

Psychosocial Issue among Office Workers: A Case Study at a Public Higher Education Institution in Malaysia

Ezrin Hani Sukadarin, Norhidayah Abdull, Junaidah Zakaria and Abdullah Ibrahim
Occupational Safety and Health Program, Faculty of Engineering Technology,
Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP), Gambang, Pahang, Malaysia

Abstract: Self-awareness of worker's own health status had been proven can prevent work-related harm and injury and also mental health problems. Both mental and physical health improvements (physical and psychosocial factors) should be the main focused in any research. Workload and work-related stress are the examples of psychosocial factors that may exist in each organization. A case study related to safety and health was conducted among staff at Human Resources Management Division (HRMD) at a public higher education institution (Institut Pengajian Tinggi Awam-IPTA) in Malaysia. Total numbers of 22 staff were employed. However, only 21 staffs were participated in this study which contributed to about 95% of the response rate. A set of self-administered questionnaires which consist of questions on socio demographics information, questions on working hour, questions on workload and also questions on work-related stress were used as the study instruments. Result shows that office workers in HRMD, work in long hours in a week to keep up with workload. The availability of supplies, equipment and materials to do the work however, helps the workers to manage their works in a proper way. The relationship of inter-staff also found in a good condition. This study will be useful for other researcher to conduct a psychosocial study among office workers in a bigger sample size. This finding also can be as a guidance to manage workload and work-related stress in workplace.

Key words: Psychosocial, workload, work-related stress, office workers, equipment and materials

INTRODUCTION

Psychosocial issue is considered as one of the important factors in occupational ergonomics study (Choobineh *et al.*, 2011). However, psychosocial issues were not giving so much attention as what have been done to any physical issues in the field of occupational ergonomics. As noted, there are many approaches that can be done to measure physical risk factors in a workplace. For example, study on posture and other related physical load have been conducted actively (Mohamad *et al.*, 2013; Mokhtar *et al.*, 2013; Sukadarin *et al.*, 2013). Study on body or work station dimension which are important to design ergonomics element as well as to identify the limitations of design in anthropometry study were also getting so much attention from researchers (Ismail *et al.*, 2013). All those conducted researches were aimed to manage and prevent Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) among workers. However, in order to ensure that MSDs is properly managed, psychosocial factors in the work environment also have to be understood and handled in a very good

manner (Magnago *et al.*, 2010). This can be seen, for example in the study of Pascale *et al.* (1999) which found that lack of job control (one of the psychosocial factors at work) associated with an increased rate of musculoskeletal sickness absence and also increased the risk of hospitalization due to MSDs. Besides that work demand, job content and social support were also proven have significant relationship with low back discomfort (Habibi *et al.*, 2012).

Literature review: The prevalence of MSDs in relation with psychosocial factor is undeniable (Krause *et al.*, 2005). Unlike measuring physical ergonomics and conducting anthropometry study, to study about psychosocial factors, different approaches are required. Work-related stress and workload are the other examples of psychosocial factors that may exist in the organization. Work related stress is associated with unhealthy working environment. However, in order to have motivation to drive performance, positive pressure is needed. That pressure has to be managed carefully so that, it is not maintained over a prolonged period of time or become

excessive, otherwise it can lead to negative stress and reduced coping capacity. In the other side, if an individual does not feel sufficiently challenge (have no positive pressure at work at all) that individual will become de-motivated and disengaged to the organization.

In order to prevent work-related harm to individual's well-being and to promote good mental health, one of the efforts is to allow employees to care for their own health. Attention should be focused on both mental and physical health improvements (physical and psychosocial factors) (Sukadarin *et al.*, 2013). It is showed in many researches whereby ill health and sickness absence as well as work-related stress associated with many occupational problems such as reduced levels of job satisfaction, motivation and commitment and also increased employee turnover.

Workload as defined as job demands placed on an employee given a specific amount of time and resources. Workload which is overload is the source of stress and burnout (job demands exceeding human limits) (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). Time pressure is one of the reasons that may contribute to high workloads or too tight deadlines. Especially in higher education, the high level of perceived stress was found in 1998, 2004, 2008 and 2012. Those surveys were focused on teaching and educational professional. It was also reported that the highest average number of days lost per worker was due to work-related stress depression and anxiety. However, those surveys were excluding the sample from supporting staff from the selected higher education system.

Urgent action is required to enhance the well-being for those who are working in higher education. The fact that respondents from higher education who had poorer work-related well-being and who experienced unacceptable levels of stress tended to report higher levels of sickness absence is a serious cause for concern for employers. In addition, employee performance and engagement and overall levels of student satisfaction also will be affected by the unhealthy working condition that caused by unmanageable work-related pressure. In fact, for those who are working as the supporting team in the higher education also need to be highlighted in the effort to promote good physical and mental health in the organization. Therefore, this study is about to identify the type of workload and to explore work related stress among Human Resources Management Division (HRMD) at a public higher education institution (IPTA) in Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A case study was conducted among staff at HRMD in an IPTA. The response rate was about 95% in which a

total, numbers of 21 staff were participated in this study. Questionnaires were distributed to workers. The questionnaires consist of three parts which are: Part 1: demographics information. Demographics information includes the basic information of the population such as gender, age, marital status and years of working experience. Part 2: exposure time (working hour). Part 3: workload. This part consists of 30 questions that related to workload. The questions were adapted from the survey and questionnaire by Public and Commercial Services (PCS) workload and work life balance survey 2013. Part 4: work-related stress. Part 4 in the questionnaire is related with stress. It contains 34 questions that have been adapted based on the Management Standards Indicator Tool.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics: The result of demographics data is presented in Table 1. The respondents consist of 71% female and 29% male. Majority of them (43%) age in the range of 31-35 years old followed by 29% of respondents in the range of 26-30 year old, 24% of respondent's age are >36 year old. The rest (5%) of respondents are in the range of age 21-25 year old. Majority of them are married (81%). Meanwhile, others are still single. In terms of respondent's working experience, 29% of respondents have worked >10 year and another 29% of the respondents have worked in the range of 4-6 year. Temporarily, only 24% of respondents have worked <4 year.

Exposure time (working hour): All respondents (n = 21) were answered the questions regarding workload. Table 2 shows the background information of the factors that may be contributed to the workload. The factors including the factor that related to exposure times at work, the reason of working in the selected work duration and also the respondent's daily commuting times. The reason to consider the respondents commuting times is because of the hours associated with work also need to include time spent commuting to the workplace as proposed by French.

Based on the current results, about 57% of respondents work in the range of 38-48 h in a week. There is 10% of them work >48 h a week. Meanwhile, 14 and 19% of respondents work in the range of 22-34 h and <15 h in a week, respectively. The main reason why most respondents (67%) from the total number of respondents has to work in a long hours is actually to keep up with workload.

Table 1: Demography (%)

Variables	Values
Gender	
Male	29
Female	71
Age (years)	
21-25	5
26-30	29
31-35	43
>36	24
Marital status	
Single	19
Married	81
Working experience (years)	
1-3	24
4-6	29
7-9	19
>10	29

Table 2: The finding of exposure time at work (%); n = 21

Question	Exposure time
How many hours you work in a week? (h)	
<15	19
16-2	0
22-34	14
35-37	0
38-48	57
>48	10
The main reason for working longer hours?	
To keep up with workload	67
Choose to work extra hours at times	24
It is expected	0
Pressure from managers	0
Enjoy my work	10
Afraid of losing my job	0
How long it takes your time to go to your workplace? (min)	
30	76
31-60	24
61-120	0
>120	0

Another reason was they choose to work extra hours at times (24% of respondents). Some of the respondents (10%) feel that they are enjoy of their work so, they are willing to extend their working hours. In terms of respondent's commuting times, all of the respondents spent <1 h to go to the workplace. About 76% of them only take 30 min to reach their workplace.

Workload: Based on Table 3, more than half (57%) of the respondents feel that work plays an increasingly important role in their lives, 81% of them have a good relationship with colleagues and also 81% of respondents also disagree with the statement of poor relationship with manager.

Some respondents (38%) revealed that if they are not working, they have something else to do to occupy their times. This may be the reason why when the respondents (38%) take time off: they do not feel they miss their jobs. Result shows that 43% of total respondents believe that their workload is well planned and under control but some of them (19%) feel like they are facing difficulties to

manage their times properly. However, 67% of respondents agree that they are making sure that the work does not control their whole life.

Almost half of respondents (43%) find the jobs are rewarding and about 48% of respondents feel fulfilled when busy. There are might be the reason why more than half of respondents which about 52% of them feel enjoy the challenges of their job. But there are some negative feedback also revealed from the workload survey which are 10% of respondents feel insecure in their jobs and about 10% of respondents too have to come to work even when they sick.

The respondents stated that great deal very often (33%) fairly often (33%) and sometimes (29%) need to be done. Sometimes the deal required the respondents to work very hard (33%) but almost half of respondents require working very hard in fairly often (43%). Meanwhile, some of them (19%) have to work very hard in very often. Based on the survey, almost half of respondents (48%) feel that they have to get the job done with very little time (in sometime) (48%). However, 43 and 5% of respondents stated that they are facing often and very often situation, respectively that they have to complete the job given in very little time.

More than half of respondents feel they have much workload (57%) much of works that others expect the respondents to do (62%) much tasks need to be done in specific times (62%) as well as much amount of work that have to be done (57%). The respondents (62%) also feel that they have moderate rest period and some of them (33%) feel that they have little rest period. However, the availability of supplies, equipment and materials to do the task or job given is considered very much by 24% of respondents, much by 48% of respondents and also found to be moderate by 29% of respondents.

Work related stress: Table 4 shows the result of stress survey in percentage. Based on the finding, about 62% of respondents often and about 29% of respondents always know how to get job done. If there is a change at work, about 24% of respondents said that staff are always (24%) and often (48%) been informed. In fact, sometimes respondents (62%) have sufficient opportunities to question managers about the change at work. Although in sometimes, respondents (43%) feel that there is a misunderstanding or anger between colleagues and sometimes respondents (48%) unable to take sufficient breaks, the respondents believe that the colleagues are often (43%) willing to listen to work-related problems and will often (43%) help and support when work getting tough.

Table 3: The finding of workload survey (%); n = 21

Question	Agree	Neutral	Disagree		
Work is an important part of my life	57	43	0		
My working relationship with my colleagues is good	81	19	0		
When I take my time off I miss my work	5	57	38		
When I am not working I do not know what to do with my time	24	38	38		
My workload is generally well planned and under controlled	43	52	5		
My working relationship with my manager is poor	0	19	81		
If condition remains as they are I will consider changing jobs	14	52	33		
I would like to control the hours I work but do not know how	19	48	33		
I make sure work does not dominate my whole life	67	33	0		
I have medical advice to cut down my working hours	0	67	33		
I find my job very rewarding	43	57	0		
I feel my job here is insecure	10	33	57		
I feel more fulfilled when I am busy	48	48	5		
I am in control of the role work plays in my life	48	52	0		
I am so busy that I come in to work even when I am sick	10	57	33		
I enjoy the challenge of my job	52	48	0		
Question	Very often	Fairly often	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never
How often a great deals need to be done?	33	33	29	5	0
How often does your job require you to work very hard	19	43	33	5	0
How often does your job leave you with little time to get things done?	5	43	48	5	0
Question	Very much	Much	Moderate	Little	Very little
How much workload do you have?	10	57	33	0	0
Quantity of work do others expect you to do?	5	62	29	5	0
How many rest period you have between heavy workload periods?	0	0	62	33	5
How many tasks do you have?	10	62	29	0	0
How much time do you have to do all your work?	0	14	81	0	5
The amount of work you do?	10	57	33	0	0
The availability of supplies, equipment and materials to do your work	24	48	29	0	0

Table 4: The finding of work-related stress survey (%); n = 21

Question	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
I am clear what is expected of me at work	0	10	19	38	33
I can decide when to take a break	5	14	43	33	5
I know how to go about getting my job done	0	0	10	62	29
If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me	0	19	19	24	38
I am given supportive feedback on the work I do	0	10	38	38	14
I have a say in my own work speed	0	5	14	48	33
I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are	0	19	29	10	43
I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do	0	24	24	14	38
I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department	0	5	52	24	19
There is friction or anger between colleagues	29	29	43	0	0
I have a choice in deciding how I do my work	5	10	48	19	19
I am unable to take sufficient breaks	19	29	48	0	5
I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organisation	10	5	43	33	10
I am pressured to work long hours	29	48	19	0	5
I have a choice in deciding what I do at work	14	10	33	43	0
I have to work very fast	0	5	43	43	10
I am subject to bullying at work	52	24	10	10	5
I am aware of others being subject to bullying at work	0	5	24	48	24
If I were aware of bullying I would feel able to challenge it	10	24	48	19	0
If I reported bullying, I would be confident that it would be stopped	24	14	43	5	14
I have unrealistic time pressures	14	24	33	14	14
I get help and support I need from colleagues	10	5	43	43	0
I have some say over the way I work	14	19	43	24	0
I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work	10	0	62	29	0
I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues	0	5	48	38	10
Staffs are always consulted about change at work	0	5	24	48	24
I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work	10	24	48	19	0
My working time can be flexible	24	14	43	5	14
My working location can be flexible (subject to business constraints)	14	24	33	14	14
My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems	10	5	43	43	0
When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice	10	5	33	48	5
I am supported through emotionally demanding work	0	5	76	19	0
Relationships at work are strained	29	33	29	5	5
My line manager encourages me at work	5	0	38	33	24

In terms of working duration, sometimes respondents (19%) feel pressured to work long hours. The respondents often (10%) and always (43%) have to neglect some tasks due to too much things to do in one time. However, 43% of respondents agreed that sometimes they can decide when to take a break which 33 and 5% of them state sometimes and always respectively that they can decide to take a break.

Managing stress in a proper way is important in any place of work. In a study by Lin *et al.* (2009), perceived high job stress were significantly associated with health complaints. But when the duties and responsibilities of each worker are clear and has been communicated very well, result shows that workers are happy to give their full commitment. Previous study also showed that, exposure time to work routine associated with high physical load (Sa *et al.*, 2013). The finding of current study shows that workers are exposed to long work hours to keep up with the workload. However, workers seem can still manage their life routine without any disruption. In fact, some of them seem so engaged with their works and feel more fulfilled when they are busy. Specifically to this study, a good relationship among colleagues and a very supportive superior in the organization may be the contributing factors to ensure that the stress level in the organization is under control.

CONCLUSION

As conclusion, office HRMD in IPTA, work in long hours in a week to keep up with workload. The availability of supplies, equipment and materials to do the work however, helps the respondents to manage their works in a proper way. The relationship of inter-staff also found in a good condition. The management also seems took the responsibilities to ensure that the workers managed to get all what they need to have and to know to complete their tasks. With all the necessary things in place, the healthy environment can be cultivated.

As conclusion, HRMD workload and stress level is still manageable. This study will be useful for other researchers to conduct a psychosocial study among office workers in a bigger sample size. This finding also can be a guidance to manage workload and work-related stress in workplace.

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