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Coping Strategies among Employees towards Occupational Stress

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ABSTRACT

Workplace, being a dynamic and changing environment is considered to be one of the major sources of daily stress among employees. Various researchers identified ways of coping to address the demand of occupational stress. Eastern Visayas State University – Tanauan Campus as an academic institution is expected to provide timely and responsive services to its stakeholders. The study sought to evaluate the relationship of coping strategies to level of occupational stress among employees of EVSUTC that will provide basis for possible implementation of health and wellness program or policy intervention in stress management program. The study was anchored on the Job Demand Control Model which provides explanation on the occupational stress level among employees. The study utilized a standardized instrument and questionnaires were distributed to 146 respondents to extract the different variables and its relationship. Descriptive-correlational design was also utilized and appropriate statistical treatment observed to obtain association. The study revealed employing self-efficacy (one's own motivation) as the primary coping strategies identified to be effective in addressing stress. The findings also revealed, that new employees have higher stress level, while those with longer number of work or occupational experience display lesser amount of stress. The researchers recommend that university administrators should focus on faculty welfare by providing a health and wellness program to address occupational related – stress. Policy related to health promotion and prevention should also be considered. Senior employees are also encouraged to conduct mentoring and capacity training among junior personnel in order lessen the level of occupational stress.

Keywords: Coping strategies, Occupational stress, University employees, Job demand control model

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

In a fast changing and dynamic work environment, stress has become a part of employee's daily life in every organization. One may suffer physical stress in excessive use of their body, while others are on mental stress in different demands of their cognitive abilities and the rest experiences emotional stress in dealing with personal and work relationship. It is something that employees cannot avoid in every tasks that they need to adapt and respond. Stress is the state of body to respond inaccurately to a specific demand for change⁽¹⁾. Experts further stated that complete freedom from stress would mean death. How employees treat stress will determine the impact of stress on them and on the organization, they work for.

Stress affects everyone regardless of gender, age, occupation and economic status⁽²⁾. Most of this occupation are employees, businessmen, teachers, university administrators, university professors, service provider personnel, working and non-working women, university graduate and post-graduate students and even children suffer from stress⁽³⁾. Occupational stress is viewed as either a response or as a motivation that brings positive or negative effects to employees. Human has a natural response known as "flight or fight reaction" to a specific stressor encountered.

Due to increasing patterns of occupational stress in the workplace, various coping strategies studies have been identified by several researchers and experts to be effective in handling stress. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) provide guidelines on preventing occupational stress in organizations⁽⁴⁾. Some experts argue that coping strategies help employees increase adaptive capabilities to deal with stress. This is done to minimize the consequences of stress from stressor.

The Eastern Visayas State University Tanauan Campus as an academic institution expected to provide timely and responsive services to its stakeholders. Further, the university require faculty and staff to carry-out the four-fold functions such as instruction, research, extension activities and participate actively in income generating projects. This directed EVSUTC employees to occupational stress such as role conflict, role overload and role ambiguity that contribute to stimulating stress on the numerous demands by the university.

The university administrators are encouraged to focus their attention in reducing stress among faculty members⁽⁵⁾. The different effective coping strategies of university employees presented ideas for a sound stress management program⁽⁶⁾. It is observed that employees with higher work engagement attitudes use adaptive coping strategies in dealing with stress. Several studies supported this claim that a successful stress management program in an organization promotes health and wellness of employees^{(7),(8),(9)}.

This can be address by implementing a comprehensive health and wellness program in the university. Several studies shown great benefits such as: reduce health care costs and absenteeism, increase level of work engagement attitudes, greater life satisfaction, greater organizational commitments and higher organizations productivity and profitability.

Several studies support this claims that organizations who offer wellness programs to their employee's gain business competitive advantage in its operations over other organizations. The numerous results are decrease percentage of absenteeism in employees, increase self-esteem and job satisfaction among employees, increase organization productivity, increase retention of highly skilled staff, improve competitive advantage, improved employee health and healthy lifestyle choices, improved organizational reputation because of the its commitment to employee's wellbeing⁽¹⁰⁾.

University employees with effective stress coping strategies such as work engagement attitude will be more productive and encounter low work stress⁽⁶⁾. This give opportunity for university administrators to consider good management style by integrating stress management program and offering health and wellness program to its employees that will provide numerous advantages on its employee's job satisfaction, reducing employee's burnout, job stress and mental health problems and organizational overall performance. The successful implementation of a comprehensive stress management program as revealed in different studies give significant advantage to variety of groups and individuals in different organizations⁽¹¹⁾.

Employees higher level of job satisfaction and work life balance greatly affects organizations productivity, business turnover and creates more business opportunities. An effective management style of managers and supervisors can influence their staff to use their full potential and increase business productivity. Various experts revealed that positive relationship among employees and supervisors contributes greatly to the level of stress and job satisfaction⁽¹²⁾.

In addition, the different coping strategies of EVSUTC employees towards occupational stress will be evaluated as a basis for health and wellness program or policy intervention in stress management program in the university. Several researches conducted to lessen occupational stress in the organizations but still there is a dearth of study in the universities relative to coping strategies as possible intervention for health and wellness program or stress management program⁽¹³⁾.

Study Objectives

This study sought to assess the relationship of coping strategies to level of occupational stress among employees of EVSUTC that will provide basis for health and wellness program or a policy intervention in stress management program in the university.

Further, it pursued to give light to the following: demographic profile of the respondents in terms of sex, age, marital status, family size, hours per week at work, nature of work and length in service and determine the respondent's self-perceived level of coping strategies and occupational stress. Moreover, the study determined the respondent's level of coping strategies and occupational stress according to profile variables. Significant coping strategies of employees were also correlated to their level of occupational stress.

Scope and Delimitation

This study is limited on finding out the significant relationship between coping strategies and occupational stress level of the respondents.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The study was anchored on the Job Demand Control Model of EVSUTC employees, on the assessment of stress among employees and its factors and promotion of health and wellness in the workplace⁽¹⁵⁾. JDC Model provides an explanation on the level of occupational stress among employees based on job demands and the level of its job control at work.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 indicates the coping strategies employed by EVSUTC employees to manage their occupational stress regardless of the different occupational stressors likely experience. The impact of these effective coping strategies and occupational stress likely affects the employees Job Performance, Satisfaction, Organizational Performance and Work Life Satisfaction in the university. These effective coping strategies will provide insights for university administrator to come up with health and wellness program or a policy on stress management program.

METHODS

Research Design

The study utilized a quantitative research data analysis and employed a descriptive-correlational method of research to assess and describe the different variables that was consider in the study and to identify the relationship between them. This method of research was considered the most appropriate one because it comprises fact-finding and establishing existing conditions.

Research Locale

The study focused on the coping strategies of EVSUTC employees towards occupational stress for school year 2018-2019.

Sampling Method

The study utilized a universal sampling method to all EVSUTC employees to capture an overall understanding on the level of occupational stress among employees.

Research Instrument

A standardized instrument was adapted which has been found significant in this study. It consists eleven (11) items designed to measure employees occupational stress. Six (6) items to measure role overload, fifteen (15) items measuring role conflict and nine (9) items about role ambiguity and fourteen (14) items measuring coping strategies used by EVSUTC employees. The survey questionnaire contains the following salient parts: Part I of the survey instrument sought information about the respondent's profile with regards to their sex, age, number of children, hours per week at work, nature of work, year of service; Part II level of occupational stress; Part III level of occupational stressor; Part IV sought information on the respondent's coping strategies.

Method of Scoring

To determine the level of occupational stress and perception on coping strategies, the following score ranges with corresponding qualitative description and interpretation were used.

Table 1. Methods of scoring

Mean Range	Qualitative Description	Interpretation	
		Level of Stress	Coping Strategies
4.21-5.00	Strongly Agree	Severe Stress	Very Effective
3.21-4.20	Agree		
2.61-3.20	Either Agree or Disagree	Moderate Stress	Effective
1.81-2.60	Disagree	Mild Stress	Less Effective
1.00-1.80	Strongly Disagree		Not Effective

Statistical Treatment

The collected data from the respondents were tabulated, analyzed and statistically treated. The study used frequency counts, percentages, and means to describe the categorical data. For correlation analysis, the Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient was used. In addition, in testing for difference, the t-test for two population means and One-way analysis of variance was employed using IBM SPSS 22.

RESULTS

Presentation of Data

The study attempted to establish the occupational stress and coping strategies level among Eastern Visayas State University – Tanauan Campus employees.

Further, it pursued to give light to the following: demographic profile of the respondents in terms of sex, age, marital status, family size, hours per week at work, nature of work and length in service and determine the respondent's self-perceived level of coping strategies and occupational stress. Moreover, the study determined the respondent's level of coping strategies and occupational stress according to profile variables. Significant coping strategies of employees were also correlated to their level of occupational stress.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents to profile variables

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Sex		
male	70	47.9
female	76	52.1
Total	146	100.0
Age		
20-35	72	49.3
36-49	35	24.0
50 above	39	26.7
Total	146	100.0
Marital Status		
single	76	52.1
married	61	41.8
common law	5	3.4
Widow/widower	4	2.7
Total	146	100.0
Family Size		
1-3	44	30.1
4-6	71	48.6
7 above	31	21.2
Total	146	100.0
Number of Hours at Work per Week		
40 hours	128	87.7
41 – 45 hours	11	7.5
46 hours above	7	4.8
Total	146	100.0
Nature of Work		
Department/Unit Head (Faculty)	10	6.8
Faculty	46	31.5
Frontline Services (Job Orders)	24	16.4
Frontline Services (Support Staff)	20	13.7
Coordinator/Program Chair (Faculty)	11	7.5
Administrative Function (Faculty)	15	10.3
Units Heads (Admin Personnel)	20	13.7
Total	146	100.0
Length in Service		
1-5 years	26	17.8
6-10 years	39	26.7
11-15 years	32	21.9
16-20 years	28	19.2
21-25 years	6	4.1
26-30 years	15	10.3
Total	146	100.0

Table 2. Level of respondents

Variable	Mean	Qualitative description	Interpretation
Occupational Stress	2.88	Either Agree or Disagree	Moderate Stress
Coping Strategies	3.01	Either Agree or Disagree	Effective

Table 3. Coping strategies significant predictor on occupational stress

	Ways of coping	Weighted mean
1.	Engagement for self-efficacy (one's own motivation)	4.11
2.	Exercise/physical activity sessions	3.97
3.	Counseling sessions (e.g. peer counseling, family counseling)	3.59
4.	Gym sessions after office hours with colleagues	3.49
5.	Team building activities	3.16

Table 4. Difference between level of occupational stress and profile variable (sex)

Variable	t_c	df	p-value	Interpretation
Sex	-0.853	144	0.395	Not Significant

Table 5. Difference between level of occupational stress and profile variable

Variable	F	p-value	Interpretation
Age	1.313	0.187	Not Significant
Marital Status	1.345	0.168	Not Significant
Family Size	0.689	0.824	Not Significant
Number of hours at work per week	1.223	0.249	Not Significant
Nature of Work	1.299	0.195	Not Significant
Length in Service	1.875	0.022	Significant

Table 6. Difference between coping strategies and profile variable

Variable	F	p-value	Interpretation
Age	1.221	0.229	Not Significant
Marital Status	1.478	0.078	Not Significant
Family Size	1.528	0.62	Not Significant
Number of hours at work per week	0.853	0.678	Not Significant
Nature of Work	1.479	0.77	Not Significant
Length in Service	1.288	0.176	Not Significant

Table 7. Relationship between occupational stress level and coping strategies

Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Interpretation
-0.190	0.021	Significant

DISCUSSION

The following coping strategies has been found significant predictor on the occupational stress level experience by EVSUTC employees in the university⁽⁵⁾. Engagement for self-efficacy (one's own motivation) gives an implication that handling stress can be mediated with oneself⁽⁶⁾. Employees can also express their stress through physical activities such as exercise, doing house chores and office errands. Counseling sessions has also been found significant in expressing what a person feels towards stress. The presence of family and friends ease emotional stress of employees by talking to someone close to them. Stress originating from the workplace can be addressed by conducting team building activities after a stressful event in the university. Giving breaks after university accreditation in stressful moments of collating and organizing documents boost morale of the employees and help them relieve occupational stress⁽¹³⁾.

Employees with effective stress coping strategies will be more productive and experience low work stress^{(12),(13)}. Several advantages on its employee's job satisfaction, reducing employee's burnout, job stress and mental health problems and organizational overall performance. The successful implementation of a comprehensive stress management program as revealed in different studies give significant advantage to variety of groups and individuals in different organizations.

The length in service of employees greatly affects the level occupational stress because on its limitation on its job control. This gives an implication that the longer the person in into service, the lesser the occupational stress he or she become. Adaptive coping strategies help them create a system in handling occupational stressor. The shorter period a person is exposed into, the higher the stress level he or she acquire in the university^{(13),(16)}. Regardless of the profile variables (age, sex, marital status, family size, number of hours at work per week, nature of work) of the respondents it doesn't have any relationship to occupational stress. This implies that the type of stress is different across age group. Employees with longer years in service should act as mentor to supervise and assist new employees to establish system of handling stress.

The occupational stress level has a relationship with the type of coping strategies of the respondents. It implies that the adaptive coping strategies of the respondents have been found effective regardless of their profile variables except in the length of service. Employees are able to use adaptive coping strategies regardless of the nature of stress experienced in the university. This further implies that employees with work engagement attitude likely to adapt occupational stress in the university^{(6),(16)}.

CONCLUSION

The result and findings of the study confirmed that employees experienced different level of occupational stress in the university. Occupational stress is always present regardless of age, gender, family size, number of hours at work per week, nature of work and length in service. Employees with limited job description and were given work beyond their scope of expertise contributes greatly to their level of stress.

The following recommendations are presented in relation to research, education and university administrators to effectively manage occupational stress among employees in the university.

The researchers recommend that university administrators should focus on faculty welfare by providing a health and wellness program to address occupational related-stress. This will give benefits to employees manage their health care costs.

Policy related to health promotion and prevention should also be considered. Revisiting the university policies on stress management program that will lessen occupational stress among employees.

Senior employees are also encouraged to conduct mentoring and capacity training among junior personnel in order to lessen the level of occupational stress.

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