the current study supported the research hypotheses and conform with the findings of prior studies.

As the study hypothesized that EC has a relationship with JP, results found that EC and JP have a significant and positive, but weak correlation. This study supports evidence from previous observations. Research revealed a moderately positive association between JP and EC (Karacsony, 2019; Stackhouse et al., 2022). On the contrary, other research indicated a strong correlation between JP and EC among employees across various sectors, including banks and cooperate sectors (Dinc, 2017; Ireferin & Mechanic, 2014). The results of the current study support the idea that highly committed workers perform effectively under stress, focusing on future performance through skill development and understanding of the products and customers.

The results of the current study supported the hypothesis that eustress and distress predict EC. The result indicates that while distress has negatively predicted EC, eustress has positively predicted EC among IT employees. Previous studies showed that eustress has a positive significant correlation with EC (Ali et al., 2011; Usman et al., 2023). It is reflected that distress and eustress are significant predictors of EC.

The final hypothesis, which hypothesized that eustress and distress predict JP, is partly unsupported through the findings of the study. The results show that while distress does not significantly predict JP, eustress positively and significantly predicts JP. Previous Studies indicate that distress does not predict JP, possibly due to job demand and resources, and that many IT professionals experience moderate stress (Arasu et al., 2019; Subikshaa & Jasmin, 2018). As mentioned in the literature review, IT-related companies offer flexible work schedules and remote work opportunities as benefits to families to help employees balance their work and personal lives (Weerasekara et al., 2020). However, there are few studies aligned with the current findings. Srikala and Namasivayam (2020) found that, among employees working in certain IT-related companies, WS did not have a detectable impact on JP. Also, the result partly supports the final hypothesis. Bonache (2022) examined that eustress improves performance. Thus, present research findings and studies emphasize that eustress or low-stress levels can boost employee JP.

Implications

The current study has significant implications to understand how eustress and distress significantly predict EC and JP among IT employees. The results align with the previous studies indicating that EC has a positive relationship with JP (Ali et al., 2011; Dinc, 2017). This study discovers that eustress might enhance EC and JP in the IT sector due to its positive work environment. Findings imply that employees who had higher levels of positive stress tended to feel more committed to their jobs and organizations.

The study suggests that companies create a work environment that promotes positive stress by offering skill development, recognition, and autonomy. Managers should also reduce negative stress factors like workload and unrealistic deadlines. This can be done by acknowledging employee accomplishments, providing growth opportunities, and fostering open communication. Therefore, by creating a work environment that promotes both employee well-be-

ing and motivation, companies can benefit from increased productivity and employee retention.

Conclusion

To summarize, work stress influences IT professionals and the industry, leading to both positive and negative effects on their commitment and performance. This study mainly highlighted that IT professionals experience a lower level of stress and eustress, and it positively predicts their EC and JP. This suggests that the success of employees can be attributed to their reasonable goals, effective time management, improved work environment, better career prospects, and recognition of their work.

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