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The Interrelationship between Co-Workers' Support, Job Satisfaction, and Work Stress Among Apparel Merchandisers



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ABSTRACT

This research aims to assess the employees' perception of co-workers' support, and the interrelationship between co-worker's support, job satisfaction and work stress among the apparel merchandisers in Bangladesh. To conduct the study, responses from 138 Merchandisers were obtained using questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS. Result revealed that on average Merchandisers were satisfied with their job and the co-worker support they received, but they were uncertain on their work stress. Both Assistant and Senior Merchandisers received the co-worker support and were neutral on their work stress. However, Assistant Merchandisers much deviated on the point of co-worker support and Senior Merchandisers much deviated from work stress. Comparatively Senior Merchandisers were more satisfied with their job than Assistant Merchandisers. Regression analysis indicated that co-worker support had a significant positive impact on stress and the job satisfaction had significant contribution in reducing stress. In addition, those who were not bored felt less stressed and those who were satisfied with their job for the time being and liked their job more than average felt more stressed. Finally, the research supported the necessity of maintaining the co-worker support and job satisfaction to reduce work stress.

INTRODUCTION

Readymade garments industries are very important for the economy of Bangladesh. It began its journey with a moderately small investment in late 1970s and started to thrive between 1980s and 1990s. Gradually RMG industry became the largest industry in this country. These industries made and can continue to make a substantial contribution to the economic development of Bangladesh. Moreover, the industry is playing a vital role in further industrialization. Other industrial sectors grow on the basis of an evolving garment industry. Merchandising staff in RMG sector play the vital role for the expansion of the apparel business. Their duties are quite broad, responsible for executing the whole order from order receipt to order shipment and thus it is thought that they have heavy workloads and suffer from high level of work stress (The Hong Kong Productivity Council 1993). In addition, due to the large time difference between Bangladesh and its two major markets Europe and United State, it is unavoidable that Merchandisers suffer from long working hours. As so they are looking special care and support from their co-workers. A very little research has been conducted on job satisfaction of merchandising staff in Bangladesh though job satisfaction has gained considerable attention from researchers in the field of organizational behavior, organizational psychology and human resource management (Meyer, J. P. & Allen, N. J. 1997). Workplace environment is an issue of increasing concern in today's industries. It affects greatly on the motivation and performance of the workforce. According to Cooper and Rossi work stress has much undesirable outcomes including poor performance, absenteeism, dissatisfaction and health-related problems among the employees (Rossi & Lubbers, 1989). In Bangladesh context, job satisfaction among Apparel Merchandisers remains an area that has received a very little attention (Cooper & Payne, 1989; Rossi 1989). Research within the area of social support and its beneficial effects in the workplace has become increasingly popular in the last two decades (Ducharme & Martin, 2000) and more recently the idea of researching different types of support, for example supervisor and co-worker support has received an increasing amount of attention (McCalister, Dolbier, Webster, Mallon & Steinhardt, 2006; Albar Marin & Garcia-Ramirez, 2005). One key reason for this is that each source of support can have different effects on other variables. For example, some researchers argue that co-worker support is more relevant to overall satisfaction with the job whereas supervisor support relates to specific job satisfaction areas (Seers, McGee, Serey & Graen, 1983). Due to an increasing number of organizations relying more heavily on work teams to achieve organizational objectives the research on co-worker support is becoming

progressively more important (Ducharme & Martin, 2000). The aim of the present research is to examine the perception of Apparel Merchandisers on these issues and determine the interrelationship between work stress, job satisfaction, and co-worker support.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Research regarding work environment has been done throughout the world in different contexts. Previous research on work stress has put much emphasis on the work environment. It has been found that work environment and its contribution to workplace relationships have much effect on work stress and consequently on employees' health (Karasek & Theorell, 1989). A study conducted in food service industry indicated that co-worker support significantly reduced stress and increased job satisfaction (Babin and Boles, 1996). In nursing, it has been observed that when nurses did not get enough support from co-workers and were not satisfied with the head nurses, it significantly affected on their perception of work stress (Sveinsdottir H, Biering P, Ramel A., 2006). According to a research conducted by Ducharme and Martin (2000) even with the existence of depressive symptom, job satisfaction of employees ameliorated with support in the workplace. Instead of the variety of studies conducted in this area, not much literature is found corresponding to RMG industry in Bangladesh. In 2003 Paul and Majumder conducted a research on only job satisfaction and causes of dissatisfaction along with other issues (Paul-Majumder, 2003). Keeping all these in mind this research focused on employees' insight on the work stress, co-worker cooperation, and job satisfaction. It also emphasized the contribution of job satisfaction and co-worker support on work stress.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct the research, a sample of Apparel Merchandisers working in different garment industries and buying houses was chosen ranging from junior to higher level position. All of them were full-time employees of their respective organizations. Data was collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained details pertaining to the demographic profile of the respondents and then four attitude measurement scales containing twenty-two items in total. Participants had to rate how frequently a condition happened or how a statement best related to them on a rating scale. The twenty-two items related to co-worker support, job satisfaction, work stress and intentions to quit. The questionnaires were distributed and collected from 160 employees, among which a number of cases of non-response were 22

indicating an 86.25% response rate. Among these respondents, 57 were Assistant Merchandiser and 46 were Senior Merchandiser. The rest held different positions. The age of the respondents varied from 25 to 45 years. Participants were made aware through an information sheet that participation was voluntary and that all responses would remain confidential and anonymous. For data cleaning and analysis, SPSS was used.

QUESTIONNAIRE SCALE:

In total 22 questions were asked in order to measure the four attitude scales. To measure co-worker support, the social support scale designed by O’Driscoll (2000) was used which contains four items (Table 01).

Table 01: Item and corresponding scores to measure co-worker support.

Item No.	Items	Score for Response						Item score
		(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)	(vi)	
1.	Colleagues provided "helpful information or advice"	1	2	3	4	5	6	x_1
2.	Colleagues provided "sympathetic understanding and advice"	1	2	3	4	5	6	x_2
3.	Colleagues provided "clear and helpful feedback"	1	2	3	4	5	6	x_3
4.	Colleagues provided "practical assistance"	1	2	3	4	5	6	x_4

(i)= never, (ii)= very occasionally, (iii)= sometimes, (iv)= often, (v)= very often, (vi)= all the time

The total score of the individual was computed by summing individual item score ($\sum_{i=1}^4 x_i$). The scale has a minimum score of 4 and a maximum score of 24. An individual with higher score indicated that they got higher levels of support from their co-worker.

The other two scales- job satisfaction and work stress were measured by six-item version of Brayfield and Rothes' (1951) Overall Job satisfaction scale which was developed by Agho, Mueller and Price (1993) and nine-item version of Parker and Decottiis (1983) Job Stress scale used by Jamal and Baba (1992) respectively. The range of score of job satisfaction scale is 6 to 30 and work stress scale is 9 to 45. A higher score of the individual scales represented that the participants were more satisfied with their job and had more work stress respectively.

The last scale-intention to quit was measured by Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, C., Fichman, M., Jenkins, D., & Klesh, J., 1979). The scale consisted of three items with overall score ranged from 3 to 21. A higher score indicated higher intention to quit current job.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To ensure the reliability of the data, a reliability analysis was performed. Table 02 represents the Cronbach alpha coefficient for co-worker support, job satisfaction, work stress and intention to quit:

Table 02: Cronbach alpha coefficient for the four scales:

Scale	Cronbach alpha coefficient
Co worker support	0.871
Job satisfaction	0.728
Work stress	0.781
Intention to quit	0.573

Table 02 indicates that all the coefficients were greater than 0.7 making them acceptable except the intention to quit scale. For co-worker support this value was more than 0.85 making the internal consistency excellent. The internal consistency of the scale-intention to quit was found to be very poor, which indicates that there were not enough questions to measure employee's intention to quit. Hence, this scale was not used to draw any further inferences in this research.

For the three scales, descriptive statistics were computed which is represented below in table 03.

Table 03: Mean score, standard deviation, minimum and maximum for the three scales:

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Co worker support	19.3623	3.61251	11.00	24.00
Job satisfaction	21.3309	2.63609	16.00	27.00
Work stress	28.1232	4.38553	16.00	41.00

The mean score for co-worker support and job satisfaction indicated that on average Merchandisers were satisfied with their job and support they received from their colleagues. But they were oscillating on how they felt regarding their work stress. In addition, the standard deviation for all the scales except work stress was moderately low which indicated that there was not much spread of scores for these scales.

Additional emphasis was put on the difference of the work environment of Senior Merchandisers and Assistant Merchandisers as shown in table 04.

Table 04: Mean score, standard deviation, minimum and maximum for Senior and Assistant Merchandiser for the three scales:

Scale	Job	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Co worker support	Senior Merchandiser	21.1087	2.59254	14.00	24.00
	Assistant Merchandiser	18.0877	3.47070	11.00	24.00
Job satisfaction	Senior Merchandiser	22.5111	2.49201	17.00	27.00
	Assistant Merchandiser	20.1071	2.10349	16.00	27.00
Work stress	Senior Merchandiser	29.9348	5.26794	18.00	41.00
	Assistant Merchandiser	27.5263	2.82909	18.00	33.00

It was observed from the mean scores that both Senior and Assistant Merchandisers got co-worker support very often, however, the standard deviation for Assistant Merchandisers significantly differ from the mean score. The deviation may be due to the fact that the

Assistant Merchandisers are entry-level officers and naturally they are looking for more support from their seniors and coworkers as they are inexperienced. This supports may differ from industry to industry; depending largely on the company culture and working environment of the organization. Hence, mixed opinions were observed. For work stress, Assistant Merchandisers and Senior Merchandisers on average felt neutral; however Senior Merchandisers deviated more compared to Assistant Merchandisers. In fact, Senior Merchandisers are always under pressure for managing all existing orders as well as for new opportunity and directly accountable to their superiors. So their work stress level varied significantly on the relationship with their superiors. Despite their stressful job, Senior Merchandisers were more satisfied with their job compared to Assistant Merchandisers. This may be due to the fact that there is a significant salary difference between Senior and Assistant Merchandiser in Bangladesh.

For a further illustration of the dependency of the scales, regression analysis was performed which is represented in table 05.

Table 05: Multiple regression analysis of work stress on co-worker support and job satisfaction

	Coefficients	Standard error	t	p-value
Co worker support	0.338	0.099	3.429	.001
Job satisfaction	-0.288	0.136	-2.123	.036

Note: $R^2 = 0.102$, Adjusted $R^2=0.088$

The model shows how on average, work stress depended on job satisfaction and co-worker support. The overall model was found to be significant since, $F = 7.514$ and $p - value = .001$. Also, it has been found that co-worker support and job satisfaction had a significant effect on work stress.

From table 05 it is seen that with an increase in co-worker support, work stress also increased. This unusual phenomenon may be due to the reason that overall the participants were neutral about their work stress. In past studies, it has been seen that people understand the importance of the support they got when they felt stressed. When people did not find themselves in such stressful situations they did not feel the necessity of the support (Seers et

al, 1983). Another reason behind the phenomenon can be that co-worker may not have played an effective role in reducing stress. In past research, it has been found that supervisor was more fundamental in reducing work stress. (McCalister et al., 2006)

In addition, job satisfaction played a significant role in reducing stress. It is seen that with an increase in job satisfaction work stress decreased. A second regression analysis was performed to further illustrate the relationship between work stress and job satisfaction. This regression model considered individual items of the job satisfaction scale as the independent variable and work stress as the dependent variable. The regression coefficients along with their p- values are shown in table 06. The model was overall significant with $F = 10.901$ and $p - value < .005$

Table 06: Multiple regression analysis of work stress on individual items to measure job satisfaction

Variable	Coefficients	Standard error	t	p-value
Item 5	-3.128	0.512	-6.110	.000
Item 6	0.843	0.636	1.325	.188
Item 7	1.762	0.550	3.202	.002
Item 8	-0.752	0.508	-1.479	0.142
Item 9	1.697	0.505	3.360	0.001
Item 10	-0.161	0.592	-0.272	0.786

Note: $R^2 = 0.336$, Adjusted $R^2=0.306$

From table 06 it can be seen that item 5, item 7 and item 9 showed a significant effect on work stress. This result indicated that those who were satisfied with their job for the time being (item 7) and those who liked their job more than average (item 9) had more work stress. The reason behind this phenomenon may be due to being satisfied and liking what they did, they got more involved in their respective duties. As a result of increased workload, they felt stressed to complete their responsibilities. On the other hand, those who did not feel much boredom (item 5) psychologically did not feel much stressed even with increasing workload.

LIMITATION

Due to the low value of Cronbach's alpha, the research failed to provide much insight on intention to quit. The scale requires more items to measure employees' intention to quit meticulously. However, it has been found from the results that on average the employees were neutral regarding this phenomenon (mean score=13.1884 with standard deviation 3.27243). The reason may be that in Bangladesh it is very difficult to find a new opportunity, so without having a job offer at hand employees' do not intend to quit their current job., It was also found that although Senior Merchandisers were more satisfied with their job, they showed increased intention to quit (mean score=14.197) in comparison with Assistant Merchandiser (mean score= 12.2281). This may be due to the fact that Senior Merchandisers usually get better opportunities as they are experienced and seeking the higher position somewhere else. Hence, they incline to quit their current job and move on to a better scope. However, further research can be conducted to investigate this characteristic of employees more precisely by using a more reliable scale.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research indicated a deeper understanding on work stress and its relation with co-worker support and job satisfaction. It addressed the necessity of job satisfaction in reducing stress. With the decrease in boredom among the employees, work stress reduced significantly. Also, co-worker support and work stress had a significant positive relation which can be due to the facts that with an increase in work stress employees required more co-worker support. Overall, this research has provided much insight on employees' perception on work environment in terms of job satisfaction, co-worker support, and job stress and highlighted the necessity of job satisfaction and co-worker support to decrease work stress among the employees in RMG industries.

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