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The interplay of Job stress and Post-traumatic stress  
disorder in the context of terrorism, and its effects on  
employee outcomes: The roles of individual and  
organisational resources

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of

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Fatima Ali Junaid  
ID Number: 14061868  
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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my father, who lost his life in bomb blast while offering Friday prayers on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

and

to all like him who have lost their lives in acts of terrorism, and to their families who are left with their irreplaceable loss.

May we all find peace.



# **The interplay of Job stress and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in the context of terrorism, and its effects on employee outcomes: The roles of individual and organisational resources**

## **Abstract**

Terrorism is a scourge which has now spread across the globe. The events of the last few years in London, Paris, and other cities around the world highlight the fact that acts of terrorism cause deep trauma to those exposed to them. However, for some countries such as Pakistan, terrorism is an everyday reality. Living under on-going terrorism can be extremely stressful for employees, in that they have to deal with continuous risk in addition to the common stressors of professional and personal life. To date, however, there has been scant research into this phenomenon. This study was thus undertaken with two main objectives: 1) to understand the interplay between work stress and that caused by terrorism and its implications for employee outcomes; and 2) to determine whether personal and organisational resources such as psychological capital and perceived organisational support could help explain the influences of these stressors.

Pakistan was the setting for this research, as it has suffered from on-going terrorism for more than a decade, with nearly 50,000 civilians killed between 2003-2014. I have personally experienced on-going terrorism and its associated loss of life. The drive to understand the effects of this context was thus deeply felt and meaningful on a personal level. This research was challenging in many aspects, and I faced obstacles different to those presented by general management research, including conducting a study in a country where danger to life from terrorism was a real possibility. Aside from being emotionally taxing, the investigation involved ethical issues around the additional stress and trauma that could arise from the inquiry. Notwithstanding this, gaps in the literature and the practical need for the study could not be ignored.

Drawing on conservation of resources theory, a theoretical framework was developed. This suggested that if employees are stressed, they are likely to feel resource depletion. The source of stress could be caused by their job and/or terrorism. The constant nature of terrorism, however,

would likely further hinder employees from gaining psychological strength. For job stress, a challenge and hindrance stressors framework was used, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was used as a lens through which to understand terrorism stress. Next, using positive psychology and organisational support theory, it was argued that viewing/ approaching/ utilising psychological capital as a psychological resource, and perceived organisational support as an organisation-based support resource may help to reduce the toll of the stressors on employees. This thesis comprises three studies and three data sets. First, it explored through a qualitative study the stressors of a job and terrorism, and their influence on employee outcomes, and determined the roles of personal and organisational resources. Next, a quantitative study was conducted to test some of these relationships. The first study had highlighted that there was a need to develop a contextual measure which required testing before conducting the final study.

Study One was based on the limited existing literature, and involved semi- structured interviews with 15 human resources (HR)/line managers. It aimed to gain knowledge about the influence of job and terrorism stress on employee outcomes, and the role of resources in helping reduce/explain the detrimental consequences. Thematic analyses highlighted several themes which were highly embedded in the context of on-going terrorism. The main themes concerned job stress, terrorism stress, organisational support in the context of terrorism, and employee outcomes of stressors of job and terrorism. Study One pointed out that the population at large was exposed to terrorist incidents, had suffered losses, and was likely to be traumatized. It also indicated that the organisational support needed by employees in the context of on-going terrorism was distinctly different than that which is conventionally observed in the literature as perceived organisational support (POS). For example, employees in the terrorism context wanted organisations to provide physical security such as armed guards with bullet proof jackets. There was no existing instrument that could be used to specifically measure this.

The second study was informed by the first and focused on developing a measure for the contextual POS; I called it Security-POS. This study had a sample of 146 Pakistani employees and used factor analysis. It confirmed that Security-POS is distinct from POS. Mediation analysis confirmed that Security-POS enhances POS, which in turn positively influences employee

outcomes and well-being. Drawing on the findings of the two studies, the third and final study was developed. The survey for this study was based on 416 Pakistani employees.

The studies conjointly found that job stressors and PTSD collectively had more dire effects on employee behaviours than did each stressor separately. PTSD itself was higher than any other comparable samples such as those from post 9/11 or Israeli populations. In contrast to the majority of extant research findings, challenge stressors were often not recognised as a challenge, and consequently became another burden for employees. More importantly, hindrance stressors were identified as being the most detrimental of all the stressors. Both POS and Security-related contextual POS helped in moderating the adverse effects of the stressor. Psychological capital also mediated and reduced the harmful effects of the stressors and PTSD.

This is constructed in the form of a ‘By Publication’ thesis wherein the most significant part of the thesis is presented in the form of stand-alone, but linked journal articles. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce the study and review the literature respectively, while Chapter 3 outlines the overall methodology of the research. Chapters 4 to 8 contain the five research articles (manuscripts). These chapters present one article or manuscript each as a complete, stand-alone piece, but collectively, are linked and based on the overall study. A brief outline of these five journal articles or manuscripts can be found below. Chapter 9 then provides an overall discussion of the study, its limitations, contributions and implications, and finally, a concluding section.

This study contributes in general to the literature of management science, and in particular to the areas of job stress and trauma, and even more specifically, to the development of conservation of resources theory, positive psychology, and organisational support theory. It was conducted in areas that were far flung and hard hit by terrorism. It presented voices which are otherwise not heard, and has implications for the well-being of the individual employees working in, and for organisations located in, the terrorism- afflicted area. However, beyond Pakistan and other terrorism-afflicted countries, this study has wider implications for international organisations and communities. According to the United Nations (2016), the number of international migrants has grown faster than the world’s population, reaching 244 million in 2015, a 41% increase since 2000. A large number of people continue to flee unsafe environments, not



only as refugees, but also as expatriates, students and skilled migrants. These individuals may not always be aware of the burdens of the stress and trauma that accompanies them, and nor may their new employment organisations and host countries. For the well-being of the workforce in various settings, it is thus critical that the effects of terrorism on employees and their organisations become better understood.

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## **List of Acronyms**

ANZAM	Australia New Zealand Academy of Management
APA	American Psychiatric Association
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CET	Cognitive evaluation theory
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
CoR	Conservation of Resources theory
EFA	Exploratory factor Analysis
FATA	Federally administered tribal areas
IEP	Institute of Economics and Peace
KPK	Khyber Pakhtunkhawa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NICE	National Institute for Health and Excellence
OST	Organisational support theory
POB	Positive organisational behaviour
POS	Perceived organisational support
Psycap	Psychological capital
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SATP	South Asia terrorism portal
Security-POS	Security-perceived organisational support
UN	United Nations

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