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Job stress and problems encountered by Panchayat development officers

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Abstract

Job stress and problems in working climate are inter related and important factors affecting workforce productivity. The present study was conducted during 2016-17 to assess the job stress among Panchayat Development Officers (PDOs) in seven districts of Northern Karnataka. Using incidental meeting technique of non probability sampling method 30 PDOs from each district were taken as sample, totally comprising of 210 PDOs. The pre structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. The results of the study depicted that, majority of respondents were found to possess overall job stress index of 64.14. More than half the number (60.50 %) of respondents belonged to medium level of job stress followed by 31.00 and 8.60 per cent, who belonged to high and low level of job stress. A majority of the PDOs (87.14 %) expressed political interference in implementing schemes and programmes as the major problem encountered during implementation of panchayat programmes. Keeping the political parties outside the Panchayats was suggested as the solution for the above said problem by 40.44 per cent of PDOs followed by making decisions at meetings / Gram Sabha (30.05 %) and maintaining good communication (17.49 %). Heavy workload and mental stress was felt as a problem by 89.05 per cent of respondents. The possible measures to reduce this problem were to conduct stress management trainings (45.99 %), recruitment of additional staff (29.55 %) and stopping target based programme implementation (25.67 %) etc.

Keywords: panchayat development officers (PDOs), job stress, problems, panchayat raj, suggestions

Introduction

It is important to perceive and address job stress, because its elements badly affect employee mental as well as physical health (Rana & Munir, 2011) [5]. The organizations employ and rely on specialists and professionals who supposed to be provided with suitable work environment to perform their roles effectively. Since we live in an environment dominated by different stimulus and motivations (physical, moral and psychological), which in turn have an impact on the individual, not only at home but also surpassed to work environment. These stresses make individual lives in a state of anxiety, tension and emotion which affects the duties, functions, and relationship with workers in the organization and even on his health and safety (Revati, 2012; Soran *et al.*, 2014) [6, 7]. Job stress will be experienced, when the imbalance between demands of work environment and the individuals' abilities increases, so at work, stress may be an awareness indicated by ambiguity, conflict and overload arising from the work environment and the characteristics of the individual.

Panchayat Raj is a form of local government administered by a council or Panchayat elected in a democratic way. The panchayat Raj system is performing better and helping the rural people since inception. However, an effort for appropriate institution building and changing the value system for improving the working of Panchayats is a continuous ongoing process. One such step taken by the Government of Karnataka in recent years is appointment of Panchayath Development Officers (PDOs)-to shoulder enhanced tasks and responsibilities. These PDOs are bridging people between government and people in delivering the benefits to the needy people. The government has created 5627 posts of Panchayat Development Officers of the rank of management or superintendent in the scale of 10,000-18,150, one in each GP vide order dated 31.3.2008. The PDO is supposed to guide the elected members in administration matters and implement the schemes to the needy in coordination with them. The work pressure and political interference is increasing in panchayats as most of the government programmes are implemented through gram panchayats. Stress levels are raising and forcing few to commit suicide in recent past. Hence, the present was planned to study job stress and problems faced in delivering their job activities.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted during 2016-17 in Dharwad, Haveri, Uttara Kannada, Belagavi,

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Gadag, Bagalkot and Vijayapur districts of Northern Karnataka. Each Gram Panchayat is having a PDO to carry out the administrative functions of the Gram Panchayat with the help of elected representatives. The number of PDOs working in each district varies with the number of Panchayats functioning there. The conduct of research needed 30 PDOs from each district constituting a total sample of 210 PDOs from seven districts of Northern Karnataka. Hence, PDOs were selected by using incidental meeting technique.

Keeping in view the objectives and the variables under study, a questionnaire was prepared in consultation with experts as well as the PDOs themselves. The questionnaire was pre-tested in non-sample area for its practicability and relevancy. Based on the pre-test responses and experience gained, necessary modifications were made wherever necessary. The data collected was tabulated and analyzed using suitable statistical tools like, percentage and frequency.

Results and Discussion

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match with the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor job performance and even low job satisfaction. Table 1 depicts the statement wise data on job stress of PDOs in the Panchayat Raj system. It can be seen that nearly 51.43 per cent strongly agreed and 41.90 per cent agreed for 'being responsible for people', respondents also strongly agreed for the statement 'responsible for too many jobs' (48.10 %). Nearly 37.14 per cent strongly agreed and 53.81 per cent agreed that they are 'responsible for helping others to solve their problems'. Disagreement was expressed by the majority for 'my job activities are unclear to me' (45.71 %) and 'I am not sure of what is expected of me' (44.76 %). But 30.95 per cent strongly denied that 'they work hard to complete their work on time' and 29.05 per cent strongly disagreed with the statement 'my job is boring'. The feeling of more responsibility shouldering them and activities being not clear make the person to develop stress in the working environment.

The overall job stress index was found to be 64.14, which indicates that PDOs felt pressure in their job to the extent of 64.14 per cent and it can be considered as the moderate level of stress.

A critical look at Table 2 shows that more than half the number (60.50 %) of respondents belonged to medium level of job stress followed by 31.00 and 8.60 per cent, who belonged to high and low level of job stress. However medium level of stress may not be harmful for the job as stress within limits pushes a person to perform well. During data collection respondents expressed that, they undergo stress due to over burden of work, many meetings to be attended, target based work, political interference and so on. These are the possible reasons for medium and high stress level. The respondents with low level of stress may be cool by nature or not much bothered about their duty. While listing solutions for their problems a few expressed that, one should not take much tension and learn to accept things as they come. PDOs have been serving in the department for the last eight years and this might have forced them to get adjusted with the tension.

These findings are in accordance with the results of Padmaja and Prabhakar (2011)^[3] and Ramannavar (2016)^[2] where job stress of the extension functionaries was at medium level.

High stress level was observed among majority of PDOs as per the study of Bharamagoudar (2016)^[1].

A perusal of the table 3 indicated the constraints encountered by PDOs in performing their job and expected solutions. Political interference in implementing schemes and programmes was expressed by great majority of the PDOs (87.14 %). Panchayat being a democratic organization, all the programmes and schemes are planned and implemented by panchayat itself and non official members have a great say in implementing programmes. PDOs felt stress of interference and expressed lack of freedom in implementation of programme.

Hence, the respondents felt that keeping the political parties outside the Panchayats, making decisions at meetings / Gram Sabha and maintaining good communication with villagers, members and representatives as the best possible solutions for solving this.

The schemes and programme implementation starts with allotment of target for each panchayat based on the taluk level allocation. The progress of work of the PDO is measured by the target achieved with respect to the budget allocated. Since there are many other activities to be conducted along with schemes and programme implementation, they face more work burden resulting in mental stress. They therefore suggested conduct of stress management trainings and recruitment of additional staff as the best possible solutions.

The table also shows that the PDOs lack freedom while implementing the activities of Panchayats. The interference and involvement of villagers, elected members and other representatives can be observed in each and every step of decision making. This could be the reason for finding majority of PDOs (64.29 %) complaining about lack of freedom in decision making. They suggested that giving more freedom may help in this regard. They also felt that officers should become bold and take strong decisions in the purview of rules and regulations.

A word of appreciation and encouragement always brings improvement in the work out put. The respondents (58.10 %) expressed that it is very difficult to expect word of appreciation and recognition in Panchayat system. Punishments are rather fast, they opined. Hence, they preferred to have performance based promotion and while few expressed that one should not think of recognition/punishments, rather do our duty to the best.

Around 58 per cent each of PDOs felt that promotion opportunities are less and faced lack of time for implementation of programmes. The next promotion post for the PDOs is Assistant Director (Rural Development) at the Taluka level and these posts are few in number compared to the number of aspirants. Most of the PDOs have entered the service at the same time and their time of eligibility for promotion will be same. As the next position posts are less it is highly impossible for all to get promotion at the earliest. So, they wanted to have creation of new posts at the higher level so that all will get opportunity and work with a ray of hope. Few wanted to have modification to service rules and few expressed working sincerely without expectation as the best solution.

The implementation of any programmes have many procedures to follow like understanding the rules and regulations concerned to the programme, giving wide publicity, identification of beneficiaries, conduct of Gram Sabha etc. Too many programmes and release of budget at the last moment creates tension among PDOs and chances of bypassing the rules will be more. They expressed that other

department schemes have been forced on them for implementation and wanted to get rid of those so that they get sufficient time for implementing their own department schemes. Redistribution of schemes to concerned departments (45.45 %), reducing number of meetings for PDOs (39.67 %) and taking cooperation from colleagues (29.75 %) were listed

as the best possible solutions. PDOs also complained that superiors do not guide and help in problematic situation (53.81 %) and information relevant to work is not properly communicated (52.38 %) as other constraint encountered by them. The results of the study are in line with the findings of Bharamagoudar (2016)^[1].

Table 1: Job stress of PDOs in the Panchayat Raj system, (N=210)

S. No.	Statements	SA F (%)	A F (%)	UDF (%)	DF (%)	SD F (%)
1	I work on my unnecessary job activities	29 (13.81)	56 (26.67)	43 (20.48)	55 (26.19)	27 (12.86)
2	My job activities are unclear to me	2 (0.95)	22 (10.48)	42 (20.00)	96 (45.71)	48 (22.86)
3	To keep up with my job, I always have to take work home with me	26 (12.38)	68 (32.38)	33 (15.71)	56 (26.67)	27 (12.86)
4	My job is boring	13 (6.19)	27 (12.86)	49 (23.33)	60 (28.57)	61 (29.05)
5	I am responsible for people	108 (51.43)	88 (41.90)	3 (1.43)	4 (1.90)	7 (3.33)
6	I try to work hard to complete my work on time	11 (5.24)	10 (4.76)	35 (16.67)	89 (42.38)	65 (30.95)
7	My work area is too crowded	43 (20.48)	84 (40.00)	33 (15.71)	41 (19.52)	9 (4.29)
8	I do not have authority to do my job well	32 (15.24)	54 (25.71)	42 (20.00)	59 (28.10)	23 (10.95)
9	My job is too difficult	44 (20.95)	60 (28.57)	47 (22.38)	49 (23.33)	10 (4.76)
10	My job has become too routine	10 (4.76)	24 (11.43)	50 (23.81)	83 (39.52)	43 (20.48)
11	There is not enough time to do my job	65 (30.95)	85 (40.48)	24 (11.43)	26 (12.38)	10 (4.76)
12	Work condition on my job are below satisfaction	29 (13.81)	69 (32.86)	33 (15.71)	62 (29.52)	17 (8.10)
13	I receive conflicting requests from two or more people	57 (27.14)	79 (37.62)	36 (17.14)	31 (14.76)	7 (3.33)
14	I am not sure of what is expected of me	5 (2.38)	24 (11.43)	45 (21.43)	94 (44.76)	42 (20.00)
15	I am responsible for too many jobs	101 (48.10)	86 (40.95)	5 (2.38)	13 (6.19)	5 (2.38)
16	My job is too easy	14 (6.67)	53 (25.24)	50 (23.81)	37 (17.62)	56 (26.67)
17	I am responsible for helping others to solve their problems	78 (37.14)	113 (53.81)	14 (6.67)	5 (2.38)	0 (0.00)
18	I do not have time to take an occasional break from the job	53 (25.24)	78 (37.14)	40 (19.05)	32 (15.24)	7 (3.33)
19	My working conditions are not as good as the working conditions of others	62 (29.52)	63 (30.00)	35 (16.67)	39 (18.57)	11 (5.24)
Overall job stress index						64.14

Figures in the parenthesis indicates percentage

Table 2: Level of job stress among PDOs (N=210)

Category	Frequency	Per cent
Low	18	8.60
Medium	127	60.50
High	65	31.00
Total	210	100.00

Table 3: Constraints faced by the PDOs in implementation of programmes and expected solutions to overcome those problems (N=210)

S. No.	Constraints	F	%	Possible solutions	F	%
1.	Heavy workload and mental stress	187	89.05	Stress management trainings	86	45.99
				Recruitment of additional staff	56	29.95
				Stopping target based programme implementation	48	25.67
				Meditation and exercises	32	17.11
				Trips with family and friends	16	8.56
				Working in teams	13	6.95
				Avoiding unnecessary work	8	4.28
				Provision of basic facilities	5	2.67
2.	Political interference in implementing Schemes and Programmes	183	87.14	Keeping out the political parties	74	40.44
				Decisions at meetings/ Gram sabha	55	30.05
				Good communication	32	17.49
				Follow government circulars and orders	19	10.38
				More powers to PDOs	17	9.29
				Taking them into confidence	15	8.20
				Online payment	11	6.01
				Stringent action against them	8	4.37
3.	Lack of freedom for the implementing officers in decision making			More freedom for officers	45	33.33
				Taking strong decisions	38	28.15
				Upgradation of post	28	20.74
				Work as per law	19	14.07
4.	Lack of recognition/appreciation for good working	122	58.10	Performance based promotion	65	53.28
				Giving importance to self satisfaction	26	21.31
5.	Lack of promotional opportunities	121	57.62	Creation of new posts	82	67.77
				Serving sincerely without expectations	26	21.49
				Modification to service rules	17	14.05
				Performance based promotions	15	12.40
				Post upgradation	11	9.09

6.	Lack of time to implement the programmes	121	57.62	Redistribution of schemes to concerned departments	55	45.45
				Conducting less meeting for PDOs	48	39.67
7.				Taking cooperation from colleagues	36	29.75
				Giving sufficient time for implementation	15	12.40
				Recruitments	12	9.92
				Putting more efforts	9	7.44
				Slow implementation process	4	3.31
				Publishing calendar of events	3	2.48
8.	Superiors will not guide and help in problematic situation	113	53.81	Making suitable modification to rules	76	67.26
				Officials from same department as higher officials	64	56.64
				Collecting information from all sources	63	55.75
				Understand rules and regulations	47	41.59
				Written circulars and orders	35	30.97
				Change in mindset of officers	12	10.62
				Help and co operation from colleagues	8	7.08
9.	Information relevant to work is not properly communicated	110	52.38	Conducting training from time to time	87	79.09
				Referring government circulars	53	48.18
				Help from web sources	25	22.73
10.	Frequent transfers	102	49.54	Suitable transfer policy	98	96.08
				Taking it as part of job life	15	14.71
11.	Non co-operating fellow employees	84	40.00	Taking them into confidence	48	57.14
				Strict adherence to job chart	33	39.29
				Making all the staff accountable for each activity	28	33.33
				Sending them for personality development trainings	19	22.62
12.	Non co operation from elected members	83	39.52	Compulsory degree education for elected members	52	62.65
				No financial power for presidents	36	43.37

F-Frequency, %-Percentage

Conclusion

As any organization grows and develops, more and more, problems such as power struggles, interpersonal conflicts, low job motivation, *etc.*, are manifested leading to stress among the people working in the organization. There is a need to understand the sources of stress and mitigate them by taking necessary measures. The suggestions given by the PDOs can be taken in to consider to solve the problems in implementing schemes and programmes. Addressing these issues will definitely help the working of panchayats and brings satisfaction among employees.

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