

IMPACTS OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT ON EMPLOYEE ALIENATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explains the relationships between occupational stress and the alienation of the role of employees and employee empowerment. The study consisted of the experts and staff of the Social Security Organization of the greater Khorasan region (Razavi, North, and South Khorasan Provinces). The study was conducted on a sample of 389 participants, and the questionnaires focused on occupational stress, employee alienation, and employee empowerment. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to collect data. The components were identified, and variables measured, and the results were suggestive of that occupational stress, occupational stress factors, alienation and alienation factors were not optimal in the study population. Employee empowerment status in the study sample was satisfactory (measures and significant and desirable components of competence, autonomy, and trust are undesirable). A positive correlation was revealed between occupational stress and alienation. Increasing the aspects of occupational stress will intensify the staff alienation situation. Further, a negative correlation was found between occupational stress reduction and empowerment, as the latter can be effective in reducing the aspects of occupational stress. The mediating effect of empowerment on the relationship between occupational stress and alienation was also confirmed.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Every person is exposed to situations that involve stressful events in the course of their life. Naturally, healthy people can adapt to long-term stress and cope with short-term and transient stress. People who cannot adapt to and handle stress in different areas will be prone to diseases. Stress can change a person's perception of reality, or disrupt the process of thinking, causing many difficulties in general, as well as affecting the relationships between individuals and feelings of belonging to

others, and, in general, the attitude of individuals towards life (Sujudi 2002). Occupational stress occurs when an individual's expectations are higher than his or her powers and abilities. A workplace where one is expected to demonstrate creativity, decision making, and tact, is stressful and can ultimately lead to lower efficiency. This is a major problem that puts people's health at risk in modern society. Add to the reduced productivity of the staff, increased absenteeism from the workplace, reduced production, workforce displacement, labor disputes, medical expenses, disruptions, and additional costs of new recruitments, as other expensive costs incurred by organizations and companies (Ranjbar et al., 2009).

Even though modern life provides innate welfare and comfort, it exposes humans to physical and mental expectations that foster stress. However, stress is not a new problem, since humans have been influenced by this ever-intensifying malady since entering the social realm. Stress affects all aspects of human life and can be traced back to family, education, social and economic activities, and occupation (Ngarav, 2013, p. 2).

Today's organizations are bombarded with such issues as rapid changes, customer expectations, demands for the best services. As a result, organizations must be adaptable in their attitudes, goals, and methods of doing business (Rezaei, 2011).

Organizations should be more flexible in unstable and unpredictable environments. In this regard, many studies have been carried out on the empowerment, effectiveness, and teamwork by researchers, including Saeed and Kurd (2009), who addressed the effects of psychological empowerment. A productive workforce is the most valuable asset and a source of wealth in any country. Despite being rich with natural resources, many communities lack competent and efficient labor force and, therefore, are not able to benefit from the divine gifts (Henry et al., 2006).

To improve performance, the organization has to pay more attention to its employees and the factors affecting their performance (Farahmand 2009). The significance of empowerment lies in the fact that individuals are more important than management systems, which prompts the organization managers to move towards a complete understanding of and the need for providing their employees with mental, physical, and emotional protection, as well as health care (Marshall, 2002 p. 72).

Employee empowerment holds that an organization should keep its employees satisfied and provide them what they need. This relationship can develop into a reciprocal win-win situation (Scott and Jief, 1375, p. 36). Empowerment, on the one hand, allows managers to benefit from the wisdom, experience, energy, skills, and motivation of the individuals (Cyclops 1998, p. 266), and on the other, remains an essential tool for improving and satisfying employees and keeping them committed (Kirkman & Razen 1999, p. 58; Baker 2000 p. 117; Salazar 2000 p. 58; Dixon & Lawrence 2009 p. 166), sustaining effectiveness and productivity (Castej 2005 p. 112; Perez 2002, p. 113), improving individual and team performance (Silver 1990, p. 240; Sharma & Kayur 2008, p. 11), reducing service-leaving intentions (Koberg et al., 1999, p. 71), and eliminating organizational stress (Lich and Wale 2006). Focus more on organizational and psychological issues that employees how to serve, how they think and how they interact and notes.

This study attempts to determine the components of and measure occupational stress, employee alienation, and employee empowerment in Social Security Organization—a social welfare

organization subordinate to the Iranian Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare—as well as the impact levels of the validity of the components of the three variables.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Work-related stress is an increasingly common feature of modern life (Arshadi & Damiri, 2013). Modern organizations consider occupational stress as a serious issue in the workplace (Hoboubi et al., 2017; Aghilinejad, 2007; Ghasemzadeh et al., 2015). Occupational stress is the harmful physical and emotional responses that arise when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Work-related stress is considered harmful when physical and emotional responses take place when there is a mismatch between job requirements and the workers' capabilities, resources, or needs (Mursali et al., 2009; Gholamali et al., 2008).

2.2 EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a fundamental and essential aspect of success, productivity, and growth in any form of business (Hunjra et al.; 2011; Rasti, 2014). Employee empowerment is regarded as a motivational practice that aims to improve performance by increasing opportunities for active engagement in decision making. The process mainly involves developing trust, motivation, and participating in decision making and removing barriers between employees and top management (Meyerson & Dewettinck, 2012; Soleimani, 2007). Empowerment is the mechanism of giving an employee the authority to make decisions and often entails the transfer and distribution of responsibilities from managers to and among employees (Saif & Saleh, 2013). Empowerment was defined earlier as providing an organization's employees with the authority to handle matters related to their daily job activities (Huxtable, 1994; Abesi, 2009; Abboudi, et al., 2014). A plethora of studies is available in the literature expatiating on the advantages of employee empowerment. For example, Lavasani et al. (2008) stated that empowered employees are more likely to develop a feeling of motivation that helps them exercise authority and control and apply the crucial knowledge and skills for handling the needs of customers. The empowerment program aims to give some power and authority to employees through managers to share responsibilities with them, which eventually helps empowered employees to improve their recognition and status. Such employees would develop positive thinking and tend to do their best to perform well at their jobs (Wadhwa & Verghese, 2015; Alawi et al., 2011). Moreover, Ripley & Ripley (1992) demonstrated empowerment could increase the motivation of employees in carrying out the routines, improve their job satisfaction, enhance their loyalty and productivity, and reduce the turnover intentions among them. Employee empowerment has widely been recognized as an essential contributor to organizational success, as several authors reported its direct effects on employee performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Meyerson & Dewettinck, 2012).

3. QUESTIONS AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF RESEARCH

The main question of this study is as follows: *What are the degrees of occupational stress, employee alienation, and employee empowerment among the Social Security Organization staff?*

Primarily, this study hypothesizes that:

- H#1: Occupational stress has a positive and significant impact on alienation.
- H#2: Occupational stress has a positive and significant impact on employee empowerment.
- H#3: Employee empowerment has a positive and significant impact on alienation.

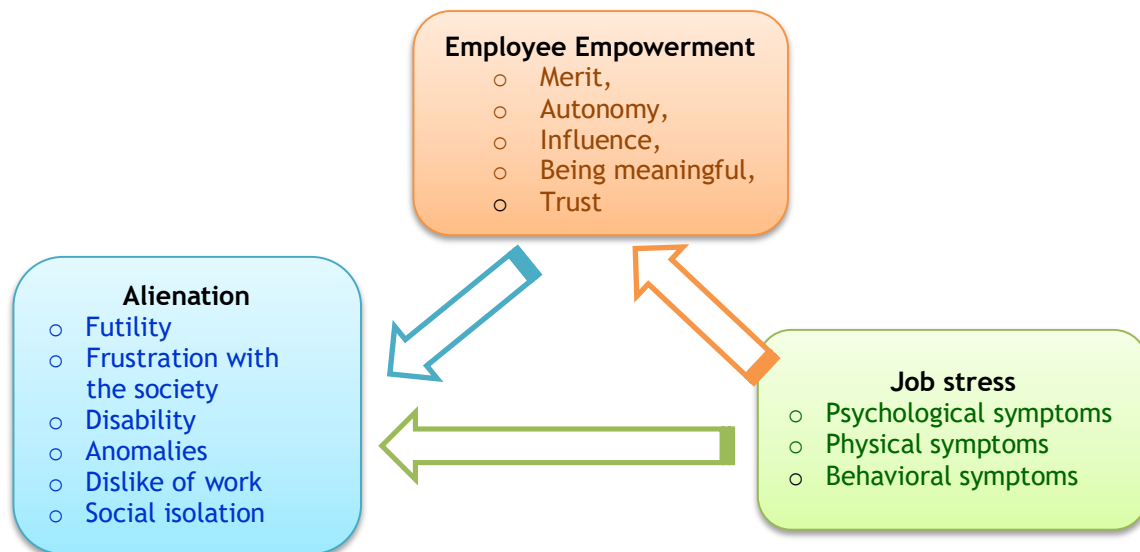


Figure 1: Conceptual model

4. THE STATISTICAL POPULATION, SAMPLE SIZE, AND METHOD

A set of units that share at least one attribute form a statistical population. A statistical sample is a collection of symptoms that are chosen from a larger part, group, or community to obtain a set representing the qualities and characteristics of that larger part, group, or community. Sampling is the process of taking samples (Hooshangi et al., 2017).

The primary study objectives here are to design an occupational stress model based on alienation and empowerment. It was decided, based on advice received from counseling professors, to consider "all staff members with a bachelor's or higher degree in all branches of the Iranian Social Security Organization in Razavi, North and South Khorasan provinces in 2016" as the statistical population for this research.

The aim of this study was to develop practical knowledge in a field of specialized knowledge and to apply the results to solve specific problems within the organization, so this study is objective, applied research and methodology, descriptive and correlational that Field research methodology is used to collect data.

Considering that structural analysis was used in data analysis, and the volume of population of 550, according to the respected master, exceeded the number of questions in the job stress questionnaire, 400 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 389 was gathered. This is practical applied research. For the theory of research, it has been used through library studies and the field method has been used for practical and practical purposes.

5. OCCUPATIONAL STRESS COMPONENTS

The descriptive information of the variables, including the average, mean, mode, standard deviation, the minimum, and the maximum are presented in Table (1). Based on the experimental

mean (3.13) and the five-degree Likert spectrum used to measure the variables, it is safe to conclude that the occupational stress variables were measured at an above-average level. Based on the experimental averages, on the scale of Bazargan (1997), it can be decided that the components of psychological, physical, and behavioral symptoms were, similarly, measured at a higher level than the average.

Table 1: Description of Occupational Stress Variable among Subjects

Component	Number	Average	Median	Mode	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Behavioral symptoms	389	3.07	3.13	3.00	.64	1.38	5.00
Psychological symptoms	389	3.20	3.29	3.65	.63	1.59	5.00
Physical symptoms	389	3.07	3.10	3.20	.64	1.40	4.80
Occupational stress	389	3.13	3.23	3.43	.59	1.54	1.91

6. ALIENATION COMPONENTS

The descriptive information of the variables, including the average, mean, mode, standard deviation, the minimum, and the maximum are presented in Table (2). Based on the experimental mean (3.43) and based on the five-degree Likert spectrum used to measure the variables, it is safe to conclude that the algebraic variable has been measured at an above-average level. Based on the experimental averages, on the scale of Bazargan (1997), It can be decided that alienation components, namely futility, dislike of society, disability, anomalies, dislike of work and social isolation were, similarly, measured at above the average.

Table 2: A description of the of alienation variables.

Components	Number	Average	Median	Mode	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Futility	389	3.31	3.33	3.00	.80	1.33	5.00
Frustration with the society	389	3.32	3.33	3.00	.79	1.67	5.00
Disability	389	3.32	3.25	3.25	.71	1.50	5.00
Anomalies	389	3.35	3.20	3.20	.72	1.80	5.00
Dislike to work	389	3.67	3.60	3.60	068	2.00	5.00
Social isolation	389	3.54	3.50	4.00	.83	1.00	5.00
Alienation	389	3.43	3.41	3.14	.58	2.14	5.00

6.1 EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT COMPONENTS

Descriptive information of variables, including average, mean, mode, standard deviation, the minimum, and the maximum are presented in Table (3).

Considering the empirical mean (2.96) and based on the scale of Bazargan (1997), it is safe to conclude that the variable "empowerment" has been measured at a satisfactory level.

According to the empirical averages, it can be decided that the components of competence, autonomy, and trust are satisfactory at the satisfaction level and the components of influence and significance are better than satisfactory.

Table 3: Description of the empowerment variables.

Component	Number	Average	Median	Mode	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Competence	389	2.50	2.50	2.50	.70	1.00	4.50
Autonomy	389	2.95	3.00	2.33	.81	1.00	5.00
Influence	389	3.15	3.00	4.00	.93	1.00	5.00
Significance	389	3.25	3.33	3.00	.78	1.00	5.00
Trust	389	2.67	3.50	2.00	1.11	1.00	5.00
Employee empowerment	389	2.96	3.78	2.54	.66	1.08	5.54

7. TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

hypotheses about the study variables are examined by the Z-test, with the results discussed below.

Hypothesis: The study of the status of occupational stress in the studied population
H0: Occupational stress in the studied population is not at a desirable level.

H1: Occupational stress situation in the studied population is favorable.

As evident from Table (4), since the p-value of the test (>0.999) is higher than the level of significance (0.05), the zero assumption cannot be ruled out. In other words, according to the average obtained for this variable, the occupational stress status in the studied population is not optimal.

Table 4: Occupational stress status in the studied population

Average	SD	Z score	p-value
3.13	.59	4.53	>0.999

The status of occupational stress components in the studied population

H0: Occupational stress factors in the studied population are not at a desirable level.

H1: Occupational stress situation in the studied population is favorable.

As evident from Table 5, occupational stress components, namely psychological, physical, and behavioral symptoms, are not at the desired level (p-value >0.999).

Table 5: Status of occupational stress components in the studied population.

Component	Average	SD	Z score	p-value
Behavioral symptoms	3.07	.64	2.30	0.989
Psychological symptoms	3.20	.63	6.34	>0.999
Physical symptoms	3.07	.64	2.09	0.981

Hypothesis: A survey on the alienation status in the studied population

H0: Alienation in the studied population is not at a desirable level.

H1: Self-alienation situation in the studied population is favorable.

As evident from Table 6, given that in the p-value of the test (>0.999) is higher than the level of significance (0.05), the zero assumption cannot be rejected. In other words, according to the average obtained for this variable, the status of alienation in the studied population is not at the desired level.

Table 6: Status of alienation in the studied population

Average	SD	Z score	p-value
3.43	.58	4.48	>0.999

Hypothesis: The study of the status of components of alienation in the studied population.

H0: The components of alienation in the studied population are not at a desirable level.

H1: The components of alienation in the studied population are at a desirable level.

As evident from Table 7, given that in the p-value of the test (>0.999) is higher than the level of significance (0.05), the zero assumption cannot be rejected. In other words, according to the mean obtained for components of alienation, it is safe to say that the status of the components of alienation in the studied population is not favorable.

Table 7: The Status of Components of Alienation in the Study Population

Component	Average	SD	Z score	p-value
Futility	3.31	0.80	7.87	>0.999
Social disobedience	3.32	0.79	8.33	>0.999
Disability	3.32	0.71	8.85	>0.999
Abnormalities	3.35	0.72	9.52	>0.999
Do not like to work	3.67	0.68	19.58	>0.999
Social isolation	3.54	0.83	12.57	>0.999

A survey on the empowerment status of employees in the studied population H0: Employee empowerment situation in the studied population is not favorable. H1: Employee empowerment situation in the studied population is favorable. As evident from Table 8, considering that in the p-value of the test (0.904) is lower than the level of significance (0.05), the zero assumption cannot be ruled out. In other words, according to the average obtained for this variable and the index of Bazargan (1997), The employee empowerment status in the studied population is satisfactory.

Table 8: Employee empowerment status in the studied population

Average	SD	z score	p-value
2.96	.66	-1.31	0.904

Hypothesis: The status of components of employee empowerment in the studied population

H0: The components of staff empowerment in the studied population are not at a desirable level.

H1: The components of staff empowerment in the studied population are at a favorable level.

As evident from Table 7-6, the empowerment components "influence" and "meaningfulness" scored at a favorable level (p-value <0.999). However, as Table 9 indicates, "competency", "autonomy", and "trust" components are not at a desirable level (p-value <0.999).

Table 9: Status of Employee Empowerment Components in the Study Population

Component	Average	SD	z score	p-value
Merit	2.50	0.70	-14.10	>0.999
Autonomy	2.95	0.81	-1.01	0.842
Influence	3.15	0.93	3.16	0.0001
Meaningfulness	3.25	0.78	6.38	0.0001
Trust	2.67	1.11	-5.76	>0.999

Hypothesis: there is a meaningful relationship between occupational stress factors and employee alienation.

H0: There is no relationship between occupational stress factors and employee alienation.

H1: There is a relationship between occupational stress and employee alienation.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was employed to investigate the relationship between the variables (data is quantitative and normal). The results of the correlation test are indicative of a significant relationship between psychosomatic, physical, and behavioral symptoms and alienation (p-value <0.999). Based on the positive correlation coefficients calculated, these relations are of the direct (incremental) type. In other words, the employee alienation situation exacerbates with an increase in any component of occupational stress (psychological, physical, and behavioral symptoms). According to the correlation coefficients, alienation has a stronger relationship with physical symptoms than the other components.

Table 10: Relationship between Occupational Stress Components of Employees.

Variable	Alienation	Psychological Symp.	Physical Symp.	Behavioral Symp.
alienation	1			
Psychological symptoms	**0.615	1		
Physical symptoms	**0.663	0.756**	1	
Behavioral symptoms	**0.596	** 0.717	** 0.811	1

* at a 0.05 level of significance, ** at a 0.01 level of significance

Hypothesis: there is a meaningful relationship between occupational stress factors and employee empowerment.

H0: there is no a relationship between occupational stress factors and employee empowerment.

H1: there is a relationship between occupational stress factors and employee empowerment.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was employed to investigate the relationship between the variables (data is quantitative and normal). The results of the correlation test are indicative of a significant relationship between the psychological, physical, and behavioral symptoms and the staff empowerment (p-value <0.999). Based on the negative correlation coefficients calculated, these relations are inverse (decreasing). In other words, employee empowerment is undermined with an increase in any component of occupational stress (psychological, physical, and behavioral symptoms).

According to the correlation coefficients of intensity, employee empowerment has a stronger relationship with behavioral symptoms than other components.

Table 11: Relationship between Occupational Stress Components and Employee Empowerment.

Variable	Employee Empowerment	Psychological sympt.	Physical sympt.	Behavioral sympt.
Employee Empowerment	1			
Psychological symptoms	**-.0.578	1		
Physical symptoms	**-.0.618	0.756**	1	
Behavioral symptoms	**-.0.662	0.717**	** 0.811	1

* at a 0.05 level of significance, ** at a 0.01 level of significance.

8. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to explore the relationship between occupational stress and employee alienation with regard to the variables of employee empowerment among the Social Security Organization staff (Case Study: Razavi, North, and South Khorasan Provinces) in 2016. According to the study model and experts' opinions and the improvement of the proposed model after the preparation, distribution and collection of questionnaires and data analysis, first, the components of each variable were identified and then, confirming the relationship between occupational stress and employee alienation. It is found that an increase in occupational stress enhances the rate of employee alienation. The relationships between employee empowerment and occupational stress and employee alienation is a diminishing one, with each staff member having classes, conferences and conferences. The results are sufficient to validate the model. Based on the findings, when occupational stress increased, alienation and employee empowerment increases. An inverse relationship was found between employee empowerment and alienation. Managers can embrace employee empowerment in the workplace as a practical means to benefit from their human resources. Indeed, robust programs must be implemented in organizations to expand employees' capabilities. That is the case, particularly in organizations that do not produce physical outputs. Employee empowerment is also a reliable approach to gaining customer satisfaction. Empowered employees are the basis for improving productivity in a modern organization. Occupational stress is also a disturbing variable that, if designed and implemented for that plan, can significantly reduce organizational efficiency and employee satisfaction.

The results show that occupational stress has a direct exacerbating effect on employee alienation. Organizational administrators are advised to manage occupational stress in their respective organizations to provide peace of mind to the staff. The productivity and satisfaction of the employees

increase commensurate with an organization's success in relieving occupational stress, which ultimately translates into the performance of the organization. Occupational stress is the main cause of dissatisfaction with the job. Therefore, planning for reducing it in the organization is what managers need to focus on. A highly stressed workforce can never accept the work environment as friendly, which hinders the realization of its full capacity.

Recommendations are given for future research:

- Studies may focus on industrial firms.
- Other variables can be involved in the model.
- Similar studies can be replicated in other organizations to increase the credibility of the results.
- Future studies should measure other rated and objective occupational stress.

9. DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The used or generated data and the result of this study are available upon request to the corresponding author.

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