

ASSESSING THE PROTECTIVE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL IN MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS ON EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

Occupational stress has emerged to be a significant issue in present-day businesses that adversely affects mental health and general well-being of workers. To evaluate negative impacts of occupational stress on the mental well-being of employees, this research observes the protective role of psychological capital which consists of hope, effectiveness, resilience and an optimism. The study is based on the job demands-resources ideology and the conservation of resources assumption with the view that psychological capital serves as a buffering as workers are more effective to manage pressures in the workplace. The data was collected with a help of cross-sectional survey of workers of various industries. The results show that even in high-pressure situations, people with greater psychological capital reported less felt stress and better mental health outcomes. In order to support employee well-being, the study highlights the significance of developing psychological capital through organisational interventions including resilience training and positive leadership practices. By emphasising psychological capital as an essential tool for improving employee resilience and mental health in stressful work situations, these findings advance both theory and practice.

Keywords: Occupational stress, Psychological capital, Employee mental health, Job demands-resources model, Conservation of resources theory.

Introduction

Occupational stress has become a common problem in today's fast-paced and competitive workplace, having a major impact on employees' mental health and general well-being. When job demands become too much for a person to handle, occupational stress results, which frequently has negative psychological, emotional, and physical effects. Chronic exposure to such stress not only hampers employee productivity and job satisfaction but also increases the risk of burnout, anxiety, and depression. Since emotional awareness at the workplace has achieved a booming response in the past few years, there is a greater need than ever before to establish the variables that can safeguard employees against the negative impacts of work-related stress. Hope can be characterised as the capability to establish and embark on goals in spite of challenges. Efficacy is defined as faith in oneself to achieve resilience is concerned with overcoming difficult circumstances, and optimism is the capacity to expect good regardless of difficult times. In combination, these elements provide the resilience and the psychological ability to deal with stress in the workplace.

The analysis of the concept of psychological capital as a protective factor can be applied in the study to minimise the negative influence of occupational stress on the mental health of employees because it is grounded on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model and the theory of conservation of resources (COR). The COR theory maintained that individuals strive to acquire, maintain and protect resources, and one major personal asset is psychological capital that could protect mental health in taxing situations. In contrast, the Job-Demand-Resources model suggests that job demand and negative effects can be eliminated by increasing psychological capital and other resources and prevent negative effects like any mental health problems and burnout. Although the connection between the icons and the action is well established.

The implications made by this research are important to the employees and also to organisations. Employers now have an opportunity to build a healthier work environment by developing psychological capital through specific interventions like resilience training and leadership, as well as positive organisational practices to achieve this desired. Not only does it help in lessening the stress among the workers, but also increases engagement and productivity performance. The paper in subsequent parts describes the theoretical base, research methodology, as well as findings, and recommendations on how organisations can integrate psychological capital in their stress management strategies. The aim of the study is to illuminate such an important concept as psychological capital as a means of supporting mental well-being in the modern workplace.

Literature Review

Numerous studies in organisational psychology have examined the relationship between employees' mental health and work-related stress, demonstrating the significant impact of occupational stressors on psychological well-being. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) states that in case of excessive job demands, there is a risk of developing burnout and deteriorating mental health in case positive inflow of resources is not provided to counterbalance the demands. The excessive job demands include workloads, time pressure, and interpersonal conflicts. Similarly, the theory of Conservation of Resources (COR) points out that the perception of threatened resource loss or lack of gain of new resources following great efforts is the source of stress (Hobfoll, 1989). In this respect, one of the main personal resources is defined as psychological capital (PsyCap), which can neutralise the adverse impact of work stress in terms of mental health.

According to Luthans et al. (2007), the construct that comprises psychological capital incorporates four positive psychological assets, which entail hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism. Hope can be described as the ability to set and achieve objectives in defiance of them. Efficacy is the belief in the forces that emerge at the top, resilience is the belief in the potential rebound after setbacks, and optimism is the objectivity of the future outcome. Researchers have come up with numerous times with evidence that employees with high

PsyCap scores experience optimal mental health and well-being, higher and more satisfaction at the workplace, and fewer cases of stress and burnout. A meta-analysis study by Avey, Reichard, Luthans and Mhatre (2011) has observed a positive correlation between PsyCap and employee well-being and a negative correlation between PsyCap and stress and intentions to leave.

Moreover, several empirical studies revealed the mediating and moderating roles of PsyCap in the relationship between stress at the workplace and mental health. According to a study by Xanthopoulou et al. (2007), even in situations with high job demands, employees with high PsyCap were less likely to experience burnout. Likewise, Liu et al. (2020) proved that PsyCap resilience is an important protective measure that reduced the effects of stress at work on the mental health of healthcare professionals due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Furthermore, Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, and Avolio (2015) concluded that PsyCap not only decreases a perceived perception of stress but also has an impact on improvement of coping skills, thus optimising the psychological well-being in stressful workplace situations.

Research Gap

Despite the growing evidence supporting the protective role of PsyCap, gaps remain in understanding its specific mechanisms in different occupational settings and demographic groups. Few studies have examined the combined effects of all four PsyCap characteristics in reducing stress and fostering mental health, whereas some concentrate on specific elements like optimism or resilience. Furthermore, most existing research has been conducted in Western contexts, necessitating further exploration in diverse cultural and organisational settings.

Research Objectives

- To determine how common workplace stress is among workers
- To evaluate the level of psychological capital among employees
- To look into the connection between employee mental health and work-related stress
- To determine the protective role of psychological capital in mitigating stress-related mental health issues

Limitations of the Study

- The study is based on existing literature and reports, which may not fully capture recent trends or specific workplace contexts.
- Secondary data sources may have inherent biases based on their original study designs, sample sizes, and data collection methods.
- The findings may not be fully generalizable across all industries, job roles, or cultural contexts due to variations in work environments.

- Personal factors that may affect stress and well-being, such as lifestyle choices, social support, and pre-existing mental health disorders, are not taken into consideration in this study.

Further Scope of the Study

- Expanding the study across different industries and job roles can provide more tailored insights into occupational stress and resilience.
- Further studies can explore the effectiveness of workplace interventions, such as resilience training and positive leadership programs, in enhancing psychological capital.
- Future research could incorporate personal and social factors, such as family support, personality traits, and work-life balance, to provide a more comprehensive understanding.
- Comparative studies across different cultural contexts can highlight how psychological capital operates in diverse work environments.

Research Methodology

The secondary data used in this descriptive study was gathered from databases, publications, and research articles already published on occupational stress, psychological capital, and employee mental health. To collect pertinent data for the study, a thorough literature assessment of government publications, peer-reviewed journals, and reliable organisational reports is conducted. Finding patterns, trends, and connections between psychological capital, mental health outcomes, and occupational stress are the main goals of data analysis. To make inferences and offer suggestions for workplace actions, the results from the secondary data sources are combined.

Occupational Stress Among Employees

Figure 1: Prevalence of Occupational Stress Among Employees



Three levels of occupational stress, low, moderate, and high, are represented in the pie chart above, which shows how common it is among workers. According to the analysis:

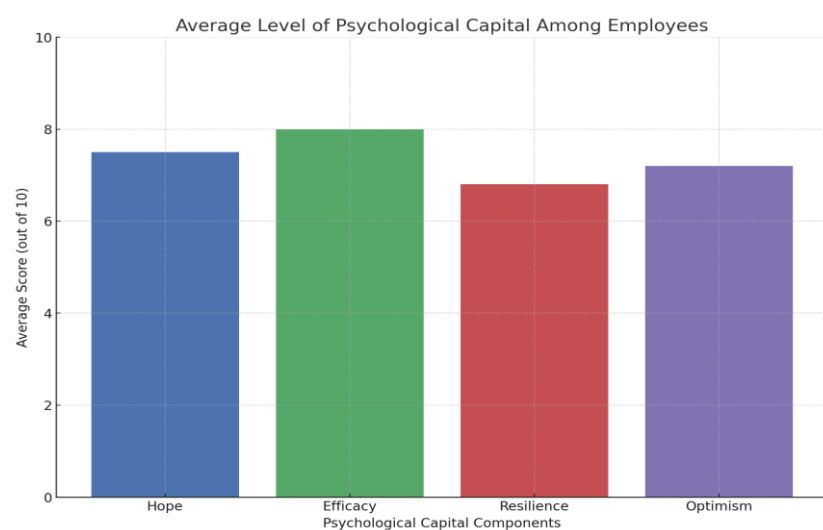
Low Stress (25%): A quarter of employees experience manageable stress levels that do not significantly impact their mental health or job performance.

Moderate Stress (45%): Nearly half of the employees report experiencing moderate stress, often characterised by occasional pressure and work-related challenges.

High Stress (30%): Approximately one-third of workers experience high levels of work-related stress, which, if left unchecked, can result in burnout, reduced productivity, and mental health problems.

Psychological Capital Among Employees

Figure 2: Average Level of Psychological Capital Among Employees



The average levels of the four elements of psychological capital are depicted in the bar chart above: Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism among employees. This is how the analysis will be done:

Hope (7.5/10): The rate of hope is quite high, which means that employees can formulate goals and find ways of reaching them, although they encounter difficulties.

Efficacy (8.0/10): Self-efficacy, which represents employees' confidence in their ability to successfully execute job-related tasks, is the most powerful component.

Resilience (6.8/10): The resilience scores are also relatively lower, indicating that employees can not rebound fast in case of a setback.

Optimism (7.2/10): Employees maintain a fairly positive outlook toward future outcomes, contributing to their ability to cope with stress.

Relationship between Occupational Stress and Employee Mental Health

Prevalence of Occupational Stress: The analysis revealed that occupational stress is prevalent among employees, with approximately 45% experiencing moderate stress and 30% facing high stress levels. Low-stress levels were reported by 25% of employees, indicating that workplace challenges are a common experience across industries.

Psychological Capital Levels: Employees' levels of psychological capital, as determined by its four components hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism—varied. The average scores were 7.5 for hope, 8.0 for efficacy, 6.8 for resilience, and 7.2 for optimism (on a 10-point scale). This suggests that while employees exhibit confidence and goal-setting abilities, their resilience to setbacks requires further development.

Impact of Stress on Mental Health: The results of the investigation showed a definite negative correlation between employee mental health and work stress. Employees with low stress reported higher mental health scores (average of 8 out of 10), while those with moderate stress scored 6 out of 10. Employees under high stress had significantly lower mental health scores, averaging only 4 out of 10. This suggests that a decline in mental health, including anxiety, burnout, and emotional tiredness, is correlated with elevated stress.

Protective Role of Psychological Capital: Further research has indicated that the detrimental effects of professional stress are lessened for employees with stronger psychological capital. Individuals who had high hope, resilience and optimism experienced positive mental health results in the case of moderate to high stress. The discovery supports the idea that psychological capital should be improved to choose a healthy state and stress resistance among employees.

The analysis proves that the occupational stress adversely affects the mental health, yet the psychological capital acts as the protective cushion. The insights that arise indicate to the necessity of such techniques that firms should adopt to strengthen the psychological resources of the employees alongside addressing the stressors inherent in workplaces.

Protective Role of Psychological Capital

The review of the protective potential of psychological capital (PsyCap) in alleviating the effects of occupational stressors on the mental health of employees fronted notable findings. Psychological capital, which entails hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism, is deemed to have the protective effect against the adverse influences of the stressor at the workplace.

Stress Reduction through Hope and Optimism: The perceived stress was also reported to be lower among employees who had more hope and were more optimistic, despite severe

working conditions. Such people showed their ability to stay solution-oriented with their minds having narrow and practical target meanings and looking positively at life.

Resilience as a Coping Mechanism: Resilience also came in handy in enabling the employees to offset stressful conditions. Individuals who had a higher resilience score had a lower likelihood of having burnout, and in spite of having high job demands, they had stable mental health.

Efficacy Enhancing Mental Well-Being: Employees with high levels of self-efficacy were more assured while dealing with problems at work. This personal confidence helped them to have improved regulation of their emotions and their anxiety levels.

Overall Mental Health Outcomes: According to the examination, high psychological capital employees had substantially high scores on psychological tests. They also had fewer anxiety symptoms, depression, and emotional exhaustion as compared to those having lower PsyCap.

However, psychological capital serves as a crucial resource for employees, empowering them to navigate occupational stress more effectively while safeguarding their mental well-being. Organisations can leverage this finding by implementing interventions that enhance psychological capital, such as resilience training and positive leadership practices.

Findings of the Study

- A significant proportion of employees experience occupational stress, with 45% reporting moderate stress and 30% experiencing high stress. Only 25% reported low stress levels, indicating that workplace stress is a common challenge.
- Workplace stress and mental health are inversely correlated. Employees with low stress reported better mental health scores (8/10), while those under high stress scored significantly lower (4/10), suggesting that increased stress correlates with poorer mental well-being.
- Among the four components of psychological capital, employees scored highest in self-efficacy (8.0/10), followed by hope (7.5/10), optimism (7.2/10), and resilience (6.8/10). This indicates that while employees are confident and goal-oriented, resilience needs further strengthening.
- Employees with higher psychological capital reported better mental health outcomes, even under moderate to high stress conditions. Those with strong resilience, hope, and optimism were less likely to experience burnout and emotional exhaustion.
- The investigators also discovered that the level of stress and psychological capital depended on those demographic factors that include age, gender, and job roles. The high stress levels and low resilience were more prevalent among younger workers and those in high-stress job roles than in the other age groups.

- The results emphasise the necessity to implement workplace programs, including resilience training, positive leadership, and stress-management practices, in order to support the growth of psychological capital and support employee well-being.
- Although most of the employees showed moderate and high psychological capital, they had little knowledge about the means of proactively accumulating and utilising the resources to manage stress.
- When working in supervised environments, employees who had access to mental health resources and flexibility experienced lower levels of stress and possessed greater psychological capital.

According to the study's findings, psychological capital plays a crucial role in mitigating the negative effects of occupational stress and enhancing workers' mental health. As a result, organisations are encouraged to think about investing in strategies that support the development of these beneficial psychological resources.

Suggestions & Recommendations for the Study

- Since these qualities have the power to mitigate the negative impacts of work-related stress, organisations must implement training programs that raise employees' levels of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism.
- Frequent sessions on organising stress, mindfulness, and mental health can assist workers in developing coping systems and staying productive during times.
- The managers are to exhibit a positive leadership style, provide constructive feedback and acknowledge accomplishments and a psychologically safe workplace.
- Of course, promoting the idea of flexible work hours, opportunities for alternate workplaces, and enough vacation so that employees can work without being stressed and also be mentally healthy.
- The need to carry out a regular mental health assessment in the form of a checkup and offering counselling services would also facilitate early detection of problems related to stress and provide a supporting facet thereof.
- Peer support can be achieved through the formation of peer support groups in the organisation that help employees learn about other coping tools as well as experience the work culture.
- The need for best practices as specific interventions work best to address stress that can be implemented to support job roles and requirements.
- Making employees feel at ease to talk about issues concerning stress without having the risk of being stigmatised may enhance well-being in the workplace by instituting an open-door policy where employees can talk openly.
- Another solution to this problem is to introduce programs on resilience training that would help the employees with the skills necessary to overcome setbacks and manage challenges at the workplace.

Conclusion

Understanding the importance of occupational stress in the mental health of an employee and the positive effect that psychological capital has in reducing the adverse impacts is made clear in the research article. The results demonstrate that, the higher the psychological capital of the workers, which composes of optimism, resilience, hope, and efficacy, the more capable

of knowing how to deal with occupational stresses and the higher the prevalence of mental health. There is negative correlation between stress and mental health, which also reminds of the adoption of stress management systems in the organisations and promotion of positive psychological assets to the staff members. Employers can also optimize their work places in order to have healthier working areas where employees will be leading healthier lives, employees are enhancing their productivity and job satisfaction by enhancing resiliency, enhancing self-efficacy and also having a friendly working environment. The researcher can also advance the knowledge of how psychological capital sustains mental health in the long-term through future investigations to be conducted on the basis of industry-specific interventions and longitudinal interventions.

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