



SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR REDUCING STRESS - A STUDY AMONG SUGAR MILL EMPLOYEES IN TAMILNADU

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Abstract

Stress is perhaps the number one problem bothering almost everyone – the haves as well as the have not's, the growing and grownups as well as the successful and not so successful. In western society, work is the primary factor for stress. Social support focuses on social interactions that enable individuals to meet their goals and deal with the demands of their environment. Many researchers have explored how employees use social support to cope up with stress. The current research attempts to identify the social support factors to reduce stress among 330 employees in five sugar mills spread over Erode, Namakkal and Karur districts of Tamil Nadu. Review of the literature indicated the need for a better understanding of social support factors. The rescaled factor loadings in the study displayed four important social support factors such as Society support, Relative support, Workplace support and Surrounding support.

Keywords: Social Support, Stress, Society Support, Relative Support, Workplace Support, Surrounding Support.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is the result of an individual's interaction with environmental stimuli. Such stimulus may be in any form, interpersonal interaction, an event and so on. It is not necessary that stress should always be dysfunctional. There is some stress called eustress, like stress for creative work, entrepreneurial activities and keen competition that stimulate better productivity. If stress is temporary and mild, most people can handle it or at least recover from its effects rather quickly. The most widely reported determinants of job stress and organizational effectiveness determine the feelings of job satisfaction and perceptions of positive workforce communication including perceptions of cooperation and teamwork. Social support implies the kind of aid and backing that individuals receive from their interactions with other persons. The more support workers receive from others at work or in relation to work, the less likely they are to experience work related stress. Social support is defined as the existence and availability of people on whom we can rely upon and who let us know that they care about, value, and love us. Social interactions result in sharing of problems, receiving support for problem solving and alleviate the feeling of disappointment and frustration. Social support can be in many forms, including emotional support (esteem, affection, trust, concern, or listening), appraisal support (affirmation, feedback or social comparison), informational support (advice, suggestion, directives, or information) and instrumental support (aid in-kind, money, labor or time). People with spouses, family members and friends get psychological and material support and have better mental health. Support from people increases a sense of belonging, self-worth and a feeling of security to any employee. Hence, social support reduces stress in general.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Stress is an unavoidable part of to-day's life and modern organisations face problems of executive stress and burnout. The stress that an employee faces in the workplace adversely affects the productivity of an organisation and decreases the health of individuals. In fact, every industry has its own unique set of problems and sources of stress. The sugar industry remains a focal point for socio economic development in rural areas by mobilising rural resources, generating employment and income and creating transport and communication facilities. More than 500 sugar mills are functioning all over India. Hence a study is undertaken in sugar mills.

Each mill has different departments like Engineering, Processing, Accounting, Human Resources, Finance and Cane department. In cane department, cane inspectors are responsible for planting sugarcane, harvesting, field workers management and so on. The cane officers have to ensure regular supply of sugar cane to sugar mills. Both cane officers and cane inspectors occupy crucial position in sugar mill as they serve as connecting link between the cane growers, field workers and sugar mill.

The social support system may come from society, relatives, work place and surroundings. Of these which factor is important to reduce stress? To find answer to this question, a study is undertaken from the point of view of cane inspectors and cane officers who occupy core positions in sugar mill. The findings of the study will throw new light on management of stress and improve mental and physical health of the workers and thereby enhance productivity level and production.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bernin P, Theorei T and Sandberg C. G (2001) explored the patterns of correlations between psychosocial stress indices and neuro endocrine status in managers. Fifty-eight male managers in three Swedish companies constituted the sample. The



indices have been analyzed by means of computations of age adjusted partial correlations with nine different variables analyzed in fasting blood samples. The researchers stated that serum concentrations of lipids were the variables most strongly correlated with psychosocial factors. The study focused that pressure at work influenced the managers' endocrine status and the psychosocial support indices (good network, work support, friend support and manager support) influenced male managers in a healthy way by good social support due to the individual's way of acting with the surroundings. The analyses of corporate culture measured as "Rules of the Game" indicated that "bureaucracy" was significantly associated with high LDL-cholesterol and low HDL-cholesterol. According to the study, good social support was in general health promoting to managers, at least with regard to serum lipids and on the other hand, bureaucracy seemed to be dangerous to the health of managers.

Social role theory provided a framework for understanding how the work-family conflict affects individual well-being and organizational effectiveness. Christo F.V. Fernandes, Satishkumar and Nandakumar Mekoth (2008) discussed the impact of social support on role stress experienced by the executives of public and private sector banks in Goa. They pointed out that in a wide variety of professions, people at work were spending most of their time working and coordinating with others. Conflict between the demands and behaviors expected in different roles was expressed in the form of role stress that negatively influences the well-being of employees and the performance of business organizations. The study had showed that role stress was highest when social support was poor and role stress was lowest when social support was excellent, so social interactions resulted in sharing of problems, receiving support for problem-solving and alleviates the feeling of disappointment and frustration. The study also showed that stress had arisen due to lack of skills for performing the role and could not be helped just with social support.

Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, and Erlebach (2010) performed a qualitative study with various workers to explore how individuals cope with career transitions. They found that social support received highest number of responses from the participants. The study indicated that support from family and friends were considered as a major source in making positive transitions. The study also indicated that people who reported thriving during career transition experienced negative effects when adjusting to work environment demands and social support acts as a strong source for positive adjustment. The study suggested that the behaviors and attitudes used for positive career transition may help coping stress.

Few researchers have explored how employees use social support to cope during organizational change. Sandra A. Lawrence and Victor J. Callan (2011) tested a model to understand how perceived support influences employees' use of support mobilization to deal with change related stress. Survey data were collected from 476 health professionals working in a large public hospital in Australia undergoing large-scale change and downsizing. In their research, moderated path analyses revealed that perceived available support plays a moderated mediation role during coping with change. Support mobilization mediated the indirect relationship between change-related stress and job satisfaction, at both low and high levels of perceived available colleague support. The research also found that perceived available non-work support moderated the relationship between support mobilization and job satisfaction, and perceived available supervisor support moderated the relationship between change related stress and support mobilization.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of the study is to identify the social support factors among the employees to reduce stress. The secondary objective is to understand the situations in which the employees have got social support.

METHODOLOGY

In Tamil Nadu, 43 sugar mills are functioning in 19 districts of which 16 in cooperative sector, 2 in public sector and 25 in private sector. The present study is confined to Cane Inspectors and Cane Officers from the five sugar mills in three districts namely Sakthi Sugars Limited and Bannari Amman Sugars Limited in Erode district, Ponni Sugars (Erode) Limited and The Salem Co-operative Sugar Mills Limited in Namakkal district and E.I.D Parry (India) Limited in Karur district of Tamil Nadu. Sakthi Sugars Ltd has several outstanding performances in achieving the lowest sugar losses, highest standards of technical efficiency and the highest mill efficiency. Bannari Amman Sugars Ltd has an imported facility to produce 300MT of refined sugar per day and the same is mainly marketed to pharmaceutical and food industries and exported to all countries. Ponni Sugars (Erode) Ltd has created a record in the annals of sugar industry by achieving full capacity cane crushing during the very first year of its commercial operation.

Tamil Nadu Co-operative Sugar Federation's main endeavour is directed towards the economic betterment of cane growers and sugar mills in Tamil Nadu. Every grain of EID Parry's pure refined sugar is a product of a superior refining process and is processed hygienically from first grade cane. The five sugar mills in these three districts were chosen for the study as their sugar production as well as man power is more when compared to sugar mills in other districts. For selection of the five sugar

mills purposive sampling was adopted. All the 330 employees working in these five sugar mills were included for this study. Census method was adopted. Out of 330 samples, 268 employees are Cane Inspectors and 62 are Cane Officers. In this study, the primary data were collected through questionnaire.

To identify the social support factors among the employees 12 factors were given in the questionnaire and the respondents were asked to express their opinion on a five point scale ranging from “Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree”. Cronbach alpha reliability test was applied and the result was relatively high (0.77). Therefore, it was found that the questionnaire used for assessing the social support factors was reliable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- Out of 330 respondents 18.8 per cent of the respondents are Cane Officers and 81.2 per cent are Cane Inspectors.
- The dominant age group among the respondents is 36 to 45 years, which constitutes 34.8 per cent of the total. It is followed by 46 to 55 years age group, which constitutes 27 per cent.
- It is observed that 31.8 per cent of the total respondents hold Bachelor’s degree, which is followed by 28.2 per cent with School level education.
- 26.1 per cent of the respondents have experience of more than 20 years while 23.9 per cent have 11 to 15 years of experience.
- It is also noted that 40 per cent of the respondents earn a monthly income of Rs.5, 001/ to Rs.10, 000/. It is followed by the monthly income group of Rs.10, 001/ to Rs.15, 000/ that constitutes 39.1 per cent.
- Most of the respondents (88.8 %) are married.
- The dominant family type among the total respondents is nuclear family, which constitutes 68.5 per cent, and the respondents from joint family constitute 31.5 per cent.
- 60.9 per cent of the respondents have less than 4 dependents in their family. It is followed by the respondents with 4 to 5 dependents, which constitute 36.4 per cent.

Social Support Factors of the Respondents

Supervisors who foster a supportive work environment typically display concern for employees’ needs and feelings and encourage them to voice their concerns, develop new skills and solve work-related problems. Supportive co-workers give the employee needy information, advice, guidance and other types of assistance. Family members genuinely care about employee’s physical and mental well-being throughout stressful and tough times at work. Neighbors, friends and relatives give access to support in which employees need. Community center is a place that is specially provided for the people, groups and organizations in a particular area where they can go in order to meet one another and do things. Religious /social festivals reflect the real culture and tradition of the people, which give them ample opportunities to enjoy and entertain.

The social support factors of the respondents in the five sugar mills such as superiors, subordinates, co-workers, family, friends, neighbors, relatives, religious / social festivals, spiritual discourses, community centers, social welfare people and doctors were analyzed with the primary data collected. The factor analysis was performed with the aim of collecting the same information but in a reduced number of variables. The outcome was a more parsimonious structure of sources of social support. Initially, the test of validity of data for factor analysis was studied with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity. The factor analysis results in four important social support factors of the respondents and these factors were named considering the list for items under each component and the respective loadings of the items. The Eigen value and the per cent of variance explained by the factors are described in Table 1.

Table 1, Social Support Factors of the Respondents

S. No.	Social supportFactors	Number ofVariables	Eigen Value	Percentage ofVariation Explained	Cumulative Percentage of Variation explained
1	Society	5	3.167	26.391	26.391
2	Relatives	2	2.423	20.193	46.585
3	Workplace	2	1.293	10.775	57.360
4	Surrounding	3	1.010	8.418	65.778
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy: 0.597			Bartlett’s test of Sphericity: Chi-square value: 1335.41*		

* Significant at zero per cent level

From the table 1, it is clear that four social support factors, which include twelve social support variables, accounted to 65.78 per cent of the total variance.

The most important social support factor is 'Society' since its Eigen value and the per cent of variation explained are 3.17 and 26.39 per cent respectively. The second and third important social support factors are 'Relatives' and 'Workplace' since their Eigen values are 2.42 and 1.29 respectively. The per cent of variation explained by these social support factors are 20.19 and 10.78 per cent respectively. The fourth factor narrated by the factor analysis is 'Surrounding' since its Eigen value is 1.01. The percentage of variation explained by this factor is 8.42 percent. The analysis concludes that the important social support factors are four, namely, 'Society support', 'Relative support', 'Workplace support' and 'Surrounding support'.

Variables in 'Society Support' Factor

It is concluded that 'society' is the most important supportive factor that help reduce stress followed by 'relatives' and 'work place'. Surrounding is the least important factor according to the analysis. The social support variables related to the society were clustered into one group and was named as 'Society support' factor. The social support variables identified in the 'Society support' factor were community centers, spiritual discourses, social welfare people, doctors and religious / social festivals. The factor loading of the society support variables and their communality values are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2,Factor Loading of Variables in 'Society Support' Factor

S. No.	Variables	Factor loading	Communality value
1	Community centers	0.864	0.786
2	Spiritual discourses	0.705	0.647
3	Social welfare people	0.676	0.528
4	Doctors	0.674	0.596
5	Religious / Social festivals	0.519	0.484

From the table 2, it is understood that the 'community centers' and 'spiritual discourses' are the significant variables in society support factors since their respective factor loadings are 0.864 and 0.705. This indicates that there is a higher association between the above two variables and the 'Society support' factor. The communality values of the above two variables are 0.786 and 0.647. It is inferred that 'community centers' and 'spiritual discourses' explain 'Society support' factor to a greater extent compared to other variables in this factor.

Variables in 'Relative Support' Factor

The social support variables, namely, 'neighbors' and 'relatives' are grouped into one factor and named as 'Relative Support' factor. The factor loading of the Relative support variables and their communality values are presented in Table 3.

Table 3,Factor Loading of Variables in 'Relative Support' Factor

S. No.	Variables	Factor loading	Communality value
1	Neighbors	0.864	0.754
2	Relatives	0.690	0.736

From the table 3, it is clear that in case of neighbors, factor loading is 0.864. So it is concluded that the variable 'neighbors', explains the 'Relative Support' factor to a greater extent since the communality value is 0.7.

Variables in 'Workplace Support' Factor

The social support variables, namely, 'subordinates' and 'superiors', were clustered into one group and named as 'Workplace support' factor. The factor loading of the social support variables and their communality values are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4,Factor Loading of Variables in 'Workplace Support' Factor

S. No.	Variables	Factor loading	Communality value
1	Subordinates	0.904	0.827
2	Superiors	0.783	0.661

From the table 4, it is observed that there is higher relationship between 'subordinates' and 'Workplace support' since its factor loading is 0.904. The higher communality value is noted in 'subordinates' (0.827). Hence, it is inferred that the social support variable 'subordinates' explains to a greater extent when compared to other variable namely 'superiors' in the 'Workplace support' factor.

Variables in ‘Surrounding Support’ Factor

The identified social support variables ‘friends’, ‘family’ and ‘co-workers’ are combined into one cluster and named as ‘Surrounding support’. The factor loading and communality values of the variable are presented Table 5.

Table 5,Factor Loading of Variables in ‘Surrounding Support’ Factor

S. No.	Variables	Factor loading	Communality value
1	Friends	0.811	0.749
2	Family	0.742	0.723
3	Co-workers	0.409	0.402

From the table 5, it is noted that there is higher correlation between the ‘friends’ and surrounding support factors since its factor loading is 0.811. It is followed by ‘family’ with the factor loading of 0.742. The value of factor loading and communality value are 0.409 and 0.402 respectively for the variable co-workers. It is observed that there is low correlation between co-workers and surrounding support factors.

Situation in Getting Support

The situations in which the respondents received support are categorized into five, such as all new tasks, early stage of all tasks, work-related issues, home-related issues and difficult situations. The situations in which respondents got support are presented in Table 6.

Table 6,Situations in which Support Received

S. No.	Situations	Number of Respondents	Total(%)
1	All new tasks	87/330	26.3
2	Early stage of all tasks	70/330	21.3
3	Work-related issues	66/330	20.0
4	Home-related issues	8/330	2.4
5	Difficult situations in all the above	99/330	30.0

It is observed from the table 6 that among the total respondents, 30 per cent got support during difficult situation while 26.3 per cent during all new tasks. It is followed by 21.3 per cent and 20 per cent for early stage of all tasks and work-related issues respectively. 2.4 per cent had obtained support for home-related issues. It is concluded that majority (30 %) of the respondents got support during difficult situations in all types of tasks.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that community centres, Neighbours, subordinates and friends are the most important variables that help reduce stress among employees in sugar mills. Religious and social festivals, relatives, co-workers and superiors are the least significant variables in social support factors. Neighbours, subordinates, friends and community centres display concern for employees’ feelings, encourage them and advice them to solve their work related problems. Thus social support helps to reduce stress among employees to a great extent.

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