

Workplace Stress: How Demands, Interpersonal Conflict, and Role Ambiguity Affect Human Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

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Workplace stress has become a critical issue worldwide that impacts employees, organisations, and the economy. The constant and rapid transformation of work has made the demands of working life increasingly complex, and the imbalance between the perceived demands and the resources and abilities of employees can affect their well-being. This paper examines the relationship between workplace stress and human well-being. Key stressors identified include job demands, interpersonal conflict, and role ambiguity. A survey was administered to employees within a policy organisation and public administration in Malaysia, comprising 197 questionnaires. Data analysis involved Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for coding, descriptive statistics, and structural equation modeling and hypothesis testing using SmartPLS software. Structural model findings revealed that workplace stress is significantly related to human well-being. This study offers several research propositions and concludes with implications for research and practice.

Keywords: Human well-being, interpersonal conflict, job demands, role ambiguity, work stress

INTRODUCTION

In today's global market, structural and attitude changes are critical for employers seeking to increase organisational efficiency and effectiveness (Aruldoss, Kowalski & Parayitam, 2021). These changes require personnel at all levels and job categories to adapt to new work types, methods, and cultures to fulfil organisational goals and strategies (Aruldoss, Kowalski & Parayitam, 2021; Klusmann, Aldrup, Schmidt & Lüdtke, 2021). During the adjustment process, some employees suffer controlled and uncontrollable work stress (Le Fevre, Matheny & Kolt, 2003; Hamid & Abdullah, 2020; Vikoler, Dániel & Traut-Mattausch, 2024). In the organisational setting, employees who encounter managed work stress typically exhibit the behaviour of employees who carry out the demands of their duties sensibly, which has the potential to improve their psychological and physiological health (Branson, Dry, Palmer & Turnbull, 2019; Hamid & Abdullah, 2020). For example, prudent behaviour can be demonstrated through a clear work structure, such as comprehending task procedures, work procedures, objectives, work processes, and others, which are performed following superiors' intentions (Um-e-Rubbab, Faiz, Safdar & Mubarak, 2022; Vikoler, Dániel & Traut-Mattausch, 2024). Meanwhile, employees who experience uncontrollable stress typically exhibit the behaviour of employees who fail to manage their task roles consistently, disrupting their psychological and physiological health (Um-e-Rubbab, Faiz, Safdar & Mubarak, 2022; Vikoler, Dániel & Traut-Mattausch, 2024). For example, failure to manage tasks can be translated into unsteady work structuring practices such as employees' failure to understand task functions, changes in organisational hierarchy, task duplication, and others, which do not have the coordination of task flow desired by upper management (Um-e-Rubbab, Faiz, Safdar & Mubarak, 2022; Savandha et al., 2024).

Research on the latest literature studies related to the disrupting quality of work life of employees has found that the workplace has three main characteristics: job demands, interpersonal conflict, and role ambiguity (John, Mwakyusa & Evelyne Willy Mcharo, 2024; Blomberg, Rosander & Einarsen, 2024; Junça Silva & Rodrigues, 2024). According to the organisational perspective, job demand is associated with work demands in the form of working time (the

burden of time that needs to be spent, including overtime or flexible working hours), responsibility (tasks that need to be carried out according to the employee's role) (for example, meeting project objectives or achieving KPI (Key Performance Indicators)), and skills and knowledge (the need to have certain skills or knowledge to complete the job, such as technical skills or communication skills) (Bakker & de Vries, 2020; Atiku & Van Wyk, 2024). Next, interpersonal conflict is associated with disagreements related to feelings of hostility (relational conflict) or disagreements about the best way to perform and complete tasks (task conflict) (Kostelić, Gonan Božac & Paulišić, 2024; Bruce, Hrymak, Bruce & Byrne, 2024). Disagreements about how to perform a task can arise in various settings. For example, developers may clash over coding practices or project management methodologies in a software development team. Although some level of task conflict can be productive for innovation, excessive disagreement can hinder progress and create a hostile work environment (Kostelić et al., 2024). Additionally, relationship conflict often stems from feelings of hostility between co-workers. For example, in hospital settings during ongoing global health challenges, nurses may experience increased strain due to increased workload and stress. This can cause emotional outbursts or passive-aggressive behaviour, affecting team cohesion and the quality of patient care (Bruce et al., 2024).

Role ambiguity is associated with transactions between individuals and the work environment that refer to situations where individuals are unclear or confused about the responsibilities, expectations, and roles that need to be implemented in work or the organisation (Blomberg, Rosander & Einarsen, 2024; Junça Silva & Rodrigues, 2024; Atiku & Van Wyk, 2024). For example, a customer service representative may be told to prioritise call resolution speed by one manager while another emphasises customer satisfaction scores, creating uncertainty about performance expectations (Atiku & Van Wyk, 2024). When employees are unsure about how their work will be evaluated, it can lead to anxiety and reduce job satisfaction. An employee undertaking a new task may struggle without clear guidelines on evaluation methods or success metrics (Blomberg et al., 2024).

A recent study shows that the employee's inability to manage irregular work stress can disturb human well-being (Hamid & Abdullah, 2020; Klusmann, Aldrup, Schmidt & Lüdtke, 2021; Ul Haq & Huo, 2024). According to the organisation's perspective, human well-being has two main aspects, namely emotional exhaustion (quickly feeling tired mentally and emotionally due to constant pressure related to work, interpersonal conflicts, or daily responsibilities) (Ul Haq & Huo, 2024) and disrupting quality of work life (the quality of the relationship between employees and the amount of work in the task environment) (Malfa et al., 2021).

Although there is extensive research related to work stress, research linking workplace stress and human well-being in the public sector is scarce (Blomberg, Rosander & Einarsen, 2024; Junça Silva & Rodrigues, 2024; Atiku & Van Wyk, 2024). A comprehensive literature review revealed a lack of specific work stress models that link these two variables tested simultaneously (Bakker & de Vries, 2020; Atiku & Van Wyk, 2024). Furthermore, the main limitation of research on workplace stress stems from the ambiguity in the definition of the concept of job stress, which often differs from one study to another (Junça Silva & Rodrigues, 2024; Atiku & Van Wyk, 2024). Schuler (1991) stated that most previous studies focused more on antecedent conditions related to certain characteristics of employment and the consequences of stressful employment conditions. For example, most previous studies have tended to investigate organisational characteristics that contribute to stress, individual differences in attitudes and personality traits, and characteristics of the work environment that are associated with employees' ability to manage tasks.

This study makes four significant contributions. First, it emphasises the importance of studying the literature on managing workplace stress as an important predictor in reducing employee psychological distress. Second, the study expands the literature on work stress by identifying elements of workplace stress in reducing workplace stress and shaping the dynamics of employee behaviour. Third, this study has specifically used the central tenets of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Tummers & Bakker, 2021), Work Stress Model (Cary, Cooper & Marshall, 1976), and Person-Environment Fit (P-E Fit) theory to explore how workplace stress can affect employees psychologically. This phenomenon predicts that the effects of workplace stress that are not managed well can disrupt human well-being. This prediction can be proven by testing the causal relationship in the study model, according to Lazarus (1991), who suggested that workplace stress should be evaluated in the context of his conceptual model of stress as a process that involves transactions between a person and his environment, which can differentiate between antecedent conditions. It should be seen cognitively to evaluate whether the individual has coping skills and an

emotional response because of stress that cannot be dealt with effectively. Therefore, the inadequacy of existing empirical studies inspired researchers to explore this study by simultaneously testing the inclusion and exclusion of workplace stress as a predictor variable in the relationship between workplace stress and human well-being.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE (IV)

Job Demand

Job demand is a factor that plays a significant role in increasing workplace stress. In the workplace stress literature, job demand is described as a high quantitative workload and unexpected tasks that can affect psychological stress (Bakker & de Vries, 2020; Atiku & Van Wyk, 2024). Quantitative workload includes the number of tasks and work time pressure, such as the time for employees to complete tasks (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) that need to be completed (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Work demands can come in many forms, such as work time, responsibilities, skills and knowledge, and the pressure of completing a task, which may be related to a heavy workload or a tight deadline. In theory, this condition is based on the task or workload of work, psychological and physical, requiring cognitive stimulation, mental awareness, and static or physical effort (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Karasek, 1997; Karasek, Brisson, Kawakami, Amick, Houtman & Bongers, 1998). Therefore, modern workplace stress research emphasises that job demand is an essential element and must be considered as a factor contributing to workplace stress in organisations.

Interpersonal Conflict

Conflict is a phenomenon that affects organisations in almost every stage and process (Barki & Harwick, 2001). According to the organisational perspective, interpersonal conflict has been broadly defined as differences, conflict of desires, and incompatibility that can be considered as disagreements between two or more people because of differences in opinions, values, beliefs, needs or interests that can lead to workplace stress (Kostelić, Gonan Božac & Paulišić, 2024; Bruce, Hrymak, Bruce & Byrne, 2024). Interpersonal conflict has certain characteristics that can be distinguished based on social interactions between parties with mutually exclusive or incompatible values. It is a phenomenon that affects organisations at almost every level and process (Barki & Harwick, 2001) in the workplace, and it often occurs due to a misunderstanding of job roles and responsibilities given to employees. This phenomenon in the workplace occurs in many forms, starting from minor disagreements between colleagues and supervisors and being overt or covert (Spector & Jex, 1998). It can happen when there is a disagreement related to feelings of hostility (relational conflict) or a disagreement about the best way to complete a task (task conflict). It is considered a natural phenomenon that exists in human relationships in organisations (Sillars & Parry, 1982), which can influence individual behaviour that has the potential to threaten the self-interest of others (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). In an organisational context, interpersonal conflict in the workplace has been linked to various indicators of well-being, such as depressive symptoms, job satisfaction, and somatic symptoms. Therefore, modern workplace stress research emphasises that interpersonal conflict is an essential element and must be considered as a factor contributing to workplace stress in organisations.

Role Ambiguity

Lazarus (1991) proposed role ambiguity as workplace stress assessed in the context of the model as a process involving transactions between individuals and the work environment, which refers to situations where individuals are not clear or confused about the responsibilities, expectations, and roles that need to be implemented in the work or organisation. This situation can create a lack of clarity and understanding of job expectations and responsibilities (Blomberg, Rosander & Einarsen, 2024; Junça Silva & Rodrigues, 2024; Atiku & Van Wyk, 2024). In addition, this situation can cause uncertainty in performing tasks and have a negative impact on employee performance and well-being. For example, changes in the organisational structure cause employees to experience failure to manage tasks related to task information management, work and organisational objectives, task scope, mission and organisational core, as well as the expectations of superiors placed on employees that cannot be managed adequately by them to succeed in the strategy (Blomberg, Rosander & Einarsen, 2024; Junça Silva & Rodrigues, 2024; Atiku & Van Wyk, 2024). Role ambiguity has been recognised as a psychosocial risk factor that can harm employee well-being. When employees are unsure about their roles, it can lead to job dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE (DV)

Emotional Exhaustion

Over time, scholars have provided various definitions of emotional exhaustion. In psychology, emotional exhaustion is a chronic physical condition and emotional deterioration resulting from excessive job demands and continuous task complexity (Shirom, 1989; Zohar, 1997). Much of the research on emotional exhaustion posits three main interrelated components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and depleted personal achievement (Lee & Ashforth, 1990; Pines & Aronson, 1988). In this context, emotional exhaustion is the main component of the core of exhaustion and the most apparent manifestation characterised by feelings of physical and emotional deprivation in the work context. Individuals quickly feel mentally and emotionally exhausted due to constant stress related to work, interpersonal conflict, or daily responsibilities. It is one of the main symptoms of burnout syndrome and can have a considerable impact on an individual's well-being.

Emotional exhaustion has been linked to role ambiguity and hindering job demands in organisational settings. Blomberg et al. (2024) found that role ambiguity is a psychosocial risk factor, diminishing workers' well-being and motivation ultimately leading to emotional exhaustion. The research highlighted that healthcare professionals experiencing role ambiguity invest less effort in their tasks, showing reduced engagement and lower job satisfaction. The relationship between emotional exhaustion and work engagement has also been a focus of recent studies. Junça Silva and Rodrigues (2024) demonstrated that work engagement mediates the effect of role ambiguity on emotional exhaustion. Their findings suggest that employees who lack clear goals and expectations about their roles are less likely to be engaged in their work, increasing their susceptibility to emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, the impact of emotional exhaustion extends beyond individual well-being to organisational outcomes. Bruce et al. (2024) reported that emotionally exhausted healthcare workers are more prone to medical errors, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. This underscores the importance of addressing emotional exhaustion for employee welfare and maintaining high-quality patient care and organisational efficiency. Interestingly, recent research has also explored protective factors against emotional exhaustion. Kostelić et al. (2024) found that professional commitment can act as a resource, potentially shielding workers from the negative effects of emotional exhaustion on job satisfaction. This suggests that fostering a sense of professional identity and purpose may be crucial in mitigating the impacts of emotional exhaustion in high-stress work environments. These findings emphasise emotional exhaustion's complex nature and significant role in workplace dynamics. They highlight the need for organisations to address role clarity, manage job demands effectively, and foster work engagement to prevent and mitigate employee emotional exhaustion.

Disrupting Quality of Work Life

Quality of work life (QWL) is defined as the quality of the relationship between employees and the overall work structure in the work environment (Feldman, 1993). Although many researchers agree that QWL encompasses a work environment that supports job satisfaction through the provision of rewards, job security, and career opportunities, there are various factors that can disrupt this balance. High job stress, lack of organizational support, excessive workload, and instability in career paths are often the main causes of QWL disruption. When QWL is disrupted, the effects can be seen in the form of decreased job satisfaction, lack of trust in the organization, poor cooperation between colleagues, lack of recognition, and an unsafe work environment. Disruption of QWL can also weaken employee motivation, loyalty, and dedication, thus affecting the overall productivity of the organization (May et al., 1999; Sirgy et al., 2001; Mosadeghrad, 2013). Although there is a view that happy employees are productive employees (Karolin Kõrrevesk, 2010), disruption of important elements of QWL can lead to dissatisfaction, emotional distress, and intention to leave the job (Mayo, 1993; Riyono, 1997; Storey, Ulrich & Wright, 2019; Sirgy et al., 2001).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Relationship Between Job Demand and Human Well-Being

The association between job demand and human well-being is consistent with the JD-R theory (Tummers & Bakker, 2021), which identifies two major workplace stressors: job demands and job resources. According to this theory, workplace stress happens when job demands exceed the resources available to deal with them, which explains how the organisational environment influences employee well-being and performance. Diverse occupational demands can

cause health degradation. Individuals who face high job demands, such as severe workloads, may experience persistent fatigue, anxiety, and poor work performance. These expectations can result in excessive work pressure without suitable resources. Applying this theory in workplace stress studies shows that the JD-R concept is often associated with job demand. This theory is supported by a literature review related to workplace stress.

Empirical studies have shown that high job demands can disrupt employees' emotional well-being and quality of work life (QWL). Although there is a positive correlation in some studies between job demands and certain aspects of human well-being, most research suggests that excessive workload, time pressure, and lack of resources can lead to emotional stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction. For example, Crawford and Detar (2023) assessed the perceptions of 352 employees in the southwestern United States using three instruments: the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), and the Job Demand Resource Scale (JD-RS). The results of the analysis showed a significant positive correlation between job demands and emotional burnout ($r(350) = .443, p < .05$), thus proving that high job demands can disrupt emotional balance and contribute to burnout. In another study by Sarwar et al. (2021) involving 450 public sector faculty members in Pakistan, the results of the analysis using PLS-SEM showed that high job demands had a negative impact on work-family balance and well-being. This study emphasizes that workplace stress can interfere with the role and function of employees in their personal lives, thus damaging aspects of QWL as a whole. Hall et al. (2024) also found that 97% of sonographers involved in their study reported facing burdensome work demands such as unrealistic workload, time pressure, and insufficient scheduled breaks. Unfortunately, 35% of participants did not have access to any strategies or resources to improve their well-being, and all participants (100%) reported that the available psychological support was ineffective. The direct effect was the disruption of emotional well-being and QWL among these healthcare workers. Finally, a study by Ade et al. (2024) conducted at Hospital X, Kota Padang, Indonesia, also demonstrated the negative impact of work demands on well-being. Using random sampling and a Likert scale, they found a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.447, p < 0.01$) between work demands and workplace well-being. Among the factors identified as contributing to emotional stress and QWL disruptions are workload, emotional demands, time pressure, and task conflict. Overall, these findings emphasize that high job demands not only undermine employees' emotional balance but also have a direct impact on their quality of work life. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Job demand has significant relationship with emotional exhaustion.

H2: Job demand has significant relationship with disrupting the disrupting quality of work life.

Relationship Between Interpersonal Conflict and Human Well-Being

The association between interpersonal conflict and human well-being is consistent with the Cooper and Marshall Work Stress Model, which was developed by Cary L. Cooper and J. Marshall in 1976 to understand better the elements that contribute to workplace stress. This model categorises the numerous sources of workplace stressors and the effects of such stress on employee well-being, both physical and mental. Work stress can be caused by factors such as the job itself, one's role in the company, career advancement, workplace relationships, and the structure and atmosphere of the organisation. For example, an organisation's excessively stringent procedures and rigid standards can lead to stress and discontent. A literature study on occupational stress supports this theory.

Interpersonal conflict in the workplace often has a negative impact on an individual's emotional well-being and quality of work life (QWL). Various studies have used the work stress model to assess the negative correlation between this disruption of social relationships and the level of human well-being. For example, a study based on European Employment Data from the Sixth European Working Conditions Survey (2015) found that positive interpersonal relationships, whether inside or outside the workplace, are closely related to individual well-being. However, the study also highlighted that failure to maintain positive cooperation and interaction with colleagues can increase the risk of emotional stress, thereby affecting a conducive work environment (Nappo, 2020). In Vietnam, Van Thanh (2016) conducted a qualitative study involving 42 female academics at six higher education institutions in Nha Trang. The study showed that interpersonal conflict is one of the main causes of work stress among female academics. Tension in co-worker relationships was identified as a major trigger of emotional stress and disruption of QWL, which can affect work focus, motivation and emotional balance at work. Meanwhile, a study by Babazadeh et al. (2024) in Sarab, East Azerbaijan, Iran, involving 345 participants, showed a significant negative correlation between interpersonal conflict and psychological well-being, especially among individuals infected with COVID-19.

Participants who experienced social conflict and lack of social support reported lower levels of emotional well-being and protective behaviors. The regression model used revealed that a history of conflict and tension in the social environment was the main predictor of a decrease in psychological well-being by 57.4%. This study highlights the importance of social support and a harmonious work environment in reducing emotional stress and improving QWL among employees, especially in post-pandemic situations. These findings demonstrate that interpersonal conflict not only affects individual emotional well-being but also weakens the basic elements of QWL such as a supportive work environment, healthy social relationships, and a sense of job satisfaction. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H3: Interpersonal conflict has significant relationship with emotional exhaustion.

H4: Interpersonal conflict has significant relationship with disrupting the disrupting quality of work life.

Relationship Between Role Ambiguity and Human Well-Being

The association between role ambiguity and human well-being is consistent with the P-E Fit theory (Caplan, 1987), which explains how the mismatch between the workplace climate environment and the individual influences job stress and human well-being. This theory contends that stress occurs when job ambiguity and available resources are mismatched. This refers to the organisational atmosphere around decision-making participation, communication, and bureaucracy. Applying this theory to the study of work stress reveals that person-environment fit is frequently linked to organisational climate. A literature study on occupational stress in the workplace supports this theory.

Empirical studies have shown that there is a significant negative correlation between role ambiguity and human well-being. For example, a study by Lan et al. (2020) involved 101 pharmacists from three teaching hospitals where hierarchical regression analysis revealed that role ambiguity and burnout explained 55.6% of the variation in employee retention ($F = 9.712^{***}$, $p < .001$). Such role ambiguity not only affects organizational loyalty but also contributes to emotional disorders such as stress and burnout. Mhlongo et al. (2024) also emphasized the negative impact of role ambiguity on emotional well-being among health professionals. This systematic review study showed that unclear roles contribute to increased psychological stress, emotional exhaustion, and job dissatisfaction, thus affecting the quality of patient care and the mental health of employees. In some cases, the prevalence rate of psychological distress reached 78.3%, indicating a serious impact on organizational functioning and employee well-being. Meanwhile, a study by Savandha et al. (2024) in ABC Organizations illustrated how ambiguity in organizational tasks and leadership can reduce motivation, increase work stress, and lower the quality of work output. Among the key findings were that 60% of respondents reported unclear task flow, 48% faced unclear work priorities, and 52% were uncertain about the scope of their respective tasks. More worryingly, the lack of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and conflicting instructions from leaders caused 56% of respondents to experience confusion in making daily work decisions. Collectively, these findings highlight that role ambiguity not only triggers emotional distress but also affects important aspects of QWL such as role clarity, sense of certainty, job satisfaction, and employee motivation. Prolonged confusion can lead to reduced performance, work errors, and increased desire to leave the organization. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H5: Role ambiguity has significant relationship with emotional exhaustion

H6: Role ambiguity has significant relationship with disrupting the disrupting the quality of work life.

Research Framework

Based on previous theoretical and empirical reviews, the following research hypotheses aligned with the identified predictors of workplace stress and human well-being were developed, as exhibited in Figure 1.

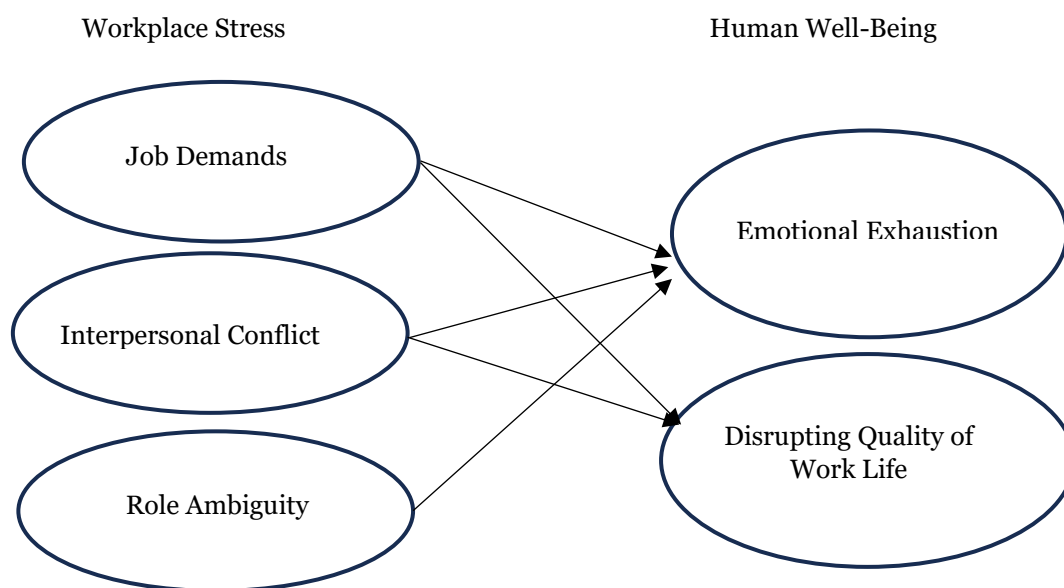


Figure 1. Research Framework

METHODS

Research Design

Work stress is a significant and critical problem in the modern workplace. Work stress is often described as mental or emotional stress that is unstable due to external pressure. According to psychologists, stress can be classified based on two main types of stress, namely eustress and distress. Eustress is a positive stress that triggers the production of adrenaline as part of the body's response to dealing with the situation. Meanwhile, distress is a negative pressure (nervousness, fear) where the external pressure exceeds the individual's capacity to overcome it. This type of pressure is usually associated with job demands in the organisation. The study adopted a quantitative methodological approach using a structured questionnaire. This study utilised a cross-sectional design. This technique was chosen because it enables researchers to combine key data from workplace stress literature, pilot tests, and questionnaires. Researchers can use this method to increase data quality, reduce biases, and gather data more accurately (Cresswell, 2012; Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

Participants

The sample consisted of 300 personnel from various units/sections/divisions in government administration offices recruited using purposive sampling. Specifically, this sampling technique was chosen because organisational management could not offer a comprehensive list of personnel due to confidentiality concerns and a desire to maintain the organisation's reputation. As a result, the researcher was unable to select study respondents randomly. Only 197 (65.66%) of the distributed surveys were completed and returned to the researcher. All these respondents completed the questionnaire voluntarily and without compulsion. Most respondents were aged 28 to 33 years old (41.1%), female (59.4%), married (69.5%), with working hours of 8 to 10 hours (88.3%), salary of RM1000 to RM2499 (46.2%) and length of service of 6 to 10 years (50.3%).

Instruments

The questionnaire in this study consists of three main sections: Firstly, workplace stress is assessed based on 15 items adapted from workplace stress literature (Rizzo et al., 1970; Lu, While & Barriball, 2007). Workplace stress is measured using three dimensions: job demand (5 items), interpersonal conflict (4 items) and role ambiguity (6 items). Secondly, emotional exhaustion is assessed based on three items adapted from burnout literature (Klusmann et al., 2021). Thirdly, the disrupting the quality of work life is evaluated based on three items adapted from work-life balance studies (Netemeyer et al., 1996). All items were rated on a seven-point response scale, ranging from "strongly disagree/very dissatisfied" (1) to "strongly agree/very satisfied" (7). Specifically, this measurement scale was chosen in this study as it maximises optimal reliability in assessing respondent reactions (Lewis & Smith, 1993), yielding

more neutral and improved responses (Cox, 1980). Respondent demographic characteristics in this study were utilised as control variables, as the study exclusively focused on employees' attitudes.

Procedure

The research data were first examined using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to assess data quality. In the second stage, the study was evaluated using the SmartPLS software package to evaluate the structural model and test the research hypotheses (Hair et al., 2017).

RESULTS

Assessment for Measurement Model

This stage ensures construct validity by adjusting the scale items used. Table 1 shows that the constructs in this study have an outer loadings value greater than 0.708 (Henseler et al., 2009) and average variance extracted (AVE) value greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017), indicating that they meet the proposed convergent validity requirements. Furthermore, all study constructs had composite reliability ratings greater than 0.8 (Hair et al., 2017), showing strong internal consistency.

Table 1. Convergent validity analysis

Constructs	Outer Loading	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Cronbach's Alpha
Workplace Stress				
Job Demand				
A1	0.917	0.955	0.845	0.954
A2	0.932			
A3	0.903			
A4	0.945			
A5	0.897			
Interpersonal Conflict				
B1	0.809	0.845	0.674	0.839
B2	0.791			
B3	0.868			
B4	0.816			
Role Ambiguity				
C1	0.882	0.943	0.759	0.935
C2	0.899			
C3	0.922			
C4	0.903			
C5	0.873			
C6	0.734			
Emotional Exhaustion				
D1	0.900	0.851	0.768	0.849

D2	0.903			
D3	0.824			
Disrupting The Quality of Work Life				
E1	0.870	0.817	0.729	0.814
E2	0.819			
E3	0.870			

Table 2 shows the value of the Heterotrait-Monotrait Correlation Ratio (HTMT), which was used to assess all the constructs. This analysis verified that all the constructs have values smaller than 0.85 (Hair et al., 2017), meaning that they meet the criteria for discriminant validity.

Table 2: Discriminant validity

Constructs	Job Demand	Interpersonal Conflict	Role Ambiguity	Emotional Exhaustion
Job Demand				
Interpersonal Conflict	0.280			
Role Ambiguity	0.897	0.269		
Emotional Exhaustion	0.107	0.574	0.174	
Disrupting Quality of Work Life	0.617	0.244	0.676	0.330

Table 3 displays the cross-loading analysis results. According to the analysis, all the indicator values for each construct are greater than those for others. This suggests that all items selected have the required level of discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3: Cross-loading

Job Demand	Interpersonal Conflict	Role Ambiguity	Emotional Exhaustion	Disrupting Quality of Work Life
0.917	0.196	0.789	0.095	0.527
0.932	0.225	0.797	0.070	0.524
0.903	0.247	0.760	0.091	0.472
0.945	0.254	0.804	0.109	0.498
0.897	0.211	0.757	0.092	0.477
0.734	0.271	0.882	0.192	0.535
0.750	0.187	0.899	0.115	0.548
0.842	0.265	0.922	0.133	0.564
0.782	0.214	0.903	0.119	0.521
0.734	0.187	0.873	0.167	0.520
0.578	0.110	0.734	0.097	0.392
0.137	0.809	0.144	0.413	0.151
0.282	0.791	0.243	0.346	0.159
0.212	0.868	0.217	0.458	0.157
0.190	0.816	0.194	0.393	0.192
0.079	0.428	0.131	0.900	0.207

0.473	0.166	0.545	0.210	0.870
0.055	0.376	0.121	0.903	0.252
0.456	0.192	0.472	0.244	0.819
0.465	0.157	0.499	0.253	0.870
0.120	0.478	0.160	0.824	0.260

Table 4 shows the means for all the constructs, which range from 2.879 to 5.884. These analyses indicate that participants' perceptions of job demand, interpersonal conflict, role ambiguity, emotional exhaustion, and disrupting quality of work life range from high (4) to very high (7). Furthermore, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for the associations among the research constructs are all less than 5.0, meaning that collinearity issues do not significantly affect the data (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 4: VIF and descriptive constructs analysis

Constructs	VIF Values		Mean	SD*
	Emotional Exhaustion	Disrupting Quality of Work Life		
Job Demand	3.644	3.644	5.884	.7208
Interpersonal Conflict	1.069	1.069	2.879	.8900
Role Ambiguity	3.635	3.635	5.813	.6782
Emotional Exhaustion			4.112	1.401
Disrupting Quality of Work Life			5.631	.7741

Note: *SD= standard deviation; VIF= variance inflation factor

Structural Model

The structural model is tested by assessing the cause-and-effect relationship between the constructs. This assessment is evaluated using numerous key criteria, including the path coefficient, determination coefficient (R^2), effect size (f^2), and blindfolding (Q^2) (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2017). According to Cohen (1988), R^2 values of 0.26, 0.13, and 0.02 are classified as large, moderate, and small, respectively.

The R^2 assessment measures the model's overall prediction accuracy (Hair et al., 2017). In contrast, the f^2 evaluates the change in R^2 when an exogenous construct is removed from the model, indicating if the omitted construct significantly impacts the endogenous variable (Hair et al., 2017). Following Cohen (1988), f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, moderate, and large effects, respectively.

Blindfolding, a sample reuse strategy that omits each data point in the endogenous construct indicators (Hair et al., 2017), was used to generate Q^2 values. Q^2 is measured using a criterion larger than zero, indicating that the construct has achieved the necessary degree of prediction accuracy (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 5 presents the structural model's results. The R^2 value reported a value of 0.36 for and disrupting quality of work life, followed by emotional exhaustion at 0.27. These values are more than 0.26, indicating that the study model had a significant impact.

Table 5: R^2 analysis

Constructs	R^2	Predictive Accuracy
Emotional Exhaustion	0.27	Large

Disrupting Quality of Work Life	0.36	Large
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Table 6 shows the f^2 analysis. The job demand has a value of 0.015 for emotional exhaustion and 0.008 for and disrupting quality of work life. These values are smaller than 0.02, meaning that the constructed model of this study has a small effect (Cohen, 1988). Next, the interpersonal conflict has a value of 0.305 for emotional exhaustion; this value is larger than 0.25, meaning that the construct model of this study has a medium effect. The interpersonal conflict has a value of 0.004 for and disrupting quality of work life; this value is smaller than 0.02, meaning that the construct model of this study has a small effect. The role ambiguity has a value of 0.017 for emotional exhaustion. This value is smaller than 0.02, meaning that the constructed model of this study has a small effect (Cohen, 1988). Lastly, and disrupting quality of work life has a value of 0.094. This value is smaller than 0.15, meaning that the constructed model of this study has a small effect (Cohen, 1988). The Q^2 value for emotional exhaustion is 0.172, and the and disrupting quality of work life is 0.252. These values are greater than zero, meaning that the construct has reached the specified level of prediction relevance (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 6: f^2 analysis

Constructs	Job Demand	Interpersonal Conflict	Role Ambiguity	Emotional Exhaustion	Disrupting Quality of Work Life	Q^2
Job Demand				0.015	0.008	
Interpersonal Conflict				0.305	0.004	
Role Ambiguity				0.017	0.094	
Emotional Exhaustion						0.172
Disrupting Quality of Work Life						0.252

The bootstrapping technique (5,000 subsamples, one-tailed significance) was employed to estimate the statistical significance of the parameter. Table 7 presents the findings of the hypothesis testing. The results of the analysis revealed six important findings. First, the job demand has significantly with emotional exhaustion (H_1 , $\beta = 0.107$; $t = 2.473$; $p = 0.000$). Second, the job demand has significantly with disrupting quality of work life (H_2 , $\beta = 0.544$; $t = 9.008$; $p = 0.000$). Third, interpersonal conflict has significantly with emotional exhaustion (H_3 , $\beta = 0.486$; $t = 7.605$; $p = 0.000$). Fourth, interpersonal conflict has significantly with disrupting quality of work life (H_4 , $\beta = 0.189$; $t = 3.167$; $p = 0.000$). Fifth, role ambiguity has significantly with emotional exhaustion (H_5 , $\beta = 0.160$; $t = 2.714$; $p = 0.007$). Sixth, role ambiguity has significantly with disrupting quality of work life (H_6 , $\beta = 0.594$; $t = 11.214$; $p = 0.000$). Therefore, H_1 , H_2 , H_3 , H_4 , H_5 , and H_6 were supported.

Table 7: The results of the research model

Relationship	Original Sample (O)	t-Statistics (O/STDEV)	p-Values	Decision
H1: Job Demand -> Emotional Exhaustion	0.107	2.473	0.000	Supported
H2: Job Demand -> Disrupting Quality of Work Life	0.544	9.008	0.000	Supported
H3: Interpersonal Conflict -> Emotional Exhaustion	0.486	7.605	0.000	Supported
H4: Interpersonal Conflict -> Disrupting Quality of Work Life	0.189	3.167	0.002	Supported

H5: Role Ambiguity -> Emotional Exhaustion	0.160	2.714	0.007	Supported
H6: Role Ambiguity -> Disrupting Quality of Work Life	0.594	11.214	0.000	Supported

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that workplace stress has a significant influence on human well-being, especially in terms of emotions and quality of work life (QWL). This study makes an important contribution to the literature on work stress by examining in depth how stress factors such as job demands, interpersonal conflict, and role ambiguity affect individual well-being in the context of work relationships. This finding is in line with the findings of previous studies such as Crawford and Detar (2023), Sarwar et al. (2021), Van Thanh (2016), Nappo (2020), and Lan et al. (2020), which also identified a negative relationship between job stress and human well-being. This study confirmed that workplace stress is a major predictor of decreased emotional well-being and disruption to QWL. The majority of respondents reported that the level of workplace stress was high, and that the stress failed to be effectively addressed in daily work routines. The inability to manage workload, deal with interpersonal conflict, and ambiguity in roles and responsibilities contributed to significant emotional exhaustion and disruption quality of work life. The implications of these findings are clear: organizations need to take proactive steps in addressing work stress to preserve emotional well-being and improve employees' QWL. A more comprehensive stress management strategy, including psychosocial support, role clarity, reasonable workload management, and a supportive work culture, can reduce emotional exhaustion and build a healthier and more productive work environment.

Limitation

This study has several limitations within its conceptual and methodological framework of research. First, the cross-sectional method used in this study cannot identify the problems or causes for the association between more specific factors. The study uses a cross-sectional design, meaning that data were collected at a single point in time. While this method is useful for identifying associations between variables, it cannot determine causality. In other words, it cannot clarify whether specific factors directly cause emotional exhaustion or poor work-life quality or if other underlying issues contribute to these outcomes. Second, this study does not explore the associations between specific markers for workplace stress, emotional exhaustion, and work-life quality. Third, the SmartPLS path model analysis explained how certain variables (like emotional exhaustion and work-life quality) are related. However, it is limited by the variables included in the study. The analysis only accounts for the variance explained by the selected factors, overlooking other potential influences such as job role, organisational culture, or external stressors. Therefore, while the model provides insight, the overall picture is incomplete without considering additional variables that may significantly impact the outcomes. Finally, the sample of this study only includes employees in government administration offices in Peninsular Malaysia who were selected using a simple sampling technique. Therefore, the findings of this study only describe patterns of the relationship between the study variables in general and cannot be generalised to different organisational settings.

Future Research Directions

This study presents several suggestions for forthcoming studies. For example, some participants' features, especially age, types of services, education and length of services, should be included in future studies because they may highlight differences and similarities in their attitudes toward the study issues. Secondly, a longitudinal method may be considered in future studies to compare subsamples in different timeframes. Thirdly, three specific features of workplace stress, such as goal setting, action planning, building self-awareness, emotional intelligence, providing feedback and accountability, can be examined further due to their importance as determinants of human well-being. Fourthly, human well-being and family conflict elements should be evaluated in future studies as they are emphasised in diverse organisational contexts. The above suggestions should be appropriately considered to strengthen future studies.

Implications of the Study

In terms of theoretical implications, this study acknowledges three significant findings: First, job demand is significantly associated with emotional exhaustion and disrupting quality of work life. Second, interpersonal conflict is significantly associated with emotional exhaustion and disrupting quality of work life. Third, role ambiguity is significantly associated with emotional exhaustion and disrupting quality of work life. These findings are in line with the notion of JD-R theory (job demands and job resources), which suggests that individuals with high job demands (such as extreme workloads) may experience persistent fatigue, anxiety and decreased work performance, P-E Fit theory regarding how work stress and human well-being are affected by the mismatch between the workplace climate environment and the individual, and Cooper and Marshall Work Stress theory on various causes of stressors at work and the effects of such stress on employee well-being, both in terms of physical and mental health. These findings are consistent with workplace stress literature, which previously revealed that stress can influence human well-being. Regarding the robustness of the research methodology, the collected survey questionnaire data have met the standards of validity and reliability analyses. This condition may lead to the production of accurate and reliable study results.

From a practitioner's perspective, the findings of this study can be used as a guide by employers and employees dealing with the issue of stress in the workplace, especially among employees in government administration offices. This goal can be achieved if top management pays attention to the following aspects. First, this study suggests that training programmes must expand their focus on workplace stress management to cover general strategies and specific acute physiological and psychological stress indicators. This includes physical illness (like chronic fatigue, headaches, or other stress-related health issues) and mental illnesses (such as anxiety and depression). Second, teamwork is needed to build a supportive work environment. Encouraging collaboration among employees helps create positive interpersonal relationships and reduces feelings of isolation that often contribute to workplace stress. A team-oriented approach enables employees to rely on one another for emotional support and practical assistance, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility. Third, organisations should practice open communication when managing stress. When communication channels are transparent and accessible, employees are more likely to voice concerns about stress, workload, or other challenges. If these recommendations are followed, they can motivate employees to manage stress and work regularly.

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