

ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE FACTORS STRESS OF EMPLOYEES WORKING IN HUNGARIAN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

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Abstract

Due to the modern world, most people lead a lifestyle in which they encounter stressful situations on a daily basis. In 2020, the worldwide coronavirus epidemic intensified the factors leading to workplace stress even more. Stress is a physical and mental response to internal and external factors affecting the individual's organization. Previous studies have shown that work stress affects 20-30 % of employees worldwide. The aim of our research was to examine the most important stress-causing factors among Hungarian employees. We see the importance of our research in the fact that this kind of research is rarely managed in Hungary, so the results achieved may be of interest to those interested in the topic. During the research, we prepared a questionnaire survey involving 282 employees. The questionnaires were sent to small-and medium-sized enterprises operating in Hungary. Based on the obtained results, we were able to identify 7 factors that influence the employees' sense of stress at work. The most significant of these are the nature of work and tasks, workplace relationships, and the structure of the organization.

Key words: stress, employee, workplace, turnover, Hungary

JEL Code: J24, J81, M54

Introduction

Nowadays, more and more in-depth studies deal with workplace stress and its effects. The original meaning of stress as a concept is to squeeze, to hurt, to offend. The concept was first used in the natural sciences, mostly in physics, where it meant external pressure acting on an object, and from the 20th century, this concept was also incorporated into medicine. The term stress in today's sense comes from the English word "stress", which means tension, pressure, effort. Selye is considered the father of stress research worldwide. The meaning of the word stress is very difficult to define because it means something different to everyone. Selye defined stress as the body's non-specific reaction or response to any stress. According to his

theory, stress is the non-specific response of the human body to strong stimuli and impulses. He called stress-causing factors, that is, all physical and psychological factors that can cause stress in an individual. It doesn't matter whether the effect causing stress is negative or positive, pleasant or unpleasant (Selye, 1976). Lazarus and Folkman (1986) were the ones who believed that stress is nothing more than a response to a situation considered difficult by the individual. As a result, they approach the phenomenon from the perspective of individual responses, rather than the physical and psychological processes triggered by stressors. The concept of stress is often associated with some negative event, but stress can also be a consequence of a positive event. Positive stress, also known as eustress, has a stimulating effect on our lives and prompts the individual to act. It helps you cope with difficult situations more easily. It has a constructive effect on the individual and even increases motivation in the long term. The opposite of eustress is distress, also known as negative stress. This appears when the individual cannot cope with the impact that affect him and they represent a mental or physical burden for him. This type of stress has a long-term health-destroying and harmful effect on the individual (Selye, 1976). Workplace stressors are workplace factors that cause stress at work for most people. Long-term work stress can lead to depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress syndrome. One of the most serious consequences of persistent workplace stress is the fluctuation. One of the biggest challenges of today's companies is to retain a quality workforce, so high fluctuation means extra costs for business organizations (Garai-Fodor et al., 2023; Muñoz et al., 2022). Fluctuation not only provides a continuous task for the HR department, but also imposes a continuous additional burden on the employees, since the training of the new workforce requires a long time and a lot of energy. This reduces the quantity and quality of company performance, not to mention the morale effects on the members of the organization.

The main goal of our research was to identify the most common workplace stress factors in the organizations we investigated, and we would like to make recommendations for their treatment at the end of the investigation.

1 Literature review

In the literature on workplace stress, we can distinguish three different perceptions, which partially overlap. These are: physiological (the stress appears on the basis of the physiological effects of harmful stimuli), technical (the stress is a characteristic of the work environment) and the psychological approach (the stress is a dynamic interaction between a person and the

work environment (Cox et al., 2005). Cooper and Cox (1985) in their study, divided the most common workplace stressors into three groups: task-related stressors, work environment-related stressors, and organizational role-related stressors. One type of task-related stressor is quantitative or qualitative overload or underload, which occurs when a worker is required to do too much or too little work for a given period of time (Gavin & Mason, 2004). Tasks consisting of monotonous, simple, repetitive and routine movements are considered qualitative underload. The other most common stress factor is the work-related stress factor. It means significant stress for employees if there are no work tools that enable fast and efficient work, if the organization does not provide suitable working conditions, or if the workplace does not provide adequate support for work, but this also includes the fact that several shift employees (Cox et al., 2005). Task-related stressors include factors such as tight deadlines, overtime, and problems arising from organizational change. Stressors related to the work environment include characteristics of the physical environment such as heat, unpleasant odors, polluted air, noise, inadequate lighting, etc. The individual tolerates these disturbing environmental stimuli in various ways, after a certain time he gets used to the stimuli harmful to health, but their effects remain harmful (Raza et al., 2023). Role ambiguity, conflict, responsibility, quality of workplace relationships, organizational culture, and opportunities related to career and personal development should be highlighted among the stress factors related to the role played in the organization (Kim et al., 2019). The feeling and occurrence of stress at work has also been amplified by the coronavirus epidemic. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Most people infected with the virus have mild to moderate respiratory illness, but some become seriously ill and require medical attention. Due to the crisis caused by the coronavirus, many businesses around the world are forced to close or have limited operations. The rapid pace of changes affected many, both the economy and the population. Uncertainty, health threats, feelings of isolation and rapid changes in daily life have all contributed to increased feelings of stress at work. According to the measurements of the APA (American Psychological Association), 63% of the respondents were stressed by the uncertainty caused by the coronavirus crisis, and 49% of the respondents stated that it had become impossible to plan their future (APA-American Psychological Association, 2021). These facts are supported by Sahni's 2020 research. Among workplace stressors during the coronavirus, Sahni highlights the lack of organizational support, the lack of strategies for overcoming stress, uncertainty, and the blurring of boundaries due to working from home (disruption of work-life balance). During

the health crisis, quality of life and stressors experienced at work were closely related (Gaspar et al., 2023).

2 Data and Method

This research deals with the analysis of the impact of workplace stress on Hungarian employees. During the primary research, we used simple random sampling among the employees of the Hungarian small and medium-sized enterprises included in our database. The questionnaire survey took place in February 2023, 450 employees were randomly selected from 34 small and medium-sized enterprises. After processing the returned questionnaires, we were able to include 282 questionnaires in our own investigations. The other questionnaires were excluded from the analyzes due to formal or incomplete reasons. The questionnaire mainly contained closed questions, which the respondents could answer using a 7-point Likert scale. Before the survey, a pilot study was conducted with 20 people, based on which the questions were clarified. The final questionnaire contained 25 questions. The obtained results were analyzed with SPSS software.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Tab. 1: Demographic characteristics

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	180	63,8
	Female	102	36,2
Age	18-25	53	18,8
	26-30	34	12,1
	31-40	61	21,6
	41-50	113	40,1
	51-65	21	7,4
Education	primary school	9	3,2
	secondary school	165	58,5
	university	108	38,3
Work experience	1-3 years	62	22,0
	4-7 years	78	27,7
	8-15 years	88	31,2
	more than 15 years	54	19,1

Source: Own research, 2023

63,8 % of the respondents were men. Regarding their age, 40,1 % of the respondents belonged to the 41-50 age group. High school graduates accounted for 58,5 % of the respondents. Based on the work experience gained at their current workplace, 31,2 % of the respondents have been working at the same workplace for 8-15 years.

When examining the components of workplace stress, we first prepared a reliability test by analyzing the Cronbach Alpha value. The components of work stress were divided into 7 parts based on Cooper's 1987 study. 1) the nature of work and tasks (workload, working hours, work requirements), 2) the role of the employee within the organization (role conflict, uncertainty, level of responsibility), 3) lack of opportunities for development and advancement (lack of career opportunities, work or tasks), 4) workplace relations (colleagues, lack of managerial support, conflicts), 5) organizational structure (leadership style, communication, organization functioning), 6) lack of work-life balance, 7) workplace environmental conditions. The Cronbach Alpha value of the work stress components was 0,749, which exceeds the value of 0,7 often cited in the literature. Based on these, the reliability of the research variables is suitable for carrying out the analyses.

The primary goal of the research was to find out which workplace factors have the greatest impact on workplace stress among employees working in small and medium-sized enterprises in Hungary. The research hypothesis formulated based on the literature is as follows:

H1: A significant relationship can be shown between the quality of workplace factors and workplace stress.

3 Results

In this chapter, we present the most important results of the research. During descriptive statistical analyses, we examine mean and standard deviation. According to Table 2, among the independent variables, workplace relationships (M=5,17, Std=1,767) were listed first. According to the respondents, the greatest stress factor of workplace stress is the relationship with their superiors and direct colleagues. In second place was the organizational structure (M=5,15, Std=1,911), i.e. the leader's style, the operation of the organization, and the quality of communication within the organization. According to our respondents, the least influencing factor on workplace stress was the workplace environment (M=4,13, Std=2,187), such as the noise and air quality of the workplace or the level of lighting in the workplace. Regression analysis is primarily used for causal inference.

Tab. 2: Descriptive Means and Standard Deviation

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
WR	282	5,17	1,767
WC	282	4,13	2,187
OS	282	5,15	1,911
CO	282	4,36	2,199
NW	282	4,52	1,853
WLB	282	4,76	1,920
RE	282	4,92	2,102

WR (workplace relationships), WC (workplace conditions), OS (organizational structure), CO (career opportunities), NW (nature of work), WLB (work-life balance), RE (role of the employee)

Source: Own research, 2023

Regression analysis shows how one variable correlates with another. In this research, workplace stress was the dependent variable, while workplace factors were the independent variables.

Tab. 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	,649 a	,421	,406	1,544	,421	28,434	7	274	,000	1,876

a. Predictors: (Constant), RE, CO, WLB, WC, WR, OS, NW

b. Dependent Variable: WStress

Source: Own research, 2023

According to the above Table 3, the value of R square is 0,649, which shows that 64,9 % of the dependent variable is explained by independent variables. The Durbin Watson value is 1,876, based on which it can be stated that there is no autocorrelation between the respondents, as the value is in the range of 1,5-2,5. The performed F-test showed a value of 28,434, the regression model was significant.

Tab. 4: Beta Coefficient

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	,981	,391		2,509	,013
WR	,246	,066	,217	3,734	,000
WC	-,100	,050	-,109	-1,999	,047
OS	,202	,063	,192	3,219	,001
CO	-,119	,044	-,130	-2,707	,007
NW	,290	,069	,268	4,202	,000
WLB	,155	,058	,149	2,662	,008
RE	,120	,049	,126	2,467	,014

a. Dependent Variable: WStress

According to Table 4, the value of the beta coefficient of workplace relations is 0,217, with a significant value of 0,000. According to this, the quality of workplace relationships significantly affects respondents' sense of workplace stress. The worse the workplace relations, the more stressed the employees feel at their workplace, this is supported by what was previously described in the international literature (Farley et al., 2023). The beta coefficient of workplace environmental factors is -0,109, with a significance value of 0,047. The workplace environmental factor also influences the interviewees' sense of stress at work, but less so than workplace relationships. The value of the beta coefficient of the organizational structure in the table showed a value of 0,192, with a significance value of 0,001. According to this, the main characteristics of the organization: the management style, the communication, and the operation of the organization significantly influence the workplace stress of employees of small and medium-sized enterprises. This fact is also supported by Toshniwal and Narendran's (2020) study, one of the findings of which is that organizational changes due to the coronavirus epidemic and the introduced new operating system had an impact on employees' sense of stress at work. Career opportunities and the lack of development opportunities have less impact on the development of workplace stress, while the type of work and task had a significant impact on the respondents' sense of workplace stress. Workload, working hours, work requirements all greatly influence how individuals perceive the level of stress at work. During the research, it was established that these factors have the greatest impact on work stress; the beta coefficient of the investigated indicator is 0,268, at the 0,000 significance level. If the worker is not aware of the task to be performed or does not have enough, time to complete the work, all this affects the worker largely and causes stress. Work deadlines and impossible work requirements also increase the value of

work stress. Those described in the literature support our findings above (Radzali et al., 2013). The work-life balance and the employee's role within the organization, although with a smaller beta coefficient value, had an impact on the respondents' sense of workplace stress. Based on the results, the research hypothesis was confirmed, according to which a significant relationship can be demonstrated between the quality of workplace factors and workplace stress. All factors individually affect the development of workplace stress, but the combined effect is even stronger, so the leaders of organizations must do immediate attention to the problem's immediate and effective treatment.

Conclusion

During our research, it was proven that a number of stress-inducing factors affects the employees of the examined domestic small and medium-sized enterprises. Although stress at work is inevitable, providing stress management tools can alleviate the effects of stress in the long term and reduce the costs of stress to businesses. Since the causes of stress at work are very different, strategies to reduce or prevent stress must always be chosen by the management taking into account the given factors. The managing of stress factors requires an immediate task, in which, in addition to the leader, the employee also has an important role. The longer we wait to eliminate workplace stress, the more costs and damage we cause to organizations. Therefore, the managerial attitude that the problems will be solved spontaneously is unacceptable in this case. It often happens that the origin of stress is something that cannot be changed immediately, so finding methods that preserve and help employees' mental health is essential for the long-term maintenance of organizations. Managing stress is also important because it not only increases the performance of employees, but also improves their well-being and health.

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