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Self-Perceived Occupational Stress and Professional Well-Being of Local Government Employees

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Abstract

Abstract

Occupational stress and professional well-being significantly influence employee productivity, organizational efficiency, and public service delivery within local government institutions. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the self-perceived occupational stress and professional well-being experiences of local government employees in the Municipality of Delfin Albano, Isabela. Specifically, the study examined employees' perceived sources of workplace stress, emotional and professional challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of well-being within the local government work environment. Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with twelve purposively selected local government employees from different municipal offices. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework was utilized in analyzing the data. Findings revealed that employees experienced occupational stress due to workload demands, administrative pressures, role multiplicity, public service expectations, time constraints, and workplace interpersonal dynamics. Participants also described challenges related to emotional exhaustion, work-life balance, and institutional pressures associated with public accountability and service delivery. Despite these challenges, employees demonstrated resilience through peer support, family support systems, spirituality, positive workplace relationships, and adaptive coping strategies. Participants further emphasized that supportive leadership, collaborative work environments, and professional recognition contributed positively to their professional well-being. The findings underscore the importance of workplace wellness initiatives, psychosocial support systems, and employee-centered organizational practices in promoting occupational well-being and sustainable public service performance. The study proposes a contextualized employee wellness and psychosocial support program for local government institutions.

Keywords: occupational stress, professional well-being, local government employees, workplace stress, phenomenology, public service, employee wellness

Introduction

Occupational stress has become a growing concern across various professional sectors due to increasing workplace demands, organizational expectations, and evolving institutional responsibilities. In public service institutions, occupational stress may significantly affect employee well-being, workplace productivity, organizational commitment, and quality of service delivery. Local government employees, in particular, perform multifaceted roles that require administrative efficiency, public accountability, interpersonal engagement, and responsiveness to community needs. These responsibilities often expose employees to emotional, psychological, and professional pressures within their work environments.

Professional well-being refers to employees' overall sense of satisfaction, emotional stability, motivation, and positive functioning within their professional roles. Employees who experience supportive work environments and manageable occupational demands are more likely to demonstrate productivity, workplace engagement, and organizational commitment. Conversely, prolonged occupational stress may contribute to emotional exhaustion, decreased motivation, burnout, and reduced workplace effectiveness.

In local government settings, employees frequently encounter challenges associated with administrative workload, public service expectations, documentation requirements, limited resources, and interpersonal workplace dynamics. Public accountability and direct interaction with community stakeholders further intensify workplace pressures, particularly in offices handling social services, financial transactions, public records, and community concerns. Despite these challenges, many public servants continue to demonstrate resilience and professional commitment through adaptive coping strategies and supportive workplace relationships.

Existing studies on occupational stress commonly focus on teachers, healthcare workers, and corporate employees, while limited qualitative investigations examine the lived experiences of local government personnel within municipal work environments. Understanding how local government employees perceive occupational stress and professional well-being is essential in developing institutional support systems that promote employee welfare and organizational sustainability. This study explored the self-perceived occupational stress and professional well-being of local government employees in the Municipality of Delfin Albano, Isabela. Specifically, the study aimed to understand employees' workplace stress experiences, professional challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of well-being within the context of public service. The findings served as basis for developing a contextualized employee wellness and psychosocial support program for local government institutions.

Review of Related Literature

Occupational Stress in Public Service

Occupational stress refers to the emotional and psychological strain experienced when workplace demands exceed an individual's coping capacities and available resources. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), occupational stress results from individuals' appraisal of environmental demands and perceived ability to manage those demands. In public service settings, employees commonly experience stress associated with workload pressure, organizational expectations, administrative responsibilities, and interpersonal workplace interactions.

Research by Bakker and Demerouti (2020) emphasized that excessive workload, role ambiguity, and workplace pressure negatively affect employee motivation, emotional well-being, and job satisfaction. In government institutions, stress may be intensified by public accountability and service-related expectations.

Professional Well-Being and Workplace Satisfaction

Professional well-being encompasses emotional stability, workplace satisfaction, professional fulfillment, and positive organizational functioning. According to Ryan and Deci (2020), supportive work environments, meaningful professional relationships, and organizational recognition contribute significantly to employee well-being and workplace engagement. In local government institutions, collaborative leadership, positive interpersonal relationships, and manageable workloads promote healthier work environments and employee resilience. Employees who experience institutional support are more likely to sustain workplace motivation and productivity.

Coping Strategies and Employee Resilience

Employees utilize various coping strategies to manage workplace stress and maintain emotional well-being. Folkman and Moskowitz (2021) explained that adaptive coping strategies such as social support, emotional regulation, spirituality, and positive reframing help individuals manage occupational stress effectively.

Workplace resilience is also strengthened through supportive organizational culture and peer relationships. Employees who experience collegial support and positive leadership often demonstrate greater emotional stability and workplace adaptability.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (1984), which explains that stress emerges from individuals' appraisal of workplace demands and their coping capacities. The theory highlights the importance of coping strategies and emotional adaptation in managing occupational stress.

The study also utilized Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Theory (1989), which emphasizes the importance of positive relationships, self-acceptance, purpose, autonomy, and environmental mastery in promoting professional and emotional well-being.

These theories guided the exploration of employees' workplace stress experiences and perceptions of professional well-being within the local government context.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the self-perceived occupational stress and professional well-being experiences of local government employees in the Municipality of Delfin Albano, Isabela. Phenomenology was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to understand participants' lived experiences, emotional perceptions, and workplace realities within their professional environment.

The study was conducted in the Municipality of Delfin Albano, Isabela, Philippines. The participants consisted of twelve local government employees selected through purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) currently work in the local government unit; (2) possess at least three years of service experience; and (3) be willing to share their workplace experiences and perceptions regarding occupational stress and professional well-being.

Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews focusing on workplace stress experiences, professional challenges, emotional well-being, coping strategies, and perceptions of organizational support. Ethical considerations including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the study.

The gathered data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Interview transcripts were carefully transcribed, coded, and categorized to identify recurring patterns, meanings, and themes related to occupational stress and professional well-being. Trustworthiness was established through member checking, triangulation, audit trails, and thick description.

Results and Findings

Theme 1: Experiencing Occupational Pressure from Workload and Public Service Demands

Participants described occupational stress associated with excessive workload, documentation requirements, deadlines, and public service responsibilities. Employees explained that serving multiple clients while meeting institutional expectations often resulted in emotional and mental exhaustion.

One participant shared:

"Minsan sunod-sunod ang trabaho at clients kaya nakakapagod mentally at physically."

Another participant stated:

"Kapag maraming deadlines at reports, nagiging stressful talaga ang trabaho."

The findings indicate that workload intensity and public accountability significantly contribute to occupational stress among local government employees.

Theme 2: Managing Emotional Strain and Workplace Interpersonal Challenges

Participants described emotional stress arising from workplace misunderstandings, communication difficulties, and interactions with demanding clients and stakeholders. Employees emphasized the emotional demands of maintaining professionalism despite workplace pressures.

A participant explained:

"Hindi maiwasan ang stress lalo na kapag may misunderstandings o mahirap kausap na clients."

Another participant remarked:

"Kailangan marunong kang mag-control ng emotions kahit pressured sa trabaho."

The findings suggest that interpersonal workplace dynamics and emotional labor significantly affect employees' professional well-being.

Theme 3: Balancing Professional Responsibilities and Personal Life

Participants revealed difficulties in balancing workplace responsibilities with family obligations and personal well-being. Some employees experienced fatigue and reduced personal time due to extended work responsibilities and administrative pressures.

One participant shared:

"Minsan nauuwi mo na ang stress sa bahay dahil iniisip mo pa rin ang trabaho."

Another participant explained:

"Mahirap i-balance ang family at work lalo na kapag peak season sa opisina."

The findings highlight the influence of occupational stress on employees' work-life balance and emotional health.

Theme 4: Strengthening Resilience Through Social, Family, and Spiritual Support

Participants emphasized that peer relationships, family support, and spirituality helped them manage workplace stress

and maintain emotional stability. Positive workplace relationships provided emotional encouragement and professional motivation.

A participant stated:

“Malaking tulong ang support ng mga katrabaho kasi nagkakaintindihan kayo.”

Another participant shared:

“Kapag stressed ako, family at faith talaga ang nagbibigay ng lakas.”

The findings demonstrate the importance of interpersonal and spiritual support systems in sustaining employee resilience and well-being.

Theme 5: Valuing Supportive Leadership and Positive Workplace Environment

Participants identified supportive leadership, teamwork, and professional recognition as important contributors to workplace satisfaction and professional well-being. Employees appreciated supervisors who demonstrated empathy, understanding, and collaborative leadership.

One participant explained:

“Mas magaan ang trabaho kapag supportive ang management at maayos ang samahan.”

Another participant remarked:

“Kapag na-aappreciate ang effort mo, mas nagkakaroon ka ng motivation sa trabaho.”

The findings suggest that positive organizational culture and supportive leadership significantly influence employee morale and professional well-being.

Conclusion

The study revealed that local government employees in the Municipality of Delfin Albano, Isabela experience occupational stress due to workload demands, public accountability, administrative responsibilities, interpersonal workplace dynamics, and work-life imbalance. These workplace pressures significantly affect employees' emotional well-being and professional functioning.

Despite these challenges, employees demonstrated resilience through adaptive coping mechanisms such as peer support, family support, spirituality, emotional regulation, and positive workplace relationships. The findings further highlighted the importance of supportive leadership, collaborative work environments, and professional recognition in promoting employee well-being and workplace satisfaction.

The study underscores the need for employee-centered wellness initiatives and psychosocial support systems that strengthen occupational well-being and sustainable public service performance.

Proposed Employee Wellness and Psychosocial Support Program

Based on the findings, a Contextualized Employee Wellness and Psychosocial Support Program is proposed focusing on stress management seminars, workplace wellness initiatives, peer support and team-building activities, mental health and counseling services, emotional resilience training, work-life balance programs, and spirituality-based wellness activities. The proposed program aims to strengthen employees' emotional well-being, workplace resilience, professional motivation, and organizational support systems within local government institutions.

Implications of the Study

The findings may guide local government administrators and policymakers in strengthening employee wellness initiatives and workplace mental health programs. Local government institutions may develop supportive organizational practices that promote healthier work environments, employee engagement, and sustainable public service performance.

The study also highlights the importance of emotional support systems and collaborative leadership in improving employee well-being and workplace satisfaction. Future studies may further examine occupational stress experiences across different government sectors and institutional contexts in the Philippines.

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