

Work Stress and Job Satisfaction: Case of Adult Learners in Malaysia

Muhammad Hasmi Abu Hassan Asaari, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia
Noorliza Karia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia
Che Supian Mohamad Nor, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Work is regarded as important criteria in determining the individual's career achievement. Academic excellence of an individual will be used to suit the person's ability to secure a good job. Adult learners were asked on various items that contributed to stress such as unsatisfaction towards amount of salary received, promotion exercises, incentives received, and work related situations. Further, adult learners also will be analyzed base on their spouse employment in relation to their stress factors and work satisfaction. The results revealed some notion need to be taken care by the individual workers (i.e. adult learners) and organizations in having a harmony at the work place. Promotion and work conditions are indicated as the main concern or stress factors to the workers.

INTRODUCTION

The numbers of adult learners enrolled into the distance education program keep increasing gradually from year to year. Working adults that intended to pursue their academic excellence in the nation will do so through distance education program. Moreover various universities are offering variety of majors that suit the adult learners in pursuing their betterment in the work position.

Work is regarded as important criteria in determining the individual's career achievement. Academic excellence of an individual will be used to suit the person's ability to secure a good job. A study by Phillips-Miller, Campbell, and Morrison (2000) stated that work has traditionally been accepted as a vital component of the lives of men in American culture. This perspective also has been true in the culture of Malaysian. Thus work has been the benchmarked in determining individual's success in their life.

Nevertheless, Maslow's Theory (1954) on the hierarchy of individual's need could be seen as the impetus for the work satisfaction. The workers will try to fulfill their needs of the lower level of the theory then they will move up the higher level as the lower level need had been fulfilled. On other hand, stress factors were being referred as the cause on workers satisfaction level. In other words, work stress will happened on an individual worker as they cannot achieve his or her work satisfaction. Again Phillips-Miller et al. (2000) indicated that work-related stress can influence career satisfaction, further it may influence overall well-being of the worker. Their findings also agrees with the findings of Barnett, Brennan, Raudenbush, and Marshall (1994), Greenberger and O'Neil (1993), and Silverstein and Perlick (1995).

The Herzberg theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959) indicated that jobs with opportunities for achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and growth in competence are those that enhance motivation and job satisfaction (Johnson & Johnson, 2001). Further, Watson and Clark (1984) indicated that negative affectivity is a predisposition to view the world negative terms, leading to self-recrimination, distress, and dissatisfaction.

Workers and the same time as adult learners cannot avoid themselves from stress factors. The motivation of this paper is to shed work satisfaction among adult learners in relation to their work stress; and whether spouse employment of the adult learners does give an impact on work satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

Structured questionnaires were distributed to the adult learners in the School of Distance Education of Universiti Sains Malaysia. The instrument was adopted against the Herzberg et al. (1959) and Maslow (1954) works. Adult learners were asked on various items that contributed to stress such as dissatisfaction towards amount of salary received, promotion exercises, incentives received, and work related situations. Further, adult learners also will be analyzed base on their spouse employment in relation to their stress factors and work satisfaction. Thus, the framework of the study is depicted in Figure 1.

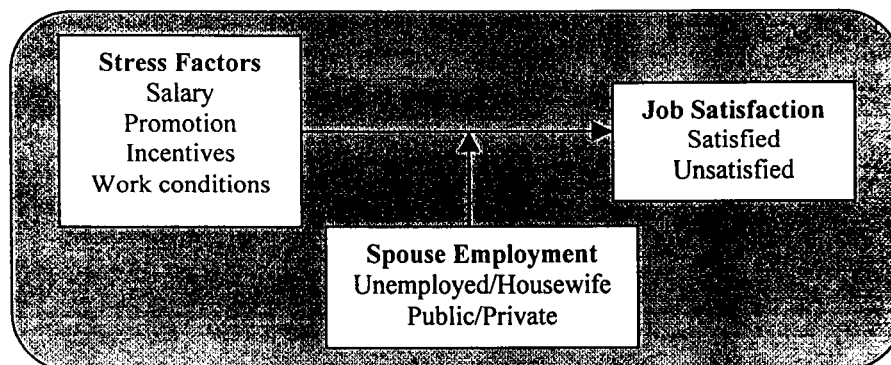


Figure 1: Stress Factors and Job Satisfaction Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

One hundred eighty-eight adult learners participated in this survey. They represented by male respondents of 52.7% and female by 47.3%. Age wise, majority of them were in the range of 26 to 30 years old (38.8%) and 31 to 35 years old represented by 27.7%. Meanwhile, twenty-five percent of them were more than 35 years old.

Based on the ethnic segregation, bumiputra of adult learners were represented by 47.4% and non-bumiputra of adult learners were represented by 52.6%. Marital status indicated married respondents were 64.4% and singles by 35.1%. Meanwhile single parent was represented by 0.5%. Summary of respondents demographic is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' Demography

Item	N	%
Gender		
Male	99	52.7
Female	89	47.3
Ethnic		
Bumiputra	96	51
Non-Bumiputra	92	49
Age (years)		
21-25	16	8.5
26-30	73	38.8
31-35	52	27.7
More than 35	47	25.0
Marital Status		
Single	66	35.1
Married	121	64.4
Others	1	0.5

Level of stress on salary, promotion, incentives, and work conditions were sought from respondents. Mean and standard deviation of stress factors are tabulated in Table 2. Overall, adult learners

indicated that they are not satisfied with the work condition (mean=3.22), promotion (mean=3.17), salary (mean=3.08), and incentives (mean=2.89) that being provided by the organization. Thus, those items contributed to their stress factors.

Table 2: Ranking of Stress Factors

Item	Mean	SD
Salary	3.08	.65
Promotion	3.17	.64
Incentives	2.89	.61
Work Conditions	3.22	.36

Comparison between male and female adult learners in Table 3, the results discovered that male and female adult learners recorded their stress factors as the following order: work condition, promotion, salary, and incentives. Moreover, male adult learners indicated their stress factors higher than the female.

Table 3: Comparison of Stress Factors

	Male	Female
Salary	3.16	2.98
Promotion	3.28	3.03
Incentives	2.90	2.88
Work Conditions	3.29	3.13

Further analysis was done on stress factors for adult learners based on their working sector and the spouse working sector. This analysis was to determine the level of stress among them. Based on the descriptive analysis, male adult learner stress factors vary among them. The summary is tabulated in Table 4.

Table 4: Stress Factors of Male Adult Learner

Stress Factor	Public/ Housewife	Public/ Working	Private/ Housewife	Private/ Working
1	Promotion	Work condition	Work condition	Promotion
2	Salary	Promotion	Promotion	Work conditions
3	Work conditions	Salary	Incentives	Salary
4	Incentives	Incentives	Salary	Incentives

For male adult learner in the public sector with spouse as a housewife, he indicated that promotion (mean=3.42) as the prime stress factor to him; and salary (mean=3.41) as the following stress factor. This can be seen that public sector will be in the bureaucratic system, where promotion exercise is not being held that often, unless the need arises. Therefore, male adult learner in the public sector will be stressful as they work for longer years and yet to obtain any promotion. Further in the local context, promotion will be tied with salary. As he gets promoted, then the salary scale also will be revised and increased accordingly.

Interestingly enough that male in the private sector with a working spouse (regardless in the public or private sector) also indicated promotion (mean=3.32) as their main concern of work stress. Again as promotion is tied with salary increased, male in the private sector (mean=3.32) will have a lesser stress as compared to the male in the public sector (mean=3.42). This lower mean of stress in the promotion can be mitigated as their spouse is also working. Thus based on the local context, most working spouse does help and support of their husband in terms of financial and their family needs.

On the other hand, male adult learners in the public sector and working spouse, and in the private sector also with working spouse will be stressed based on their working conditions (mean=3.36 and 3.61, respectively). Further, both of them did indicate promotion (mean=3.29 and 3.60, respectively) after work conditions as the stress factors. This situation occurs as they are no longer in the passion of salary and incentives. These adult learners may be those whom that served longer in their organization and considered as senior. Therefore, they will demand on a better work conditions as compared to the junior adult learners.

Moreover as they indicated promotion in second, it can be concluded that these adult learners are currently getting a handsome pays from their employer due to their seniority. Further if they got any promotion, then their salary will be adjusted accordingly to their new positions.

On the other hand, female adult learners that works in the public sector will be stressful with their promotion (mean=3.29) as depicted in Table 5. As in the local context, promotion exercise in the public sector is occasionally done. Thus this situation will caused some female adult learners need to wait for the exercise and caused them to be in stress. Meanwhile, female adult learners in the private sector will consider work conditions as their stress factor. In this case, she will not be stressful much on salary (mean=2.84) as they received a good salary. This can be seen that the person is concern on their promotion as it is tied with the salary scale.

Table 5: Female Stress Factor

Female Adult Learner	Public/ Working	Private/ Working
1	Promotion	Work conditions
2	Work conditions	Promotion
3	Salary	Salary
4	Incentives	Incentives

Finally, correlations analysis was conducted against work satisfaction and stress factors, and spouse employment status. The results were depicted in Table 6.

Table 6: Correlations Analysis

	Salary	Promotion	Incentives	Work conditions
Job satisfaction				
Pearson Correlations	.423*	.469*	.272*	.511*
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	182	185	182	170
Spouse employment status				
Pearson Correlations	-.109	-.120	.079	-.105
Sig. (2-tailed)	.233	.185	.390	.273
N	121	123	120	111

* p<.01

Correlations analysis revealed that salary (.423, p<.01), promotion (.469, p<.01), incentives (.272, p<.01), and work conditions (.511, p<.01) do have a positive correlation toward job satisfaction among workers of adult learners. This indicated that any changes in salary, promotion, incentives, and work conditions than the changes will affect the level of job satisfaction of the workers. On the other hand, spouse employment status of adult learners indicated no correlations towards work stress.

CONCLUSION

This paper looks into the stress factors in the work place from adult learners' perspective – salary, promotion, incentives, and work conditions. The results revealed some notion need to taken care by the individual workers (i.e. adult learners) and organizations in promoting a harmony at the work place. Promotion and work conditions are indicated as the main concern or stress factors to the workers of adult learners. These stress factors will caused them to be off their concentration on the work and subsequently will drag them to be unproductive. In other words, these stress factors will put the workers into a silent protest against the organization as they could not overcome the situation.

In the proactive measure for organizations, they need to provide a better career development as this will allow workers to have a clear view on the promotion path. Human resource department needs to play an active role in making clear information to the workers on their career path.

Further, workers are concern on their work conditions. Although the relevant authorities had laid guidelines for organization on handling workers, the organizations need to be more proactive in providing a better place to work for their workers. Therefore a more conducive work environment is needed in order to reduce the stress factors among adult learners in the work place.

Therefore it is the best interest of an organization to look after their worker's incentives and making their work place a "dream" place to work with - a happy worker is a productive worker.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors acknowledge the research grant provided by Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang that has resulted this article (No.304/PJJAUH/635027).

REFERENCES

- Barnett, R.C., Brennan, R.T., Raudenbush, S.W., & Marshall, N.L. (1994). "Gender and the Relationship between Marital-Role Quality and Psychological Distress," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, Vol.18, pp105-127.
- Greenberger, E. & O'Neil, R. (1993). "Spouse, Parent, Worker: Role Commitments and Role-Related Experiences in the Construction of Adults' Well Being," *Developmental Psychological*, Vol.29, pp181-197.
- Herzberg, F., Maunsner, B., & Snyderman, B.B. (1959). *The Motivation to Work*, 2ed., New York: Wiley.
- Johnson, G.L. & Johnson, W.R. (2001). "Perceived over Qualification, Positive and Negative Affectivity, and Satisfaction with Work," *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, Vol.15, No.2, pp167-184.
- Maslow, A. (1954). *Motivation and Personality*, McGraw-Hill, N.Y.
- Phillips-Miller, D.L., Campbell, N.J. & Morrison, C.R. (2000). "Work and Family: Satisfaction, Stress, and Spousal Support," *Journal of Employment Counseling*, March, Vol.37, pp16-30.
- Silverstein, B. & Perlick, D. (1995). *The Cost of Competence*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Watson, D. & Clark, L.A. (1984). "Negative Affectivity: The Disposition to Experience Adversity," *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol.96, pp465-490.