

Occupational stress indicators in the hotel industry: the case of housekeeping and front office employees

Indikatori stresa na poslu u hotelijerstvu: studija slučaja zaposlenih u domaćinstvu i na recepciji

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Abstract

The hospitality sector is plagued by a serious problem called employees' stress, which is a very important issue for both employers and employees. Although addressing and reducing stress is a noble goal, the nature and indicators of employees' stress in the hospitality industry are not fully understood. For that reason, the aim of the paper is to determine which of the above factors indicates the occurrence of stress among hotel housekeeping and front office staff. The research was conducted in hotels in the Republic of Serbia, among front office and housekeeping employees. A total of 175 valid questionnaires were collected. The obtained results showed that three analyzed occupational stress indicators (Factors intrinsic to the job, Home and work interface and Organizational structure and climate) significantly influence job stress. On the other hand, there was no found significant influence of Management role, Relationships with other people and Career and achievement on job stress.

Keywords: occupational stress indicators, front office, housekeeping, hotel, Serbia

Sažetak

Sektor ugostiteljstva se suočava sa ozbiljnim problemom a to je stress zaposlenih, što je veoma važno pitanje kako za poslodavce tako i za zaposlene. Iako je rešavanje i smanjenje stresa plemenit cilj, priroda i indikatori stresa zaposlenih u ugostiteljskoj industriji nisu u potpunosti shvaćeni. Iz tog razloga, cilj rada je da utvrdi koji od navedenih faktora indikuje pojavu stresa kod zaposlenih u hotelskom domaćinstvu i na recepciji. Istraživanje je sprovedeno u hotelima u Republici Srbiji, među zaposlenima na recepciji i domaćinstvu. Prikupljeno je 175 validnih upitnika. Dobijeni rezultati su pokazali da tri analizirana indkatora stresa na poslu (intrinzični faktori posla, konflikt porodice i posla i organizaciona struktura i klima) imaju značajan uticaj na stres na poslu. Sa druge strane, nije utvrđen značaj uticaj uloge menadžmenta, odnosa sa drugim ljudima i karijere i postignuća na stres na poslu.

Ključne reči: indikatori stresa na poslu, recepcija, domaćinstvo, hotel, Srbija


1. Introduction

Customers' service standards have risen in the modern hospitality business, where competition among enterprises is fierce, resulting in increasing employees' job expectations. Workplace stress is a pervasive and complicated phenomena (Lazarus, 1993) that is costly for businesses because it relates to costly voluntary turnover (Villanueva & Djurkovic, 2009). Because of the harsh working conditions, the hotel sector is characterized by a high degree of stress (Kim, Shin & Umbreit, 2007; Sharma, Verma, Verma & Malhotra, 2010) and stress at work is a serious issue within the hospitality industry

(Hsieh & Eggers, 2011). For this reason, many researchers concentrating on the hotel business have discovered and examined the impact of work-related stresses (e.g., Gordon & Adler, 2022; Faulkner & Patiar, 1997; Salama, Abdou, Mohamed & Shehata, 2022; Hu 'Sunny' & Cheng, 2010). The challenging environment of the hotel industry, which is constantly evolving, creates a never-ending stream of stimuli, pressure and requirements that cause stress among hotel employees (Hu 'Sunny' & Cheng, 2010). The hospitality sector relies on people to produce its goods, so it is impossible to separate the service process from the human factor (Ghazali, 2010). In providing service and building trusting relationships with

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customers, employees who frequently interact with customers are essential. On the other hand, it is not only customers causing stress to hospitality employees, but also work-related factors themselves. Some of the causes of stress identified in previous research are fatigue, mental and emotional demands (Wallace, 2003), employment factors such as pay and conditions (Smith, 2003), workplace demands (Lee & Wang, 2002), interpersonal tensions (O'Neill & Davis, 2011), physical violence (Leather et al., 1998) and lack of organizational support (Bobbio & Manganello, 2015).

Because work stress is one of the perils that hotel employees encounter, the first step of managing this component of work is to investigate the type and dimensions of job stress among employees (Cooper & Payne, 1988). In the context of the hotel industry, burnout and stress are increased by long operating hours, diversified behaviors, a high-demand/low-resource job style and minimal feedback (O'Neill & Davis, 2011). Although there is widespread agreement that addressing and reducing stress in the hospitality industry is not only a laudable objective, but can also result in cost savings for employers (Cooper & Dewe, 2008), the nature and extent of hospitality employee stress are not completely understood. Also, the extent of occupational stress in so-called „less hazardous“ industries that depend on emotional labour, such as the hospitality industry, is not well understood, despite the fact that is generally acknowledged that it can play a role in workplace illness and injury rates.

2. Literature review

In terms of work-life balance, relationships with management, compensation, and perceptions of work as valuable to society, hotel housekeepers have much lower levels of satisfaction than other hospitality workers globally (Andrade & Westover, 2020). Frontline employees in the hotel industry, particularly front office personnel, frequently have the issue of communicating with customers whose preferences and interests are dissimilar to their own (Abd Patah et al., 2009).

For hotel employees, extrinsic variables contribute to both job satisfaction and discontent. Some extrinsic factors are satisfiers (e.g., scheduling, having a job), but most are dissatisfiers (e.g., insufficient benefits, low pay, long hours, and the nature of job tasks) (Andrade et al., 2021). According to Eriksson and Li (2009) housekeepers have high job satisfaction due to fairly decent pay, scheduling flexibility, a pleasant working environment, guaranteed work hours, and task variety. Several studies have shown how hotel personnel, particularly those on the frontline, must manage their emotions in order to comply with hotel guidelines regarding client services (Seger-Guttman & Medler-Lirazb, 2018). On the other hand, strong social ties between managers, staff, and guests contribute to the development of a positive professional identity and an increase in employee retention (Mooney et al., 2015). In addition to this, employees who express higher commitment to organization have a lower intention to leave organization (Tepavčević et al., 2021). According to

Demirović et al. (2022) study, having a demanding job had a negative impact on employees' well-being and led to negative emotional reactions to their work. Alternatively, having job control and presence of social support positively influence well-being of employees. Also, involving employees in decision-making can gain several benefits to organization such as increasing employees' engagement, improving communication and performances. Although women make up significant share of employees in hotel industry, Perić et al. (2019) found that women are significantly largely absent in management decision-making.

Positive coworker ties add to hotel housekeepers' job happiness when it comes to employee relations (Eriksson & Li, 2009). According to Schein (1987), a career and achievement can be seen as that aspect of a person's self-concept that will not be abandoned even when confronted with unpleasant work choices or situations. He contends that, while most people manage to meet a wide range of requirements via their careers, not all needs are seen as equally significant. One need will usually take precedence over all others for each individual. Schein goes on to say that understanding the nature and degree of these career anchors is critical for the well-being of both the individual and the workplace. Further, a healthy service climate connects employee attitudes and actions with company strategy and makes it easier to meet service quality objectives. According to various researchers, a pleasant service climate allows employees to feel attached to the firm, boosts their work engagement, and has a moderating effect on stress repercussions (Wen et al., 2020; Arasli et al., 2017). Work-family conflict is a type of integral conflict in which the role constraints of the work and family domains are irreconcilable (Bellavia & Frone, 2005). Long hours, limited job security, a strong need for collaboration with others, and shift work are factors that make it difficult for hotel employees to maintain a healthy work-life balance, which may lead to job stress. Poor work-family balance is a reason why people leave the hospitality business, especially women (Blomme et al., 2008). On the other hand, Tepavčević et al. (2020) did not find significant influence of gender on perception of work stress.

In line with these arguments and previous evidence, we suggest the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Factors intrinsic to the job positively affect job stress.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The management role positively affects job stress.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Relationships with other people positively affect job stress.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Career and achievement positively affect job stress.

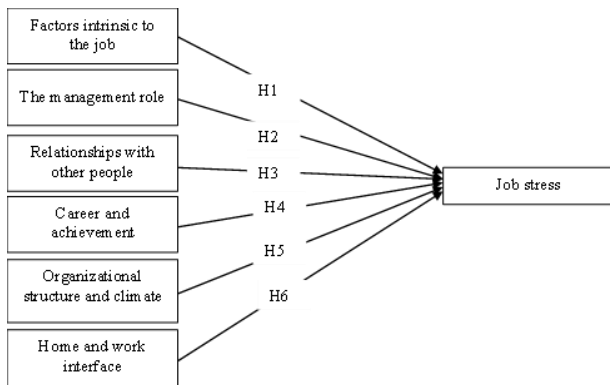
Hypothesis 5 (H5): Organizational structure and climate positively affect job stress.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Home and work interface positively affects job stress.

All statements in the questionnaire are negative or have a negative connotation. Hence, it is presumed that all

independent factors have a positive impact on the dependent variable (job stress).

Figure 1. Proposed model of research



3. Methodology

3.1. Questionnaire development

This study's questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section measured the participants' age, gender, education, marital status, and working position in a hotel. The research questionnaire in the second section was obtained and modified based on the Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI) survey instrument (Cooper et al., 1988), which provides an appropriate and well-tested technique for investigating the incidence and dimensions of work-related stress in the hotel industry. The OSI technique is meant to assess organisational stress levels as well as underlying organisational, demographic, social, and life aspects that can be linked to stress at the individual level. The instrument consists of seven modules that can be utilised individually based on the needs of individual studies. Only questions from the module *Sources of pressure employees face in the work situation* have been included in the questionnaire. This section focuses on factors intrinsic to the job, the management role, relationships with other people, career and achievement, organizational structure/climate, and the home/work interface. The third section of the questionnaire examined job stress. The scale of job stress was adopted from the short version questionnaire developed by Jamal and Baba (1992). In the questionnaire, a seven-point Likert scale was employed, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

3.2. Data collection

In order to obtain data from employees in the Serbian hotel industry, a combination of an online survey and a conventional paper-and-pen survey was used. The questionnaire was issued to 42 hotels around Serbia, while data were collected from 29 hotels (from cities and towns including Belgrade, Novi Sad, Subotica, and Niš, as well as Kopaonik Mountain and Zlatibor Mountain). Initially, hotel managers were approached and asked to assist with this study by requesting employee participation in the survey. Employees were given the choice of completing an anonymous online survey or a paper form using a pen and placing it in a box at reception. In both instances,

anonymity has been ensured. Employees were given one week to complete the survey. The sample consists of the staff working at the front office and housekeeping. The poll was performed from January to August 2022, and employees' participation was anonymous and voluntary. A total of 198 respondents accepted the invitation to answer the questionnaire. A total of 23 questionnaires were discarded because of lots of missing values. Finally, 175 valid questionnaires were processed by R and RStudio (lavaan and semPlot packages) which were used for the CFA analyses. Additional analyses included regression which was processed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 23 (SPSS).

4. Results

4.1. Study sample

The sample consists of 175 employees in 29 Serbian hotels. There is a higher number of women in the sample (52.6%). The predominant age group was 26-35, and 40.6% of the sample comprises married. There is the highest number of those who have finished faculty or college (49.1%) and secondary school (45.1%). In the sample, more respondents were working at the front office (64%) of a hotel than in housekeeping (36%) (Table 1).

Table 1. The sample characteristics (N=175)

	Frequency
	%
Gender	
Male	47.4
Female	52.6
Education	
Secondary school	45.1
Faculty/College	49.1
MSc	5.7
Age	
18-25	16.0
26-35	38.3
36-45	25.7
46-55	20.0
Working position	
Front office	64.0
Housekeeping	36.0
Material status	
Single	
In relationship	28.6
Married	40.6
Divorced	11.4

Source: Authors' calculation

4.2. Confirmatory Factorial Analysis

Prior to testing hypotheses, the measurement model was calculated using Confirmation Factor Analysis (CFA) to examine innate construct validity and reliability. Initial model fit indices indicated good results, with the exception of RMSEA and SRMR, which were above the limit value of 0.08 (CFI=0.959, TLI=0.957, RMSEA=0.111, SRMR=0.109). Therefore, modification indices were necessary. According to Beaujean (2014), a "troublingly large" residual is ">0.1," therefore four items with high residuals were eliminated (Table 2), resulting in

a model with a reasonable fit (CFI=0.982, TLI=0.942, RMSEA=0.074, SRMR=0.071).

Table 2. Confirmation factor analysis results

Factors	Items	β	t Value	α	AVE	CR
Factors intrinsic to the job (FIJ)	Too much work	0.813	*	0.899	0.615	0.782
	Rate of pay	0.842	27.541			
	Keeping with new ideas	0.872	29.127			
	Working long hours	0.721	28.271			
	Too much/little job variety	0.789	29.117			
	Effects of minor tasks	0.885	27.114			
	Factors not under control	0.758	22.158			
	Making important decisions	0.771	19.814			
The management role (MR)	Lack of power	0.774	*	0.817	0.714	0.904
	Personal belief conflicting	0.895	24.786			
	Ambiguity of job	0.898	21.241			
	Conflicting job demands	0.817	29.542			
	Having to take risks	0.894	30.008			
	Why asked to do the job**	0.727	29.321			
	Being visible/available	0.761	30.201			
	Adopt a negative role**	0.802	24.554			
Relationships with other people (R)	Implication of mistakes	0.856	23.789	0.857	0.621	0.716
	Managing work of others	0.865	*			
	Office politics	0.822	20.231			
	Attending meetings	0.747	26.998			
	Lack of social support	0.831	17.859			
	Feeling isolated	0.811	19.788			
	Lack of encouragement	0.823	18.129			
	Misuse of time	0.837	19.118			
Career and achievement (CA)	Ambiguous situations	0.769	18.963	0.712	0.588	0.802
	Personality clash**	0.775	19.108			
	Underpromotion	0.825	*			
	Threat of redundancy	0.789	30.879			
	Being undervalued	0.765	29.123			
	Change jobs, advance career	0.777	30.023			
	Unclear promotion prospects	0.889	29.845			
	Absence of career development	0.843	30.222			
Organizational structure and climate (OSC)	Attaining personal performance	0.812	24.112	0.745	0.603	0.720
	Chance of own development	0.833	27.987			
	Inadequate guidance	0.748	*			
	Lack of consultation	0.819	19.002			
	Inadequate training	0.702	20.101			
	Covert discrimination	0.786	24.014			
	Mundane administration	0.807	22.412			
	Staff shortages	0.851	24.113			
Home and work interface (HWI)	Inadequate feedback	0.717	23.214	0.707	0.575	0.798
	Insufficient resources to work	0.840	25.106			
	Sharing work evenly	0.725	19.258			
	Morale and climate	0.767	21.003			
	Organization structure/design	0.815	24.108			
	Not enough work	0.757	*			
	Not been able to switch off	0.813	18.258			
	Family's attitude to my work	0.837	17.789			
Home and work interface (HWI)	Work demands on home relations	0.821	12.982	0.707	0.575	0.798
	Absence of emotional support	0.818	16.714			
	Work demands on private lives	0.811	19.111			
	Lack of practical support	0.802	20.600			
	Partner perusing career**	0.841	29.401			
Home and work interface (HWI)	Absence of stability at home	0.762	21.542	0.707	0.575	0.798
	Pursuing career on home expense	0.813	19.001			

Notes: * Items fixed to 1 in CFA; ** item removed from CFA; β -Std. regression weights; α -Cronbach's alpha; CR—composite reliability; AVE = average variance expected.

Table 2. Continued

Factors	Items	β	t Value	α	AVE	CR
Job stress scale (JSS)	I have often felt fidgety or nervousness as a result of my job	0.832	*	0.756	0.608	0.756
	My job gets to me more than it should	0.753	18.108			
	There are lots of times when my job drives me right up a wall	0.867	17.698			
	Sometimes when I think about my job, I get a tight feeling in my chest	0.796	16.899			
	I feel guilty when I take time off from the job	0.805	18.612			
	I have too much work to do and too little time to do it in	0.752	20.101			
	Too many employees get burned out by job demands	0.721	20.258			
	I sometimes dread the telephone ringing at home because the call might be job-related	0.868	27.463			
	I feel like I never have a day off	0.800	24.258			

Notes: * Items fixed to 1 in CFA; ** item removed from CFA; β -Std. regression weights; α —Cronbach's alpha; CR—composite reliability; AVE = average variance expected.

The reliability of the scale was determined using average variance extracted (AVE) indices, composite reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The convergent validity of every dimension was evaluated by calculating the mean variance extracted score (AVE). When all item-to-factor loadings are significant and the AVE score for each dimension is greater than 0.50, convergent validity is

established (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results show that all dimensions had AVE greater than 0.50 and CR greater than 0.70, indicating good convergent validity. The results showed that the alpha coefficients of the nine factors ranged from 0.712 to 0.899, which demonstrates that the scales of the obtained questionnaire have considerable reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Independent variable	Dependent variable – Job stress			
	R^2	F	Sig.	β
Factors intrinsic to the job	.589	197.169	.000	.701**
The management role	.176	12.970	.539	.072
Relationship with other people	.189	14.897	.326	.134
Career and achievement	.152	12.681	.522	.075
Organization structure and climate	.389	129.244	.004	.471**
Home and work interface	.493	178.818	.000	.689**

** β is significant at 0.01 level

The results show that three analyzed occupational stress indicators have a significant positive influence on job stress. The highest influence is in the case of factors intrinsic to the job ($\beta=0.701$, $p=0.000$) and home and work interface ($\beta=0.689$, $p=0.000$), while organizational structure and climate ($\beta=0.471$, $p=0.004$) are also significantly high, thus supporting H1, H5, and H6. H2, H3, and H4 were not supported, indicating that the management role ($\beta=0.072$, $p=0.539$), relationships with other people ($\beta=0.134$, $p=0.326$), and career and achievement ($\beta=0.075$, $p=0.522$) not have a significant positive impact on job stress.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The goal of the study was to find out how occupational stress indicators affect job stress for housekeepers and front desk employees in Serbian hotels. Workplace stress, as is often understood, affects the health and safety of employees. The significant phenomenon of stress management can help individuals respond to stress and reduce stress in the workplace (Anbazhagan et al., 2003).

The study's findings confirmed the authors' assumptions and provided support for H1, H4, and H5. Diener and Biswas-Diener (2002) found that monetary rewards have a big impact on the quality of life, especially for low-income workers, because they motivate and help workers meet a wide range of needs. Similar results were

confirmed by Andrade et al., 2021, who proved in their research that two intrinsic variables (interesting work and a job useful to society), one extrinsic variable (pay), one work relations variable (adequate feedback from management), and one work-life balance variable (work interferes with family) were statistically significant for employees. Some of the examined studies revealed that housekeepers had sufficient scheduling flexibility to suit their children's school schedules and family time. In other instances, lengthy hours and weekend employment were problematic, as both might disrupt families (Andrade et al., 2020). Organizational structure and climate proved to be significant indicators of the stress of housekeepers and front office employees. Some of the most important signs of stress at work were not being consulted, not getting enough training, not getting enough feedback, and not getting enough direction. Management may establish opportunities and efforts for employees to resolve these issues for little or no expense. More opportunities for housekeepers to interact with guests (work relations/contact with others) can also be established and managed in order to increase their enthusiasm for their work and understanding of the importance of their responsibilities.

This study is not without limitations. First of all, this study is limited only to examining work-related indicators of stress among employees. Research could be expanded by including personal factors (such as personality traits or

locus of control) that can have an influence on coping with stress. In previous research it was determined that high levels of stress can decline employees' performances (Gilboa et al., 2008) as well as the occurrence of depression, withdrawal and hostility (Hemingway & Smith, 1999). In the hospitality industry, it is crucial to keep a pool of committed, content and motivated employees (Bowen & Ford, 2004; Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009) in order to deliver high-quality services. For this reason, these are factors that should be included in research related to stress among hotel housekeeping and front office staff. Another limitation of this study is that it focused only on housekeeping and front office employees, not taking into account other sectors and different levels of operating. Also, in future research culture context should be considered in creating strategies for effective coping with stress.

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