Research Paper

Examining the Role of Personality and Social Support in Occupational Stress and Psychological Well-Being Among Female Employees

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ABSTRACT

Occupational stress is a significant concern in modern workplaces, impacting employees' psychological well-being and overall job performance. This review paper examines the role of personality traits and social support in mitigating occupational stress and enhancing psychological well-being among female employees. By synthesizing existing literature, we explore how specific personality traits, such as resilience and emotional stability, interact with social support systems to influence stress levels and mental health outcomes. The review highlights the importance of supportive work environments and tailored interventions to promote psychological well-being among women in the workforce.

Keywords: *Personality, Social Support, Occupational Stress, Psychological Well-Being, Female Employees*

I n today's fast-paced work environments, occupational stress has emerged as a critical issue that significantly affects employees' mental health and productivity. The pressures of meeting tight deadlines, handling increasing workloads, and maintaining a work-life balance contribute to elevated stress levels in the workplace. This situation is particularly challenging for women, who often juggle multiple roles both at work and home. Balancing professional responsibilities with family duties can create additional stress, making women more susceptible to experiencing high levels of occupational stress compared to their male counterparts (Goh et al., 2016)

Personality traits and social support are two significant factors that have been identified as influencing occupational stress and psychological well-being. Personality traits, such as resilience, emotional stability, and conscientiousness, play a crucial role in shaping how individuals perceive and respond to stress. Resilience, for instance, refers to the ability to recover from setbacks and adapt to challenging situations, and it is associated with lower levels of stress and better psychological well-being (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Emotional stability, often referred to as low neuroticism, involves maintaining a consistent emotional state and experiencing fewer negative emotions like anxiety and depression, which can mitigate the impact of stress (John & Srivastava, 1999). Conscientiousness, characterized by organization, dependability, and goal-oriented behavior, helps individuals

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manage their responsibilities effectively, reducing the likelihood of stress due to disorganization or poor time management (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

Similarly, social support, whether from colleagues, supervisors, family, or friends, can provide emotional and practical resources that help buffer against stress. Emotional support includes expressions of empathy, love, trust, and care, which can provide a sense of belonging and security, reducing feelings of isolation and enhancing psychological well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Instrumental support involves tangible assistance with tasks and responsibilities, which can alleviate the workload and reduce stress by sharing the burden of work-related tasks (House, 1983). Informational support, which includes providing advice, guidance, and information, can enhance problem-solving skills and reduce uncertainty and anxiety by offering practical solutions to work-related challenges (House, 1983).

The interaction between personality traits and social support is complex and multifaceted. Certain personality traits can influence the availability and effectiveness of social support. For instance, extraverted individuals are generally more sociable and assertive, making them more likely to seek and receive social support, which can help buffer against stress (Costa & McCrae, 2000). Conversely, individuals with high neuroticism may struggle to utilize social support effectively due to their tendency to experience negative emotions and pessimistic outlooks (John & Srivastava, 1999).

Research indicates that social support can moderate the relationship between personality traits and occupational stress. For example, even highly neurotic individuals can experience reduced stress levels if they have strong social support networks (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Similarly, conscientious individuals may benefit from social support that enhances their organizational and problem-solving abilities (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Understanding these factors is essential for developing effective interventions and supportive workplace policies. For instance, workplace interventions can be designed to foster supportive work environments and provide resources tailored to individual personality traits. Personality assessments during recruitment and for employee development can help identify individuals who may be at higher risk of stress and tailor support accordingly (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Mentoring programs, training on stress management techniques, and resilience building can empower employees to cope more effectively with stress (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Flexible work arrangements and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) can offer practical support to help employees balance work and personal responsibilities, reducing stress and improving well-being (Goh et al., 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Personality Traits and Occupational Stress:

Personality traits play a crucial role in determining how individuals perceive and cope with stress. The Five-Factor Model of Personality, which includes openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics (Costa & McCrae, 2000). Each trait influences stress perception and coping mechanisms in distinct ways:

- **Neuroticism:** High levels of neuroticism are associated with increased sensitivity to stress and a tendency to experience negative emotions such as anxiety and depression. Female employees with high neuroticism may perceive their work

environment as more stressful and struggle to cope effectively. This heightened sensitivity can lead to a negative feedback loop, where stress exacerbates neurotic tendencies, further impacting psychological well-being and job performance (Costa & McCrae, 2000). Research indicates that high neuroticism is linked to higher rates of burnout and job dissatisfaction (Judge et al., 2002).

- **Extraversion:** Extraverts are generally more sociable, assertive, and positive. These traits can be protective against occupational stress as extraverts are more likely to seek and receive social support. Their sociability enables them to build extensive support networks, which can provide emotional and instrumental resources in times of stress. Additionally, extraverts tend to have a more optimistic outlook, which helps them manage stress more effectively (Costa & McCrae, 2000). Studies show that extraverts are less likely to experience burnout and more likely to report higher job satisfaction (Bakker et al., 2006).

- **Conscientiousness:** Highly conscientious individuals are organized, dependable, and goal-oriented. These traits can reduce stress by fostering effective time management and problem-solving skills. Conscientious employees are typically better at setting realistic goals, planning their work, and avoiding procrastination, which helps mitigate stress (Costa & McCrae, 2000). Furthermore, conscientiousness is associated with higher job performance and lower turnover intentions, which can contribute to a more stable and less stressful work environment (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

- **Agreeableness:** Agreeable individuals are cooperative, empathetic, and good-natured. These traits can facilitate positive relationships at work, thereby reducing stress. Agreeable employees are more likely to resolve conflicts amicably and foster a supportive team atmosphere. This cooperative nature can lead to a more harmonious work environment, reducing interpersonal stress (Costa & McCrae, 2000). Research suggests that agreeableness is positively correlated with job satisfaction and negatively correlated with conflict at work (Mount et al., 1998).

- **Openness to Experience:** Openness is associated with creativity, curiosity, and adaptability. Individuals with high openness may be better at finding innovative solutions to stressful situations. Their willingness to embrace new experiences and perspectives can help them adapt to changes and uncertainties in the workplace (Costa & McCrae, 2000). This adaptability can be particularly valuable in dynamic work environments where flexibility and creativity are required to manage stress effectively. Openness has been linked to higher job satisfaction in roles that require creativity and problem-solving (George & Zhou, 2001).

Social Support and Occupational Stress:
Social support is a critical resource for managing occupational stress. It encompasses the various types of assistance and comfort provided by different sources, including colleagues, supervisors, family, and friends. This support is particularly vital in high-stress environments, where the demands and pressures of work can significantly impact an individual's mental health and overall well-being. The buffering effect of social support helps mitigate the adverse effects of stress, fostering a healthier work environment and enhancing job performance (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Social support can be categorized into three types: emotional, instrumental, and informational.

1. **Emotional Support**: Emotional support involves expressions of empathy, love, trust, and caring. This type of support is essential for providing a sense of belonging and security, which can significantly reduce stress levels. Emotional support from family and friends creates a network of relationships that offer comfort and reassurance during challenging times. In the workplace, emotional support from colleagues and supervisors can foster a supportive and collaborative environment, promoting psychological well-being. Studies have shown that employees who receive high levels of emotional support are less likely to experience burnout and more likely to exhibit higher job satisfaction and commitment (House, 1983; Thoits, 1995).

2. **Instrumental Support**: Instrumental support includes tangible assistance with tasks or responsibilities. This form of support can directly alleviate the workload and reduce stress by sharing the burden of work-related tasks. For instance, colleagues who help with a project or supervisors who provide additional resources to complete a task can significantly ease the stress associated with heavy workloads. Instrumental support can also extend to personal life, where family members or friends assist with household duties or childcare, allowing female employees to better balance their work and home responsibilities. Research indicates that instrumental support can enhance job performance and reduce absenteeism by enabling employees to manage their workload more effectively (House, 1983; Rook, 1990).

3. **Informational Support**: Informational support involves providing advice, guidance, and information that can help individuals cope with stress. Access to informational support can enhance problem-solving skills and reduce uncertainty and anxiety by offering practical solutions to work-related challenges. For example, a supervisor who offers constructive feedback and guidance on how to handle a difficult task or a colleague who shares useful information about company policies can empower employees to navigate their work environment more confidently. Informational support also includes mentorship programs, where experienced employees provide insights and advice to newer employees, fostering a culture of learning and development. Studies have demonstrated that informational support is crucial for professional growth and can lead to improved job performance and career satisfaction (House, 1983; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994).

The Role of Social Support in Buffering Occupational Stress

The interaction between social support and occupational stress is complex and multifaceted. Social support acts as a buffer against the negative effects of stress by providing resources that help individuals cope with and manage stressors. The buffering hypothesis posits that social support can mitigate the impact of stress by enhancing coping strategies and reducing the perceived threat of stressors (Cohen & Wills, 1985). For instance, emotional support can reduce feelings of isolation and increase resilience, while instrumental support can directly reduce workload-related stress. Informational support can enhance coping mechanisms by providing clarity and reducing uncertainty.

Research has shown that social support is particularly effective in high-stress environments, where the demands and pressures of work are significant. Employees who perceive high levels of social support are more likely to report lower levels of stress and higher levels of job satisfaction and well-being. Furthermore, social support can moderate the relationship

between personality traits and occupational stress. For example, even individuals with high neuroticism, who are generally more susceptible to stress, can experience reduced stress levels if they have strong social support networks (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Understanding the role of social support in managing occupational stress is essential for developing effective workplace interventions. Employers can implement strategies to foster supportive work environments, such as promoting teamwork, offering mentoring programs, and providing access to resources that facilitate emotional, instrumental, and informational support. By doing so, they can enhance the psychological well-being and productivity of their employees, leading to a more positive and resilient workforce.

Interaction of Personality and Social Support:
The interaction between personality traits and social support is complex and multifaceted. Personality traits not only influence how individuals perceive and cope with stress but also affect the availability and effectiveness of social support. Understanding this interaction is crucial for developing targeted interventions to mitigate occupational stress and enhance psychological well-being.

Influence of Personality Traits on Social Support
Certain personality traits significantly impact the extent and quality of social support individuals receive. Extraversion, for example, is associated with being sociable, assertive, and active in seeking social interactions. Extraverted individuals are more likely to seek and receive social support because of their outgoing nature and ability to form and maintain social connections (Costa & McCrae, 2000). They often engage in more social activities and have larger social networks, which provide a broad base of emotional, instrumental, and informational support that can buffer against stress (Amirkhan, 1990).

Conversely, individuals high in neuroticism, characterized by emotional instability, anxiety, and a tendency to experience negative emotions, may struggle to utilize social support effectively. Their propensity for negative affectivity can lead to interpersonal difficulties and less effective use of available support (Bolger & Eckenrode, 1991). Neurotic individuals may perceive their social interactions more negatively and be less likely to seek support, even when it is available, exacerbating their stress levels (Watson & Hubbard, 1996).

Conscientiousness, characterized by being organized, dependable, and diligent, also plays a role in how individuals interact with their social environment. Conscientious individuals are likely to maintain supportive relationships through their reliability and consistent behavior, which can lead to more stable and effective social support networks (John & Srivastava, 1999). They may also utilize social support more efficiently to enhance their organizational and problem-solving abilities, further reducing stress (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Social Support as a Moderator
Social support can moderate the relationship between personality traits and occupational stress, providing a buffering effect that mitigates the impact of stress on psychological well-being. For instance, even individuals with high levels of neuroticism, who are generally more susceptible to stress, can experience reduced stress levels if they have strong social support networks (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Social support can provide the emotional reassurance and practical assistance needed to cope with stress, thereby reducing the negative impact of neurotic tendencies.

For conscientious individuals, social support can enhance their ability to manage stress through improved organization and problem-solving. These individuals may benefit from social support that aligns with their structured approach to tasks, such as receiving guidance on effective time management or practical assistance in task completion (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This synergy between conscientiousness and social support can lead to lower stress levels and higher job performance.

Additionally, the interplay between social support and personality traits highlights the importance of a supportive work environment. Employers can foster such environments by promoting teamwork, encouraging open communication, and providing resources that cater to diverse personality traits. For example, mentoring programs can be tailored to provide emotional support for neurotic individuals and instrumental support for conscientious employees (Rl, K., 1992).

Research Evidence
Several studies support the moderating role of social support in the relationship between personality traits and occupational stress. For instance, research has shown that social support can buffer the effects of stress among individuals with high neuroticism by providing emotional stability and reducing feelings of anxiety and depression (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). Similarly, studies have found that extraverted individuals benefit from their extensive social networks, which provide ample resources to cope with work-related stress (Amirkhan, 1990).

In a study by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), it was found that employees who received high levels of social support reported lower levels of burnout and higher levels of work engagement, regardless of their personality traits. This indicates that social support can universally enhance psychological well-being, although its effects may be particularly pronounced for certain personality types.

Understanding the interaction between personality traits and social support is essential for developing effective workplace interventions. By recognizing the unique needs and strengths of different personality types, employers can create supportive environments that enhance the well-being and productivity of their workforce.

Implications for Workplace Interventions:
Understanding the role of personality and social support in occupational stress has important implications for workplace interventions. By recognizing the diverse needs and characteristics of employees, employers can implement strategies to foster supportive work environments and provide resources tailored to individual personality traits. Here are some potential interventions, with added details and references, that can help mitigate occupational stress and enhance psychological well-being:

Personality Assessments
Using personality assessments during recruitment and for employee development can help identify individuals who may be at higher risk of stress and tailor support accordingly. For instance, assessments such as the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) can provide insights into an employee's personality traits, including resilience, emotional stability, and conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Mentoring Programs

Establishing mentoring programs can provide emotional and instrumental support to employees, helping them navigate workplace challenges and reduce stress. Mentorship can foster a supportive environment where employees feel valued and understood. Mentors can offer guidance, share experiences, and provide practical assistance with work tasks, which can be particularly beneficial for new hires or employees facing significant job-related stress (Allen et al., 2004). By pairing employees with mentors who complement their personality traits, such as matching extraverts with mentors who can offer social engagement or conscientious individuals with mentors who can provide structured advice, the effectiveness of these programs can be enhanced (Chao et al., 1992).

Training and Development

Providing training on stress management techniques and resilience building can empower employees to cope more effectively with stress. Training programs can include workshops on time management, mindfulness, and cognitive-behavioral techniques to help employees develop healthy coping mechanisms (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). Additionally, resilience training can be particularly beneficial, as it helps employees build psychological strength to withstand and recover from stress. Tailoring these programs to different personality traits can enhance their effectiveness; for example, neurotic individuals might benefit more from training focused on anxiety reduction techniques, while conscientious employees might prefer programs emphasizing efficiency and productivity (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006).

Flexible Work Arrangements

Offering flexible work arrangements can help employees balance work and personal responsibilities, reducing stress and improving well-being. Flexible work options, such as telecommuting, flexible hours, and compressed workweeks, can accommodate the diverse needs of employees, allowing them to manage their time more effectively and reduce work-life conflict (Kossek et al., 2006). This flexibility can be particularly beneficial for employees with high conscientiousness, who may appreciate the autonomy to structure their work environment to optimize productivity. Additionally, employees with high neuroticism may experience reduced stress and anxiety by having the flexibility to create a more comfortable and controlled work setting (Golden & Veiga, 2005).

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) can offer confidential counseling and support services for employees dealing with stress and other mental health issues. EAPs provide access to professional counselors who can help employees navigate personal and work-related challenges, offering support for issues such as anxiety, depression, and work-life balance (Attridge, 2012). By promoting the availability of EAPs and encouraging their use, employers can ensure that employees have access to necessary mental health resources. Tailoring EAPs to address specific personality traits can enhance their effectiveness; for example, providing additional support for employees with high neuroticism or offering career development counseling for highly conscientious individuals can address their unique needs (Henderson et al., 2005).

Creating a Supportive Work Environment

Beyond specific interventions, fostering a supportive work environment is crucial. Employers can promote a culture of support and inclusion by encouraging open

communication, recognizing employee achievements, and providing opportunities for social interaction. Team-building activities, regular feedback sessions, and recognition programs can help build a positive workplace culture where employees feel valued and supported (Saks, 2006). Additionally, training managers to recognize signs of stress and provide appropriate support can further enhance the workplace environment, ensuring that employees feel comfortable seeking help when needed (Kahn et al., 1964).

Research Evidence

Numerous studies support the effectiveness of these interventions in reducing occupational stress and enhancing well-being. For instance, research has shown that personality assessments can predict job performance and stress levels, highlighting the importance of understanding personality traits in the workplace (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Mentoring programs have been found to improve job satisfaction, reduce turnover intentions, and enhance career development (Eby et al., 2008). Training and development programs focused on stress management have demonstrated significant reductions in employee stress levels and improvements in overall well-being (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). Flexible work arrangements have been linked to increased job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and better work-life balance (Kossek et al., 2006). Finally, EAPs have been shown to improve mental health outcomes and reduce absenteeism (Attridge, 2019; Theorell, T., 1992).).

By implementing these interventions, employers can create a supportive and resilient workforce capable of managing occupational stress effectively. Tailoring these strategies to individual personality traits ensures that employees receive the most relevant and impactful support, fostering a healthier and more productive work environment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Personality traits and social support play significant roles in influencing occupational stress and psychological well-being among female employees. Recognizing and understanding these factors can help employers develop targeted interventions to create supportive work environments and enhance the mental health and productivity of their workforce. For instance, personality assessments can be utilized during recruitment to identify individuals who may be at higher risk of stress and tailor support accordingly. Similarly, fostering a culture of social support through mentoring programs, training, and flexible work arrangements can significantly alleviate stress.

Research has shown that personality traits such as neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience influence how individuals perceive and manage stress. High levels of neuroticism are associated with greater sensitivity to stress, whereas traits like extraversion and conscientiousness can offer protective benefits by enhancing social support networks and effective stress management strategies.

Similarly, social support from colleagues, supervisors, family, and friends can provide emotional, instrumental, and informational resources that buffer against stress. Emotional support fosters a sense of belonging and security, instrumental support helps reduce workload, and informational support enhances problem-solving skills, thereby reducing uncertainty and anxiety.

Future research should continue to explore the complex interactions between personality, social support, and occupational stress. This will inform more effective workplace policies and practices, ensuring that interventions are both evidence-based and tailored to the unique needs of female employees. By addressing these factors, employers can create a more supportive work environment that promotes psychological well-being and enhances overall job performance.

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Conflict of Interest
The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.