Perceived Sources and Levels of Stress Among Central Philippine University Employees

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ABSTRACT

A study on the perceived sources and levels of stress was conducted among 151 faculty and staff at Central Philippine University for school year 1999-2000. The Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) was modified to assess the extent of stress an individual is exposed to. From a list of life events, respondents were asked to rate the extent by which these stressors had affected them. Many of the respondents indicated that the perceived sources of stress had affected them to some extent. Results revealed that inadequate pay, unfair performance rating and lack of supportive superiors and administrators affected them to some extent. In terms of working conditions or atmosphere, all of the perceived sources of stress presented to them were rated to affect them to some extent and the top three stressors were too much noise, inadequate ventilation, and limited working conditions. Among the forty-three life events considered that have occurred in the last five years which caused them to feel tension and needs readjustment to their lives, death of a close family member, Christmas and personal injury or illness and vacation top the list while trouble with boss, jail term and marital separation ranked the least. An alarming 89 employees from the 151 respondents (59 percent) is expected to get sick the following year as caused by these stressors. Furthermore, the hassles of daily life affected them to some extent while the greatest micro-stressor that contributed to their distress and illness was having too many things to do. On the other hand, among the ten uplifts of life or motivators presented and considered by the respondents, completing a task ranked first, followed by spending time with family and feeling healthy or relating well with spouse or lover. The majority of faculty respondents claimed that exposure to chalk dust, infectious agents and illnesses in hospital and community, travel and exposure to hazardous chemicals, fumes and microorganisms were hazardous to their health while exposure to computer radiation was reported risk by staff members. The most common health problems presented were Upper Respiratory Infection and its accompanying symptoms like cough, colds, running nose, sore throat, headache and fever. Other reported illnesses were hypertension, asthma, allergy, rheumatism/arthritis, ulcer, hyperacidity, migraine and diabetes mellitus.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

Psychologists and physicians have long recognized that people are more susceptible to diseases of all kinds when subjected to great stress. Life events, such as death of a loved one seem to cause enough stress to lower the body's resistance to disease. Work is perceived to be a source of stress and hazardous to health. Health hazards in the workplace are pervasive and serious but too often are unrecognized by some employees and employers. No job is one hundred percent risk free and no medical history or physical examination is complete without touching this base. Increased workloads, job insecurity, rapid and continuing organizational change have all been identified to be major sources of stress among laborers and workers. Atwater (1990) has described that in the workplace, some jobs could be more stressful than others. Studies have shown that those whose jobs involved high psychological demands but little decision making or control over their work are five times more likely to develop coronary heart disease than workers who exercise greater control over their work. The association between stress and illness could not be denied and illness or sickness affects one's work performance. But stress could be managed by identifying its source (Tyson & Doherty, 1997). Proponents of individual stress management and organizational intervention models like Cox (1999), Parkes (1998), and Tyson and Doherty (1997) recognized that intervention at the organizational level should be the primary focus on any attempt to reduce stress. Thus, this paper was conceived to identify the sources and levels of stress among employees of Central Philippine University.

Objectives of the Study

This study was conducted to determine the perceived sources and levels of stress among Central Philippine University employees. It aimed to describe the characteristics of these employees in terms of age, sex, civil status, educational attainment, religion, income and length of service. It further aimed to describe their perceived sources and levels of stress in terms of administrative support and rewards, working conditions or atmosphere, relationship with colleagues and superiors, their social readjustment rating, hassles of daily living, uplifts of life, health hazards of work and the common health problems experienced in the last five years.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was used together with a one-shot survey with the aid of a researcher-made questionnaire. A sample size of two hundred eight (208) respondents from the target population of four hundred thirty nine (439) faculty and staff at Central Philippine University were randomly drawn using the lottery method. However, only one hundred fifty-one (151) respondents successfully accomplished the questionnaire, which represents seventy-three (73) percent retrieval.

The questionnaire was based on the list of life events from Encarta 2000 and Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS). Modification was done on some of the events presented in the SRRS to make it more adaptable to the local setting. From a list of perceived sources of stress, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which these stressors had affected them based on the Likert Scale shown below:

> 5 - to a very great extent
> 4 - to a great extent
> 3 - to some extent
> 2 - to a little extent
> 1 - none at all

Mean Likert Scale scores were computed and used as basis for discussion. On the other hand, life events or situations that can cause people to feel tension and negative emotions such as anxiety and danger were measured in terms of Life Change Units (LCU). The life events are categorized according to the following levels of LCU scores:

> 300 and above - 79 percent chance that stressors will lead to sickness
> 200 to 299 - 51 percent chance that stressors will lead to sickness
> 150 to 199 - 37 percent chance that stressors will lead to sickness
> below 150 - least chance of getting sick

The data were coded, encoded and descriptive tables were generated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS ver. 6).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the study revealed that the majority of respondents were middle-aged with an average age of 43.45 years. The respondents were mostly females and married. Eight in ten have MA units/degrees or doctoral units/degrees while 2 in ten are bachelor degree holders. A little more than half were Protestant by religion, some are Catholics and a few belong to other religious sectors. Seven in ten received a monthly income of below P10,000 while the rest have monthly income of more than P10,000. A little more than half have been working at CPU for more than 10 years, whereas, the rest have been working for less than 10 years.

Respondents identified the extent to which the perceived sources of stress had affected them. Many of them indicated that the perceived sources of stress had only affected them to a little extent or none at all, but when their answers were taken as a whole, these stressors appeared to affect them to some extent. Based on the mean scores, inadequate pay, unfair rating in performance and lack of supportive superiors and administrators affected them to some extent (Table 1).

All of the items perceived to be the sources of stress in terms of working conditions, affected them to some extent but the top three that affected them were too much noise, inadequate ventilation, and limited working space (Table 2).

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents Classified According to Their Perceived Sources of Stress in Terms of Administrative Support and Rewards (Multiple Response, N = 151).

Perceived Sources of Stress	Very Great Extent		Great Extent		Some Extent		Little Extent		None at All		Mean
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Lack of praise, recognition and appreciation	6	3.97	18	11.92	55	36.42	49	32.45	16	10.60	2.65
Inadequate pay	11	7.28	32	21.19	58	38.41	34	22.52	12	7.95	2.97
Lack of benefits	10	6.62	23	15.23	49	32.45	42	27.81	21	13.91	2.72
No opportunities for personal or career development	13	8.60	21	13.91	40	26.49	42	27.81	29	19.21	2.63
Adm. Policies in conflict with employee's interest	11	7.28	18	11.92	45	29.80	44	29.14	26	17.22	2.61
Lack of supportive superiors and administrators	14	9.27	29	19.21	36	23.84	43	28.48	24	15.89	2.77
Unfair rating in performance	22	14.57	29	19.21	34	22.52	33	21.85	24	15.89	2.94
Lack of security of tenure from job	14	9.27	16	10.60	27	17.88	35	23.18	53	35.10	2.33
Limited vacation, sick, emergency leave	10	6.62	17	11.26	38	25.16	46	30.46	33	21.85	2.48
Restricted teaching, loading and study load	2	1.32	17	11.26	33	21.85	34	22.52	44	29.14	2.22
Total	113	74.80	220	145.71	415	274.82	402	266.22	282	186.76	

Grand mean = 2.64

As to their relationships with colleagues and superiors, the sources of stress that affected them to some extent were communication problems, lack of team work and coordination and poor conflict management. Hoarding of authority, professional jealousies, interpersonal conflicts and interpersonal problems affect them least. (Table 3)

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents Classified According to Perceived Sources of Stress in Terms of Working Conditions or Atmosphere (Multiple Response, N = 151).

Perceived Sources of Stress	Very Great Extent		Great Extent		Some Extent		Little Extent		None at All		Mean
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Limited working space	16	10.60	32	21.19	42	27.81	29	19.21	26	17.22	2.88
Inadequate supplies	17	11.26	20	13.25	46	30.46	39	25.83	19	12.58	2.84
Too much noise	23	15.23	30	19.87	40	26.49	30	19.87	19	12.58	3.06
Odorous Faculty room	20	13.25	24	15.89	24	15.89	23	15.23	40	26.49	2.70
Malfunctioning equipment	15	9.93	34	22.52	28	18.54	40	26.49	25	16.56	2.82
Inadequate ventilation	25	16.56	30	19.87	29	19.21	26	17.22	34	22.52	2.90
Lack of comfort rooms	22	14.57	24	15.89	29	19.21	28	18.54	37	24.5	2.76
Lack of available resources	14	9.27	22	14.57	46	30.46	43	28.48	16	10.60	2.82
Lack of privacy	15	9.93	23	15.23	39	25.83	37	24.50	27	17.88	2.73
Limited access to facilities	15	9.93	18	11.92	45	29.80	44	29.14	18	11.92	2.77
Total	182	120.53	257	170.20	368	243.70	339	224.51	261	172.85	

Grand mean = 2.83

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents classified According to Perceived Sources of Stress in Terms of The Relationships With Colleagues and Superiors (Multiple Response, N = 151).

Perceived Sources of Stress	Very Great Extent		Great Extent		Some Extent		Little Extent		None at All		Mean
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Lack of Teamwork and coordination	15	9.93	27	17.88	32	21.19	42	27.81	29	19.21	2.70
Professional jealousies	12	7.95	19	12.58	29	19.21	35	23.18	46	30.46	2.40
Communication problems	10	6.62	33	21.85	36	23.84	41	27.15	23	15.23	2.76
Interpersonal problems	8	5.30	17	11.26	42	27.81	42	27.81	35	23.18	2.45
Grapevine, etc.	10	6.62	20	13.25	40	26.49	32	21.19	37	24.50	2.53
Dictatorial/autocratic superior	19	12.58	20	13.25	26	17.22	31	20.53	46	30.46	2.54
Interpersonal conflicts	9	5.96	18	11.92	35	23.18	40	26.49	38	25.17	2.43
Hoarding of authority	9	5.96	22	14.57	26	17.22	36	23.84	43	28.48	2.40
Non-involvement in change process	7	4.64	25	16.56	36	23.84	30	19.87	40	26.49	2.49
Poor conflict management	10	6.62	21	13.91	39	25.83	38	25.17	32	21.19	2.56
Total	109	72.18	222	147.03	341	225.83	367	243.04	369	244.37	

Grand mean = 2.53

From a list, respondents were asked to identify those which caused readjustment in their lives. Among the forty-three life events considered, death of a close family member, Christmas, personal injury or illness, vacation, change in work hours or conditions, and change in financial status top the list. On the other hand trouble with the boss, jail term, marital separation, marital reconciliation and foreclosure of mortgage property or minor law violations ranked the least (Table 4).

Table 4. Top Five Life and Least Five Events that has Occurred in the Last Five Years Which Caused Readjustment in the Life of Respondents (Multiple Response, N = 151).

Life Events	f	%
Top Five Events in Life		
Death of a close family member	84	55.63
Christmas	82	54.30
Vacation/Personal Injury or illness	79	52.32
Change in work hours or conditions	72	47.68
Change in financial status	69	45.70
Total	386	255.63
Least Five Events in Life		
Trouble with boss	1	0.66
Jail Term	4	2.65
Marital Separation	5	3.31
Marital Reconciliation	6	3.97
Foreclosure of mortgage property/Minor Law Violations	8	5.30
Total (Multiple Response)	24	15.89

The data in Table 5 show that almost four in every ten respondents have 79 percent chance of getting sick from these stressors the following year, two in ten have 51 percent chance, one in ten has 37 percent chance and two in ten have the least chance. The data suggest that an alarming six in every ten (58.94 percent) employees of this university have 51 to 79 percent chance of getting sick (with LCU score of 200 and above) from these stressors the following year while more than one-tenth (13.91 percent) has 37 percent or less chance of getting sick.

Table 5. Respondents Social Readjustment Rating Scores in Terms of Life Change Units, (N = 151)

Social Readjustment Rating Scores	f	%
149 and below	33	21.85
150-199	21	13.91
200-299	29	19.20
300 and above	60	39.74
Did Not Respond	8	5.30
Total	151	100.00

As generally shown in Table 6, the respondents were affected by the daily hassles of life to some extent. Among the hassles of daily life presented, having too many things to do affect the respondents to great extent, whereas, worrying about health, dealing with home maintenance, feeling concern about weight and misplacing or losing things affect them to some extent. The least source of stress that affects them to least extent was doing yard work or outside home maintenance.

Table 6. Distribution of Respondents Classified According To The Hassles of Daily Life (Multiple Response, N = 151).

Hassles of Daily Living	Very Great Extent		Great Extent		Some Extent		Little Extent		None at All		Mean
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Concern about weight	9	5.96	24	15.89	43	28.48	25	16.56	25	16.56	2.74
Worrying about health of a family member	32	21.19	27	17.8	46	30.46	31	20.53	11	7.28	3.26
Dealing with home maintenance	23	15.23	34	22.5	53	35.10	29	19.21	9	5.96	3.22
Having too many things to do	32	21.19	40	26.49	46	30.46	24	15.89	4	2.65	3.49
Misplacing or losing things	6	3.97	29	19.21	42	27.81	44	29.14	22	14.57	2.67
Doing yard work or outside home maintenance	5	3.31	10	6.62	36	23.84	49	32.45	42	27.81	2.20
Worrying about property, investment or taxes	11	7.28	15	9.93	37	24.50	40	26.49	42	27.81	2.40
Worrying about crime	7	4.64	15	9.93	39	25.83	38	25.16	43	28.48	2.33
Feeling concern about physical appearance	3	1.99	24	15.89	47	31.12	46	30.46	26	17.22	2.53
Total	128	84.75	218	144.26	389	257.6	326	215.89	224	148.34	

Grand mean = 2.77

Among the uplifts presented in Table 7, completing a task, spending time with family, feeling healthy and relating well with spouse or lover greatly affect the respondents. Moreover, relating well with friends, getting enough sleep home pleasing to him/her and meeting responsibilities also greatly affect them. Other uplifts affect them to some extent.

As to common health problems experienced in the last five years, most of the faculty respondents claimed that exposure to chalk dust, infectious agents and illnesses in hospital and community, travel and exposure to hazardous chemicals, fumes and handling of microorganisms were hazardous to their health while exposure to computer radiation was reported risk by staff members. The most common health problems presented were Upper Respiratory Infection and its accompanying symptoms like cough, colds, running nose, sore throat, headache and fever. Other reported illnesses were hypertension, asthma, allergy, rheumatism/arthritis, ulcer/hyperacidity, migraine and diabetes mellitus.

Table 7. Distribution of Respondents Classified According to Their Uplifts (Multiple Response, N = 151)

Uplifts	Very Great Extent		Great Extent		Some Extent		Little Extent		None at All		Mean
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Relating well with spouse or lover	66	43.71	21	13.91	8	5.30	6	3.97	7	4.64	4.23
Relating well with friends	69	45.70	46	30.46	20	13.25	7	4.64	3	1.99	4.18
Completing a task	81	53.64	41	27.15	17	11.26	6	3.97	0	0	4.36
Feeling healthy	70	46.36	52	34.44	20	13.25	3	1.99	2	1.32	4.26
Getting enough sleep	61	40.40	57	37.75	20	13.25	6	3.97	3	1.99	4.14
Eating a lot	16	10.60	25	16.56	62	41.06	25	16.56	17	11.26	2.99
Meeting responsibilities	52	34.44	47	31.12	37	24.50	5	3.31	4	2.65	3.95
Visiting, telephoning or writing someone	22	14.57	40	26.49	50	33.11	25	16.56	7	4.64	3.31
Spending time with family	77	50.99	40	26.49	19	12.58	6	3.97	2	1.32	4.28
Home pleasing to you	68	45.03	35	23.18	22	14.57	11	7.28	2	1.32	4.13
Total	582	385.44	404	267.55	275	182.13	100	66.22	47	31.13	

Grand mean = 3.98

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the significant findings and conclusions derived from the study, the following recommendations are presented:

The administration should look into the performance rating system, both for faculty and staff, to find ways to make it more objective as possible.

Adequate ventilation in classrooms and offices should be provided and improvement of existing facilities should be undertaken like installation of air conditioning units in offices and faculty rooms. Also, to avoid too much noise, students should be prevented from staying in corridors during class hours and provision of study areas where students could stay and study during break is recommended.

The administration could find ways to improve the leadership styles of superiors through a series of workshops on self-awareness and leadership training. Group therapy and team-building exercises could also help improve teamwork and coordination with colleagues and superiors.

The institution could plan for improving the coping strategies of its employees through the implementation of stress reducing techniques in the university. These strategies could include regular exercise, listening to music, dance, and meditation.

To lessen the high risk of employees of getting sick, the university could conduct a seminar-workshop on mental hygiene and stress debriefing, creation of guidance committee and strengthening spiritual programs that cater to the needs of the employees.

Opportunity for taking breaks like long weekends and vacation could be implemented as well as self-awareness program every semester for all employees as a preventive measure to recurring stress.

Use of white boards instead of chalk boards or other multi media facilities is highly recommended. Hazard pay for those who are frequently exposed to infectious agents and illnesses in the hospitals and community and provision of computer screens to all the computers in the university is also recommended. Information dissemination on how to avoid hazards in the workplace should be planned.

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