

# The Effect of Counselling Interventions on Work Stress of Operational Level Employees in Apparel Industry

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## Abstract

The current study was initiated to assess the effect of organizational counselling interventions on work stress of operational level employees in apparel, with the aim of bridging the gap in the context with empirical knowledge. Hence, this was conducted as a cross-sectional, quantitative field study among a sample of 87 operational level employees randomly selected from three (03) apparel manufacturing organizations in Sri Lanka. Primary data was collected via a standard questionnaire which met the acceptable level of validity and reliability. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficient and simple regression were employed to analyze data. It is found that there is a significant negative, but the weak relationship ( $r = -0.233$ ) between two constructs, and a significant, but the smaller impact of organizational counselling interventions on work stress of employees ( $r^2 = 5.4\%$ ) in the apparel industry. Findings of the current study support the empirically justified conception that operational level workers are more 'financial sensitive' and much more focus on physiological needs than psychological needs. Hence, it is recommended for practising managers in apparel to pay much attention to the factors other than organizational counselling, which could probably manipulate the unexplained variation of work stress of operational level employees.

Keywords: Organizational counselling, Organizational counselling interventions, Work stress, apparel industry

## Introduction

Work stress has been becoming a major issue which is faced by employees in modern organizations regardless of the industry that they involve in. Indeed, work stress and workplace counselling go hand in hand in one's work today. Even though researchers found plenty of research studies done to examine the association (and

the impact) between (of) counselling interventions and work stress, yet it remains as two burning issues among social researches.

Stress is a non-specific response of the body to an excess demand. Also, the stress which can damage to worker's health and organizational performance is a result of a mismatch between demand and pressure in the person, and their knowledge and abilities. A worker who is stressed is more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, and less safe at work (Leka, Griffith & Cox 2003). When employees do not satisfied with their outcome that cause to the way they treat and communicate with customers might leave a negative impact on the organization itself. As a result, in the long run, organizations are less likely to be successful in their competitive market (Ahsan, Abdullah, Fie, & Alam 2009).

Employees experiencing work stress have been shown unstable blood pressure, increase cholesterol levels, muscles tension, diabetes, hypertension, headache, substances abuse, and depression. Further, studies denoted that employee's capacity to concentrate and retain information becomes a problem. Unfavourable consequences of that were absenteeism, increased turnover, productivity reduction, and the deteriorated creativity (Higgins 2005).

Hence, counselling to mitigate the work stress is a must factor to achieve good working condition, and reduce the stress which is potential to cause in the future as well. Decisions and actions of different kinds within the operation must be accompanied by consideration of their effect on the working environment. Further, planning to conduct and monitoring activities in such a way that stress hazards can be assessed, and it also means taking steps to ensure that stress will not impair the employee's health (Higgins 2005).

Therefore, the prime purpose of this study was to assess the effect of organizational counselling interventions on work stress of employees; especially, operational level employees in the apparel industry.

Rest of the paper provides the literature pertaining to organizational counselling interventions and work stress, hypotheses advanced based on the empirical evidence, and the methodology adopted in conducting the current study. The latter part of the paper presents the findings and the conclusion of the present study.

## **Literature Review**

Work stress is a psychological and physical state that results when the resources of the individual are not sufficient to cope with the demands and pressures of the situation (Michie 2002). Thus, stress is more likely in some situations than others and in some individuals than others. Stress can undermine the achievement of goals, both for individuals and for organizations. Further, stress results not only

from excessive demands but also from the lack of stimulus entailed, for example, by excessive monotony in the workplace. Stress is not always negative. Stress can have positive consequences as well. The positive side of the work stress is termed as 'eustress' which increase the performance of employees up to a certain extent. But, the negative side of the stress termed as 'distress' is harmful, and probably deteriorate the level of performance. In extant literature, many researchers have studied the effects of stress on performance. McGrath (1976) as cited in Kapoor and Khanka (2013) reported that a moderate amount of stress empowers people to perform better. Improved performance can be due to enhanced arousal. But if the stress is far greater, it will result in decreased performance and concerning health issues as well.

Counselling is the application of mental health, psychological or human development principles through cognitive, affective, behavioural or systematic intervention, strategies that address wellness, personal growth and the career development (Sheppard 2004). According to McLeod and McLeod (2001), organizational counselling is a generally effective intervention which helps to improve employee's psychological health as well as contributing positively to organizational success. The aim of the organizational counselling is to assist both the employer and the employee by intervening with an active problem-solving approach to tackling the problem at hand. Explore and find the key sources of difficulty, review the individual's current strategies and styles of coping, implement methods of dealing with the perceived problem, thereby alleviating the issue and evaluate the effectiveness of chosen strategies are another specific aims of personal psychological counselling at work (Padmasiri & Jayathilaka 2014).

Sheppard (2004) revealed that workplace counselling is the one strategy for coping with the adverse effect of stress. Accordingly, anxiety, depression, a panic attack can be overcome, and enhance the work performance, work attitude and working relationship counselling have made a positive platform. Further, McLeod and McLeod (2001) found that well-designed counselling interventions at work are a reactive action rather than a proactive measure. However, many of the researchers and scholars reported that there is an association among the aforesaid two constructs (eg: Sheppard 2014; Padmasiri & Jayathilaka 2014; Kapoor & Khanka 2013).

Having considered the empirical evidence and theoretical discussions reported above in this article, the following two hypotheses were advanced to be tested.

**H<sub>1a</sub>:** There is a *significant relationship* between organizational counselling interventions and work stress of operational employees in the apparel industry.

**H<sub>1b</sub>:** There is a *significant impact* of organizational counselling interventions on work stress of operational employees in the apparel industry.

The conceptual framework of the current study is depicted in fig. 1. Organizational counselling interventions are considered as the independent variable while work stress is taken as the problem (dependent) variable. The hypothesized relationships among the constructs also shown in the same figure.

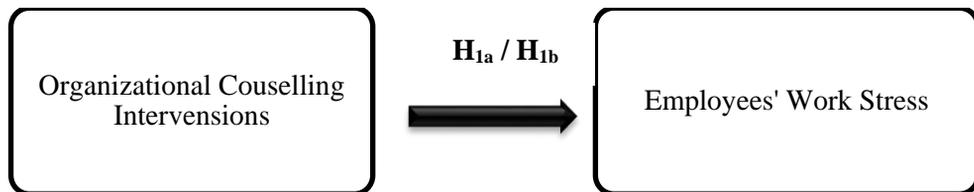


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

### **Methods and Materials**

The study is a more basic research in which researches attempted to answer a problem that is concerned in filling the contextual gap with empirical knowledge. The deductive approach was predominantly applied, and the study is mainly explanatory.

This was carried as a cross-sectional field study in which the researchers' interference was minimum. Primary data was collected through a self-administered standard questionnaire (adapted from McLeod & McLeod 2001) from a sample of 87 machine operators / operational level employees randomly selected from three leading apparel manufacturing companies in Sri Lanka. Hence, the unit of analysis of the current study was at the individual level; a machine operator in apparel. The collected data was analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel, by employing descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and simple regression analysis.

### **Analysis and Results**

Total of 47 out of 87 Machine operators responded, were males and the remaining 40 were females. 53 of the respondents were married and the remaining 34 in the sample were single. Majority of the respondents (28.7%) were in the age group of below 24 years, while 22 of respondents have more than 10 years of working experience. With regard to the monthly income; 31 respondents (35.6%) belong to the income category of more than Rs.40,000. 47.1% of the respondents experience a moderate level of stress, while 29.9% of them experience a high level of stress in the selected sample. 62.1% of the respondents reported that *the extent of counselling interventions in the apparel industry is moderate*.

Moreover, the Pearson correlation coefficient was computed between employee work stress and workplace counselling interventions to assess the strength of the association. As depicted in table 1, the Pearson correlation is -0.233, which shows that there is a negative moderate relationship between two variables. As the significant value is 0.030 (2-tailed) which is less than the level of significance (0.05) at 95% confidential level, the found correlation coefficient (-0.233) is statistically significant. Therefore, there is statistical evidence to accept H<sub>1a</sub>, that there is a significant relationship between employee stress and organizational counselling interventions.

Table 1. Correlation

		Work Stress	Level of organizational counselling interventions
<b>Stress</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	<b>-.233*</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<b>.030</b>
	N	87	87

Furthermore, the simple regression analysis was employed to assess the impact and consider the coefficient of determination. The R Square value of the computed research model is given in table 2.

Table 2. Regression results

<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>Std. The error of the Estimate</b>
1	.233 <sup>a</sup>	<b>.054</b>	.043	.63237

According to the model summary given in table 2; the R Square value is 0.054. It means 5.4% of the variation independent variable (employee work stress) is explained by the fitted regression model. This means organizational counselling interventions has an impact of 5.4% on the mitigation work stress of operational level employees in the apparel industry.

Table 3. ANOVA

<b>Model</b>		<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
1	Regression	1.943	1	1.943	4.859	<b>.030</b>
	Residual	33.991	85	.400		
	Total	35.935	86			

a. Dependent Variable: Work Stress

b. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Counseling Interventions

According to table 3; the fitted regression model is significant as Sig value is 0.030 which is less than 0.05., and according to the residual analysis done. Hence, H<sub>1b</sub> also accepted, and it could be claimed that the impact of organizational counselling interventions on work stress of operational level employees is statistically significant at the confidence level of 95%.

Findings of the current study align with Kapoor and Khanka (2013); Higgins (2005); Sheppard (2004) and Weerasinghe & Batagoda (2011) in which it was found that operational level employees in any industry are lesser sensitive to counselling facilities at work. Even though the employer provides counselling facilities, as found in the extant literature, lower level employees are reluctant to participate in counselling. The most common way of resolving grievances at work in apparel is through the immediate superior or the welfare officers, not with the psychological counsellor. Similarly, operational level workers are financially sensitive. So that, findings of the current study support the empirically proven notion that operational level workers are more financial sense and much more focus on physiological needs than psychological needs (Weerasinghe&Batagoda 2011).

## **Conclusion**

Even though the organizational counselling interventions have received a wide acceptance in mitigating the work stress of employees, featuring the unique attributes of the operational level employees in the apparel industry, it is found that only a 5.4% of an impact come from organizational counselling affecting work stress of employees. However, the found impact is significant, and cannot be ignored. Hence, this study concludes by declaring that the organizational counselling interventions have a lesser ability to mitigate the work stress of operational level employees in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka. So that, building on the context, a serious attention to other factors including; financial rewards, supervision and working environment is recommended for operational level workers in the apparel industry.

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