

Psychosocial Stressors among Male and Female Bureaucrats

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ABSTRACT

The present research work was designed to study the significance of difference between male and female bureaucrats, working in the state of Himachal Pradesh, in terms of seven sub variables of psychosocial stressors, i.e., strained interpersonal relationship, excessive responsibilities, financial constraints, marriage related stress, health related problems, adverse situations, and perceived threat). The sample comprised of 128 male bureaucrats and 47 female bureaucrats. The data was collected with the help of “ICMR Psychosocial Stress Scale” developed by Srivastava, ICMR Fourth Advisory Committee (1991-92). t-test was carried out to evaluate the significance of difference between male and female bureaucrats on seven sub variables of psychosocial stressors. The results reveal that male bureaucrats have significantly scored higher on strained interpersonal relationships, financial constraints and adverse situations as compared to female bureaucrats. Thus, the present results clearly indicate that the male bureaucrats working in the state of Himachal Pradesh experience higher level of psychosocial stress as compared to female bureaucrats.

Keywords: *Psychosocial Stressors, Strained Interpersonal Relationship, Financial Constraint, Adverse Situation, Male Bureaucrats and Female Bureaucrats.*

Stress is a common feature in our lives, especially as the pace of development increases. It is an inevitable fact that stress is a part of human life from which no human being can escape (Stephoe, 2000; Jones and Bright, 2001; Cooper and Dewe, 2004 ; Wong, 2006). Experience of stress varies among individuals and is certainly inevitable at some or the other time in one's life (Lazarus and Cohen, 1977; Taylor, 2005).

The difference between “stress” and “a stressor” is that “a stressor” is an agent or stimulus that causes “stress”. Stress is the feeling we have when under pressure, while stressors are the things we respond to in environment.

Selye (1956) and Wolff (1953) were among the first to examine stress in a social context and regarded the bodily reaction to unpleasant external stimulation. Psychosocial stress refers to

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acute or chronic events of psychological or social origin which challenge the homeostatic state of biological system.

Furthermore, it refers to the socially derived, conditioned and psychological processes that stimulate manifestation of subjective distress. Psychosocial stress reflects the subject's inability to forestall or diminish perception, recall, anticipate or imagine disvalued attributes, behaviors and outcomes' of other's responses. However, it is the cognitive and affective interpretation of circumstances rather than the circumstances themselves that evoke psychological distress (Kaplan, 1996).

A strained interpersonal relationship is one of the psychosocial stressor which effects life. There is research evidence to support the observation that poor interpersonal relationships and lack of social support are some psychosocial factors which are stressful for employees (Motowidls, Fackard and Manning, 1986; Narayan, Menon and Sectors, 1999). In addition interpersonal relationships with family, friends and colleagues do have a very stressful impact on people. Both personal and professional relationships require a significant amount of effort to maintain them. As stress increased, people began to experience impaired social functioning and relationship problems (Finn and Tomz, 1996).

Gaust, Frese and Molevar (2000) also found that social stressors such as interpersonal relationships, conflict in work place have their greatest effects on the emotional and physical well being of the employees.

Furthermore, Potter, Smith, Stobel and Zutra (2002) studied and observed that the interpersonal conflicts at work place have a negative influence on the employees. Interpersonal conflicts experienced at the work place also predicted diseases and the well-being of the employees declined substantially. Results further proved that psychosocial environment at work place had unique effects on employees.

It has also been reported by researchers that inflexible work hours, work over load, risky job and poor relations with coworkers are the main contributors to stress, which creates dissatisfaction among the employees (Shahid, 2012). Lack of financial rewards, inflexibility in work hour, personal issues, low control over the work environment and bureaucratic management system are negatively correlated with employee's productivity while lack of financial rewards contributed more in creating stress among the public health sector employees (Naqvi, Khan, Kant and Khan, 2013).

Excessive responsibilities and adverse situations are also reasons of stress in personal as well as professional life. In professional life stress can be caused by too much or too little work, time pressure and deadlines, fatigues from physical strain of work environment, excessive travelling, long working hours, and having to frequently cope with changes in work (John, Iron, and Copper, 1991). Fulcheri, Barzega, Marina, Navara and Ravizza (1995) also observed that size of work load, the complexity to tasks and responsibilities were the major

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source of stress factors. They further reported that the reason for frustration was delay in career development among the managers. Furthermore, Aminabhavi and Triveni (2000) revealed that managers experienced significantly higher stress than clerks. The fact is that managers have greater responsibility of their position as compared to clerks.

Psychosocial stressor in terms of marriage related stress is also one of the reasons of stress among employees. In 1987, Hendrix, Steal and Schulth reported that the main sources of psychosocial stress are family threat (such as complaints from spouse) and occupational threat (such as pressure from a supervisor to work harder).

In addition Mesler and Capobianco (2001) studied psychosocial factors associated with job stress. It was found that social factors at work play a critical role in the production of common chronic diseases, such as heart disease and hypertension. If experience with family and friends are supportive and constructive to the individual who is exposed to stress, the person will be able to react favorably to stressors, while the individual who has primarily negative, non-supportive experiences will find stressors to be more disruptive and upsetting. Family and friends act as a source of support to sustain and encourage when threats come along. By the same token unsympathetic and indifferent relations with peers can weaken and make an employee even more vulnerable to the pressure of work place (Harris and Hartman, 2002).

Health related problem is one of the main psychosocial stressor which effect employees. It has been reported that stress in social context and job related stress can have serious outcomes like overall poor health, drinking, depression, low self-esteem, and plan to leave the work (Margolis, Kroes and Cruinn, 1974). Due to globalization and high competition among organizations, employees perform their duties beyond the routine working hours. Such changes in the nature of job increases the job stress, which affects the workers physical and mental health. These effects of job stress are not only destructive to the individual employees, but also for the organization at large (Salleh, Abu Bakar, and Keong, 2008). Thus, stress in employees is becoming a serious issue, because researchers have reported that it has a direct effect on the employee's health and their job performance (Bytyqui, Reshani and Hasani, 2010).

In 2015, for the first time, the surveye done by American Psychological Association revealed that excessive family responsibilities are the third most common psychosocial stressor (54 per cent), followed by personal health concerns (51 per cent), health problems affecting family (50 per cent) and the financial constraints (50 per cent).

American Psychological Association (2016) surveyed gender and stress. They found that men and women report different reaction to stress, both physically and mentally. They attempt to manage stress in different ways and also perceive their ability to do so and the things that stand in their way in markedly different ways. Findings also suggest that while women are

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more likely to report physical and emotional symptoms associated with stress in comparison to men.

A study was conducted by Aminabhavi and Triveni (2000) on the nationalized and non nationalized bank employees. The sample consisted of 78 bank employees (39 from nationalized and 39 from non- nationalized banks). The result revealed that male and female bank employees do not differ significantly in their occupational stress.

The effect of gender on organizational role stress was examined by Barkat and Asma (1999). The sample consisted of 50 managers (25 male and 25 female) of State Bank of India (SBI). The age range of the subjects was between 36-55 years. Results indicated that female managers showed lower degree of role stress than their male counterparts.

Lundberg and Frankenhaeuser (1999) found that both men and women experienced their job as challenging. Data indicated that women were more stressed by their greater workload and by a greater responsibility for duties related to home and family.

The performance at work requires mental and physical effort resulting in short term physiological and psychological load reactions that can be experienced as physiological or emotional arousal. In the case when individual's capacity for performing at work exceeds his capacity, the experience is stress and fatigue (Meijman, and Mulder, 1998; Sluiter, Frings, Beek, and Meijman 2001; Cropley, and Zijlstra, 2011). These load reactions can result from psychosocial stressors, a term used to describe aspects of work management and its social and organizational contexts that have the potential for causing psychological or physical harm (Cox and Griffiths, 2005). Psychosocial stress is the result of a cognitive appraisal (an individual's mental interpretation) of what is at stake and what can be done about it. More simply put, psychosocial stress results when we look at a perceived social threat in our lives (real or even imagined) and discern that it may require resources we don't have.

All of the psychosocial stressors can lead to a stress response in the body. Most taxing stressors to deal with can make us feel unsupported and alienated. This can make it more difficult to cope. However, it's important to manage psychosocial stress in our lives. It's also important to learn stress relief techniques to effectively reverse the stress response so that we don't experience prolonged or chronic stress.

Objective

- To study the significance of difference between male and female bureaucrats in terms of seven sub variables of psychosocial stressors.

METHODOLOGY

Tool Used

ICMR Psychosocial Stress Scale (Srivastava, 1991-92): Designed by "Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)" New Delhi, the scale consists of 40 items which cover these

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areas: Strained interpersonal relationship, excessive responsibilities, financial constraints, marriage related stress, health related problems, adverse situations and perceived threat. The reliability of the scale has been established through Cronbach-Alpha ($r = .88$), split half ($r = .88$), test-retest ($r = .72$) and internal consistency ($r = .65$) method. Internal consistency of the tool on its seven subscales ranged from .24 to .77 ($p < .05$). This further established the content validity of the measure.

Sample

Purposive random sampling approach was employed to select a total sample of 250 bureaucrats. The data were collected from the Himachal Pradesh Secretariat, Directorate of Himachal Pradesh, various Districts headquarters and Blocks. Bureaucrats were approached directly in their offices. Psychosocial stressor scale was administered to the bureaucrats at their respective places of work and later collected back. Proper instructions were given to them beforehand. The goal was to choose a sample of 250 bureaucrats from various districts of Himachal Pradesh. But, out of 250 questionnaires 186 questionnaires were collected back and from those 186, 130 were male bureaucrats and 56 were female bureaucrats. Due to incomplete responses and in certain cases incorrect responses the final sample was reduced to 175 bureaucrats. Out of the total final sample of 175, 128 were male bureaucrats and remaining 47 were female bureaucrats. All the bureaucrats were in the age range of 30 to 50 years.

Table 1: Showing the Sample Distribution

Designation of Bureaucrats	Number of Bureaucrats		Place of Designation
	Male Bureaucrats	Female Bureaucrats	
Indian Administrative Service Officers (IAS)	23	05	Secretariat and Districts Headquarters
Indian Police Service Officers (IPS)	15	10	Police Headquarters and Districts Headquarters
Indian Forest Service Officers (IFS)	12	3	State Forest Department
Himachal Pradesh Administrative Service officers (HPAS)	33	21	Secretariat, Directorate, Districts Headquarters and Blocks
Himachal Pradesh Polices Service Officers (HPPS)	45	08	Districts Headquarters and Blocks
Total Number	128	47	

Bureaucrats were approached and contacted directly in their offices. The ICMR Psychosocial Stress Scale was administered to the bureaucrats at their respective places of posting and later collected back. Proper instructions were given beforehand.

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RESULTS

The t-test was carried out to find out the significance of difference between the mean scores of male and female bureaucrats on the seven sub variables of psychosocial stressors (strained interpersonal relationships, excessive responsibilities, financial constraints, marriage related stress, health related problems, adverse situations and perceived threats). The results of t-test are presented in Table 1 and graphically depicted in Figure 1.

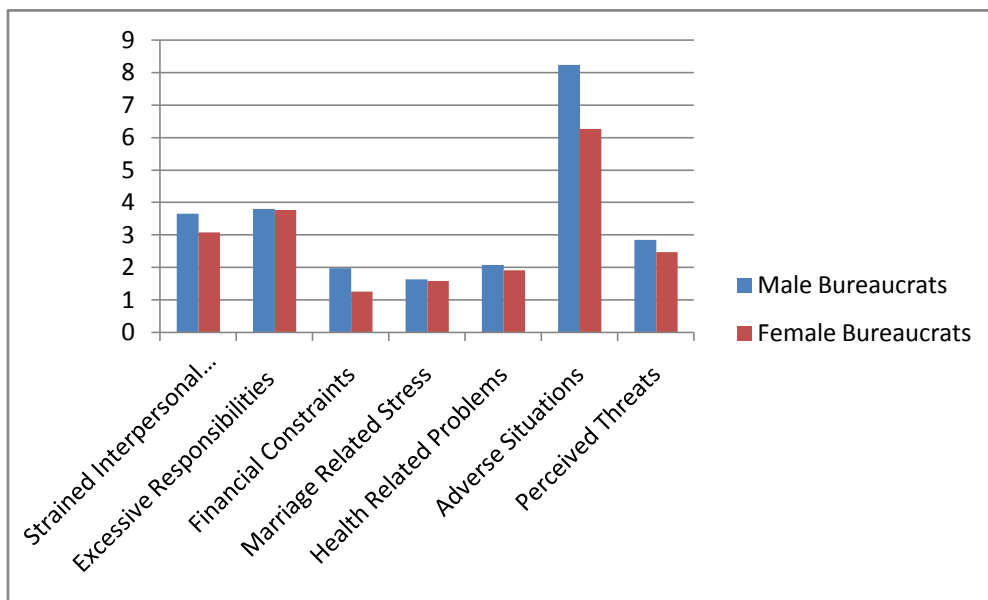
Table 1 clearly indicates that male bureaucrats ($M = 3.66$) have significantly ($t = 2.588, p < .01$) scored higher on strained interpersonal relationships as compared to female bureaucrats ($M = 3.08$). Likewise, male bureaucrats ($M = 1.99$) have also significantly ($t = 5.144, p < .01$) scored higher on financial constraints as compared to female bureaucrats ($M = 1.26$).

Table 1: Showing Mean, Standard Deviation and t-ratio on Seven Sub Variables of Psychosocial Stressors between Male and Female Bureaucrats.

Sr. No.	Variables	Male Bureaucrats		Female Bureaucrats		t-ratio
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
A	Psychosocial Stressors					
1	Strained Interpersonal Relationships	3.66	1.217	3.08	1.397	2.588**
2	Excessive Responsibilities	3.81	1.885	3.78	2.112	.105
3	Financial Constraints	1.99	1.428	1.26	.443	5.144**
4	Marriage Related Stress	1.64	1.079	1.60	1.212	.244
5	Health Related Problems	2.09	1.180	1.92	.986	1.006
6	Adverse Situations	8.24	5.013	6.28	4.223	2.624**
7	Perceived Threats	2.85	1.812	2.48	1.460	1.432

** $p < .01$ and * $p < .05$

Figure 1: Showing Mean Difference among Male and Female Bureaucrats on Seven Sub-Variables of Psychosocial Stressors



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Furthermore, Table 1 also reveals that male bureaucrats ($M = 8.24$) have significantly ($t = 2.624, p < .01$) scored higher on adverse situations as compared to female bureaucrats ($M = 6.28$).

DISCUSSION

A noteworthy finding of the present investigation was that significant gender differences emerged on psychosocial stressors between male and female bureaucrats working in the state of Himachal Pradesh.

The results indicated that there was a significant difference between male and female bureaucrats in terms of strained interpersonal relationships. The mean score of male bureaucrats was significantly higher than female bureaucrats for strained interpersonal relationships.

Strained interpersonal relationships with family, friends and colleagues do have a stressful impact on people. It is one of the psychosocial stressor which effect males and females differently because socializing activities connect females with other people like spending time with friends or family or being engaged in religious or social services which help females in responding to stress in a better way. Strained interpersonal relationships also depend upon the economic factors that, in turn are influenced by cultural and political conditions in a particular society.

Motowildls, Fackard, and Manning (1986) and Narayan, Menon and Spector (1999) reported in their respective studies that poor interpersonal relationships and lack of social support are some psychosocial factors which can be stressful for employees.

So, personal and professional relationships require a significant amount of efforts to avoid impaired interpersonal relationship. As stress increases, people begin to experience impaired social functioning and relationship problems (Finn and Tomz, 1996).

Sullivan (2004) stated that there are significant difference between the male and female officers in areas of self-disclosure, anger and communication. He explained that males argue and communicate anger more than females do. While females are reluctant to express aggression and anger, males view this as acceptable behavior and, thus, males engage in more aggressive interactions than women (Fehrs, Baldwin, Colins, Pattterson, and Benedict, 1999; Kinnney, Smith and Don Zella, 2011).

The masculine and feminine socialization beginning in childhood causes men and women to form different ways of communicating as well as valuing different aspects of relationships (Woods, 2011). Woods also introduced the “Male Deficit Model”, which discusses the cultural assumption that “men are less skilled in developing and sustaining personal relationships”. He also discusses the male inability to express himself in relationships.

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The results further reveal that male bureaucrats had significantly higher psychosocial stress in terms of financial constraints than their female counterparts. Perhaps male bureaucrats experience an overburden of financial stress because they have to cater to the needs of their family members as well as settle down their children. This could be the reason for their high financial constraint leading to increased psychosocial stress. Although bureaucrats are paid handsomely with additional allowances but they also have to pay heavy taxes and maintain their standard of living.

It seems in male dominated society where male enjoys a higher and powerful designation than a female, he also faces some drawbacks of this dominance. Most of the financial responsibilities of the family are on the male member of the family.

There seems to be a probability that the male bureaucrats face financial constraints due to the above mentioned reason where a male has to perform all the social and financial obligations. The second reason seems to be that all female bureaucrats may have earning partners which adds to their enhanced financial security. On the other hand, most of the male officers may not have earning partners which makes them more vulnerable to financial constraints.

Another important finding of the present investigation was that there was a significant difference between male and female bureaucrats in terms of adverse situations. The mean scores of male bureaucrats were significantly higher than female bureaucrats for adverse situations.

Adverse situations faced by bureaucrats are transfer to remote areas or in less powerful areas or insurgency affected areas. Transfers are a normal feature in administrative jobs, according to the Weberian concept of the separation of the incumbent from the office he is holding. They prevent the growth of excess 'embeddedness

(Evan, 1992) in local society by creating some distance between the administration and the public.

Moreover, it is on record that over the last few years male bureaucrats allegedly committed suicide, as a consequences of victimization of circumstances of facing adverse situations in personal and professional life. In a media interview before committing suicide, a bureaucrat had alleged he was being harassed by his officers (The Hindu, 2016).

In India, on average, male suicide rate is twice than that of females (Singh and Singh, 2003). Both males and females have different ways of being mentally strong when dealing with different situations in life. Males generally tend to process their emotions and stress inwardly. Many times, they don't know exactly how they feel, so they try to figure it out on their own. Some men are afraid of their emotions and keep them buried inside in order to protect themselves from looking weak. But some men get aggressive and are not able to express what exactly they are going through. So, aggression worsens their situation which leads to

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heightened levels of stress. On the contrary female's perceptions are different from males in some situations of stress. They like to make sure they succeed even before they try something, so they avoid the threat of failure. Furthermore, females take up a challenge and believe that they must go after things that scare them. Most importantly, there is research evidence that females have a higher need for affiliation (Duncan and Peterson, 2010). So, whenever they are confronted with any adverse situation they turn to significant people in their lives in order to resolve these problems. Mostly, females surround themselves with valuable people or with those who support them and help them in easing the burden of their personal and professional or work related challenges.

Thus, male bureaucrats undergo levels of higher stress due to adverse situation in comparison to female bureaucrats, perhaps because females are inherently better equipped to face adverse situations.

It can be concluded from the above discussed findings that though, male bureaucrats have scored higher on all the seven sub variables of psychosocial stressors as compared to female bureaucrats, but only three sub variables of psychosocial stressors (i.e., strained interpersonal relationships, financial constraints and adverse situations) reached the level of significance which clearly indicates that the male bureaucrats working in the state of Himachal Pradesh have experienced higher levels of psychosocial stress as compared to the female bureaucrats.

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