

## Prevalence of and Factors Linked to Occupational Stress in Public and Private Organizations in Kosovo

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**Abstract:** Stress is emerging as an increasing problem in organizations and companies over the recent decades. Despite the awareness on the risks associated with occupational stress, the growing number of literature on stress, so far no empirical research was done to study the prevalence of stress and associated work stressors of employees in Kosovo. Through quantitative research, this study sought to provide scientific contribution by examining the prevalence of stress and by identifying factors that cause stress among public and private sector employees. Findings revealed a relatively high prevalence of occupational stress among employees, where respondents with 1-20 years of work experience reporting being significantly more stressed than those with more than 20 years of work experience. Moreover, results showed that stress adversely affects job performance of employees with 1-20 years of work experience as well as of female employees. Stressors pertaining to demand, control, support, relationships, role and change were identified to be causing occupational stress among employees, all showing positive significant correlation with stress. Furthermore, both public and private sector employees considered similar factors as stressful, even though public sector employees reported experiencing slightly higher levels of stress.

**Keywords:** Occupational Stress; Stressors; Job performance; Kosovo

**JEL Classification:** D73

### Introduction

Occupational stress has become an inevitable problem in organizations and companies all over. The workplace has become a place of rapidly changing forces such as: increasing competition, quality pressure, innovation and increasing pace of doing business. As a result, employees' demands have increased dramatically and this has led to the creation of stress at work. However, no study has been conducted so far on occupational stress among employees in Kosovo, examining the prevalence of and factors linked to stress.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess the prevalence of stress and to identify the stressors affecting workers of public and private organizations in Kosovo. More specifically, the study aimed to analyze whether there is a relationship between sector of employment, work experience, work performance and stress. To achieve this a survey with 340 public and private sector employees aimed at examining the prevalence of stress has been conducted and the causes of stress have been studied.

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## **Hypothesis**

In view the study aim the following 3 hypotheses have been formulated:

H1: Public sector employees experience higher levels of stress than private sector employees.

H2: Employees with less work experience show higher levels of stress than employees with more work experience.

H3: Stress adversely affects employees' job performance.

Even though the awareness of the impact of occupation stress has increased, little research has been done on the topic in developing countries, and especially in Kosovo, where major empirical gaps remain. Therefore, this research tried to provide a scientific contribution to better understand the prevalence of stress in organizations in Kosovo and to identify potential stressors among public and private sector employees. Moreover, the study aimed to analyze the association between sector of employment, work experience, work performance and stress.

## **Review of Literature**

Stress is emerging as an increasing problem in organizations and companies over the years. While work and being employed contributes to the well-being and health of employees, stressful and insecure work can adversely affect their health. The workplace has become a place of rapidly changing forces such as increasing competition, quality pressure, innovation and increasing pace of doing business. As a result, employees' demands have increased dramatically and this has led to the creation of stress at work (Siegrist, 2017). Moreover, it has been identified that these trends pose a threat to the mental health of employees, as higher demands at work are challenging the mental functions of employees and are causing high levels of psychological worries.

Stress has become an important part of the human being development and today it is difficult to imagine an employee who has not experienced stress at work. Selye (1936) defined stress as the pressure or tension to which an individual is exposed but tries to resist. In general, stress is a reaction caused from the pressure and the unknown. Coping with unknown factors, or stressors, can cause a stressful event in humans, as the result is usually perceived as ambiguous but vital (Bashir and Ramay, 2010). Stress is an unwanted or unpleasant reaction people give in response to claims that are basically worried they cannot reach. The state of stress can also pass on health problems when the job demands are high and beyond the individual's capacities. This can also happen when the requirements do not match the skills, resources or needs of the employee at work (Bashir and Ramay, 2010).

There have been numerous research studies on this topic and tests have been developed to assess the stress of employees of different organizations and companies in order to draw conclusions on the phenomenon of stress and its impact. A research carried out by the American Psychological Association (2015) has revealed that 60 percent of respondents considered work as a very stressful factor in their lives, preceded only by finances. According to a survey conducted by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (1999), around 40 percent of workers reported that their work is too stressful and about 26 percent felt overwhelmed by stress at work.

Lewig and Dollard (2001) concluded that employees in the public sector experienced higher levels of stress than employees in the private sector. Moreover, they found that workplace environments in the public and private sectors were characterized by increasing pressure on employees to perform, as such

contributing to increased risk of health problems among employees. A survey by Ricardo et.al (2007) showed that public sector employees were significantly more likely (64%) to report stress to be the primary cause of concern at work than private sector employees ( with only 46%).

Moreover, a random sample of 305 employees and 325 managers across Canadian companies surveyed found a negative correlation between occupational stress and job performance (Jamal, 1984). The relation between high levels of stress and reduced productivity has also been shown by the Towers Watson study (2014). This study included 22,347 employees across 12 different countries around the world. Their research showed that one out of three employees are anxious about the excessive work pressure and this affects their work performance as well as absenteeism, inevitably leading to lower levels of productivity at work.

Stress at work is not a new phenomenon. In fact, according to Unum's study (2001), about 25 percent of employees considered their job as the most stressful factor in their lives, and nearly 75 percent thought that today's employee experiences much more stress at work than the previous generation of ordinary employees.

Another study, in which 425 private and public sector employees were randomly surveyed showed that with higher levels of stress job performance decreases and increased job satisfaction results in increased productivity. Also, when work begins to affect employees' personal lives, it negatively affect productivity as well. Even though, commitment at work is linked more to the worker's conscientiousness and personal satisfaction than with work pressure, when the limits are crossed the worker often fails to withstand and disengages (Halkos, 2010).

A study conducted to measure the impact of organizational culture on occupational stress among executive staff of the Bank of Ceylon has concluded that organizational culture has a major impact on stress and organizational culture has a significant negative correlation with stress at the Bank of Ceylon (Delima, 2017). Researchers have established that occupational stress can be reduced if organizational culture improves. The study has further revealed that the mean value of stress indicates that junior managers experience higher levels of stress than senior managers, while the mean value of organizational culture has shown that senior managers have a higher level of organizational culture than younger ones. Likewise, the mean value of stress was found to be lowest among the experienced executive, with more than 10 years of experience; as opposed to the ones with 3 to 5 years of experience, who showed the highest level of stress (as well as the lowest level of organization culture) (Delima, 2017).

Another study conducted in the US by Integra (2000) has highlighted that about 65 percent of the employees admitted that stress causes very big problems at work. Moreover, 10 percent of the respondents described the workplace as a violent environment because of stress, where maltreatment and verbal abuse are a commonplace. Thus, 29 percent have claimed that they have shouted at a colleague due to of stress; 14 percent claimed to have damaged office equipment because anger; and 2 percent have confessed to even having hit a colleague.

Even if it is not expressed in the form of violence or distress, stress is increasingly affecting the psychological state of the employees. Industrial Psychology Consultants (2014) conducted a survey on stress and depression, which showed that 27 percent of employees have symptoms of depression. Moreover, about 18 percent admitted that they have experienced anxiety, including feelings of fear and panic attacks (Mawanza, 2017).

Everyone may have experienced stress at their workplaces at certain times. Identifying the most common causes of stress at work can help prevent it and reduce the risk for health problems and well-being. According to Dessler (2000), there are two main sources of occupational stress: stress caused by the environment (external factors) and personal stress. This author stated that a variety of external environmental factors could lead to occupational stress. These included work schedules, place of work and job security. Dessler (2000) noted that individuals reacted differently even if they were at the same job, because personal factors also influenced stress.

There are six areas that can cause a lot of stress if they are not properly managed which are: work load, control, support, relationships with others, role at work, and frequent changes. As a first step to reducing the impact of stress and develop more appropriate work practices, it is first identifying the cause. Taking into account many studies made by different occupational health psychologists, Dessler (2000) listed some of the most common causes of stress at the workplace: high job demands with deadlines which make employees feel pressured and overloaded; inadequate workloads, making workers feel that their skills are being exploited as well as lack of control over work activities. Ben (2007) also reported that higher levels of job demands increased occupational stress, especially at organizations with lower levels of support. Dessler (2000) identified lack of support or poor work relationships as a trigger to stress as well; alongside worries about job security, salary levels, not being engaged when a business is undergoing change, or an inadequate environment (such as excessive heating, cooling or noise, inadequate lighting and malfunctioning devices).

Bhui et al. (2016) conducted in-depth interviews with employees of several organizations in order to identify the causes of occupational stress. According to this study, interviewed participants reported that poor working conditions and inappropriate management practices cause stress at work. Most of the participants referred to working conditions as a major source of stress, which were mainly related to factors such as workload, physical environment (i.e. noisy office, lack of windows, small offices in which the temperature was too low or too high), as well as long working hours. Working conditions were identified as the main cause of stress, regardless of the sector where they worked.

Most of the studies done on this topic showed moreover that stress may be largely responsible for organizational outcomes such as decline in performance, dissatisfaction, lack of motivation and commitment, and an increase in absenteeism and turnover.

## **Research Methodology**

To analyze occupational stress in Kosovo's organizations, this study focused specifically on assessing the prevalence of stress among different staff groups, as well as identifying causes of stress among employees in Kosovo's organizations. Data was collected through a survey including 110 managers and 230 workers of mostly middle and large enterprises as well as directors of various departments in public institutions. The surveys with respondents of public institutions were conducted in Pristina, due to the institutions' concentration in the capital, while surveys with respondents of private organizations were conducted throughout the entire territory of Kosovo.

In order to produce representative data, the overall sample has included 340 respondents from all over Kosovo, who were selected randomly from the database of declared employees of the Statistical Agency of Kosovo. Out of a population of 370,000 declared workers, a sample of 340 respondents was sufficient to provide statistically significant results at 95 % confidence level and 5.3 % margin of

error for this study. The survey sample was stratified by sector and job position, including male and female employees aged 18 to 65.

Respondents have completed a questionnaire that was developed to assess the level of occupational stress they experience as well as the underlying factors causing the stress. The survey instrument was based on the Health and Safety Executives' Management standards indicator tool (Court & Kinman, 2008), considering its validity and reliability in work-related research, and was adapted to account for Kosovo's labor market characteristics. The first part of the questionnaire contained general demographic questions such as age, gender, educational level, sector of employment, job position and work experience. The second part consisted of 12 questions on working conditions. The third section listed 40 potential stressors, divided into six categories, i.e. demand (measured by 6 items), control (measured by 5 items), support (measured by 7 items), relationships (measured by 7 items), role (measured by 7 items) and change (measured by 8 items), and asked about degree to which employees found them stressful. Responses were given on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (partially agree), 4 (agree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Upon completion of the survey, each questionnaire was verified to ensure the correctness of completion and to see if it contains any non-logical answers. Prior to data analysis, data has been coded and checked for consistency; afterwards it has been quantitatively analyzed through the SPSS software application (version 15.0). The prevalence of stress was identified by using frequency counts and percentages. Within the analysis, an independent samples t-test was first performed to analyze sectoral differences in the prevalence of stress. Secondly, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to identify the prevalence of stress between managers and staff as well as between highly experienced and less experienced employees, measured by years of experience. Thirdly, bivariate correlation analysis was carried out to examine potential correlation between occupational stress and the 6 categories of stressors. Finally, ordinal logistic regression analysis was carried out to explore possible linkages between demographic or work-related characteristics of the respondents (age, gender, level of education, job experience, job position and sector of employment) and stress.

## **Research Results**

### **Participants' characteristics**

A total of 340 respondents filled out the questionnaire designed for this study. The respondents' age ranged between 25 and 65 years. Nearly 61% of the employees surveyed were males, while 39% of them were females. As far as respondents' education is concerned, the majority of 59% completed bachelor studies, about 13% completed their master's studies, around 3% have completed their specialization, and nearly 2% stated that they completed doctoral studies. On the other hand, about 24% of employees surveyed completed secondary school only. From the total sample, around 49% of employees worked in the private sector, while about 51% of them were employed in public institutions. Close to 33% of respondents hold managerial positions, in 52% of cases they perform professional work and in 15% of cases perform technical / administrative work.

Examining the stress levels revealed a relatively high prevalence of occupational stress among employees in Kosovar organizations, reflected by the mean score 3.15. While comparing stress levels them among different groups of respondents, differences of opinions became apparent. Firstly, comparing stress levels among public and private sector employees showed that the mean score of

stress in public sector employees was 3.20, while the mean score of private sector employees was 3.08, as illustrated in Table 1. This indicated that employees working in the public sector were comparably more stressed than employees working in the private sector. However, when testing the difference in the mean scores through the independent sample t-test it was found not significant, since the significance value  $p$  is greater than the significance level ( $0.397 > 0.05$ ) at 95% confidence level, which does not support the findings of Lewig and Dollard (2001) that employees working in the public sector experience higher levels of occupational stress than employees working in the private sector.

**Table 1. Independent Sample T-Test for Comparisons Of Stress Levels**

Dimension	Sector	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig.
STRESS	Public	150	3.20	.772	.849	.397
	Private	146	3.08	.857		

Source: Authors' calculations.

Secondly, stress levels among employees with different levels of job experience were compared using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the difference between the means of the levels of job experience. As showed in Table 2, the significance value  $p$  is below the significance level ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ) at 95% confidence level, therefore, the difference in the mean level of stress between the different levels of job experience of the employees is statistically significant. This supports the findings of Delima (2017) that experienced executives experienced the lowest levels of stress, compared to less experienced employees.

**Table 2. Anova For Comparisons Of Stress Levels**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	13.748	3	4.583	7.372	.000
Within Groups	182.137	293	.622		
Total	195.886	296			

Source: Authors' calculations.

### Factors Causing Stress in Kosovo's Organizations

The UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 2006) identified six categories of stress factors related to occupational stress, including demand, control, support, relationships, role and change. The demand area includes issues such as high workload and work patterns. The control aspect looks at how much employees have control over their work and how they organize it. Support deals with shortcomings of support systems in the organization, such as resources provided by the organization and encouragement by managers and colleagues. Relationships pertains to the extent of positive behavior at work to avoid conflict. Role looks into role ambiguity and to what extent employees understand their role within the organization. Change focuses on employees' inclusion in organizational change.

In order to measure the extent to which these stressors impact on occupational stress, employees were asked to answer questions indicating the level of agreement. Around 58% of the employees surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that workload caused them stress. Furthermore, 76% of the employees surveyed either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that they experience stress because of the inability to plan the work. Regarding support, 75% of employees surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that lack of necessary work equipment caused them stress. Also, 75% of employees surveyed said that lack of support from their supervisor potentially caused stress at work. Pertaining to Relationship, 80%

strongly agreed or agreed that cases when they faced inadequate treatments by their employer caused them stress. Moreover, 78% stated that offensive behavior by their colleagues might cause stress at work. Employers giving responsibility without decision-making authority is stressful or very stressful for 65% of employees, while the lack of information about the developments in the organization is stressful or very stressful for 70% of them.

The bivariate correlation method was used to see if there is a correlation between occupational stress and the 6 categories of factors. The results of the correlation analysis illustrated in Table 3, showed that stress has a positive moderate correlation with demand ( $r = 0.358^{**}$ ,  $p$  value  $0.000 < 0.01$ ) and the relationship is statistically significant, i.e. an increase in this factor will cause an increase in stress levels of the employees and the other way around a decrease in this factor will cause a decrease in stress levels, favoring the findings of Ben (2007) and Dessler (2000). Stress was also positively correlated with control ( $r = 0.333^{**}$ ,  $p$  value  $0.000 < 0.01$ ), support ( $r = 0.462^{**}$ ,  $p$  value  $0.000 < 0.01$ ), relationship ( $r = 0.366^{**}$ ,  $p$  value  $0.000 < 0.01$ ), role ( $r = 0.335^{**}$ ,  $p$  value  $0.000 < 0.01$ ) and change ( $r = 0.335^{**}$ ,  $p$  value  $0.000 < 0.01$ ).

**Table 3. Correlations Matrix Among Various Dimensions**

Dimension		STRESS	Demand	Control	Support	Relationship	Role	Change
STRESS	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	1.000						
	Sig. (2-tailed)							
Demand	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	.358**	1.000					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000						
Control	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	.333**	.640**	1.000				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000					
Support	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	.462**	.567**	.560**	1.000			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000				
Relationship	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	.366**	.511**	.573**	.769**	1.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000			
Role	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	.335**	.416**	.450**	.579**	.621**	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		
Change	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	.335**	.435**	.458**	.697**	.732**	.560**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

Source: Authors' calculations.

To further analyze the ordinal dependent variable, stress level at work, and determine which work-related variables (job experience, job position and sector of employment) have an effect on stress, ordinal logistic regression was performed. The parameter estimates in Table 4 revealed that employees' work experience ranging from 1-10 years ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ) and from 10-20 years ( $0.001 < 0.05$ ) are statistically significant, i.e. 1-20 years of work experience have significant effect on occupational stress, while work experience above 20 years is not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), i.e. is not useful in predicting occupational stress. On the other hand, employees' sector of employment ( $0.151 > 0.05$ ) and job position ( $0.073 > 0.05$ ) showed no statistical significance, i.e. these variables have no

significant effect on occupational stress. Therefore, only 1-20 years of work experience was useful to predict stress among employees in Kosovo organizations. This indicates that employees with less than 20 years of work experience are exposed to higher levels of stress than employees with more than 20 years of experience.

**Table 4. Ordinal Logit Regression Analysis Parameter Estimates**

Predictors	Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.
Public sector	.331	.231	2.061	1	.151
Private sector	0 <sup>a</sup>			0	
Manager	.428	.239	3.220	1	.073
Employee	0 <sup>a</sup>			0	
1-10 years of experience	1.599	.367	18.947	1	.000
10-20 years of experience	1.091	.338	10.425	1	.001
20-30 years of experience	.650	.365	3.176	1	.075
30-40 years of experience	0 <sup>a</sup>			0	

Link function: Logit.

a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

Source: Authors' calculations.

To test the third hypothesis, ordinal logistic regression was performed to examine whether the ordinal dependable variable, stress adversely affects job performance, can be predicted by the independent variables (sector of employment, work experience, gender and level of education). The parameter estimates in Table 5 showed that employees' work experience ranging from 1-10 years ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ) and from 10-20 years ( $0.002 < 0.05$ ) are statistically significant, i.e. 1-20 years of work experience was useful to predict whether stress adversely affects job performance. Employees' gender is also statistically significant ( $0.002 < 0.05$ ), meaning that for a one unit increase in gender (going from 1 to 2), a 0.72 increase in the log odds of being on a higher level of stress is expected, all other variables held constant. Whereas, sector of employment ( $0.255 > 0.05$ ) and educational attainment ( $0.472 > 0.05$ ) of the employees showed no statistical significance, i.e. these variables are not useful in predicting whether stress adversely affects job performance. Thus, only 1-20 years of work experience and gender have an impact on stress adversely affecting job performance among employees in Kosovo organizations. This indicates that employees with less than 20 years of work experience are exposed to higher levels of stress than employees with more than 20 years of experience as well as that female employees are exposed to higher levels of stress than male employees.



Table 5. Ordinal Logit Regression Analysis Parameter Estimates

Predictors	Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.
Public sector	.275	.241	1.296	1	.255
Private sector	0 <sup>a</sup>			0	
1-10 years of experience	1.511	.373	16.439	1	.000
10-20 years of experience	1.053	.340	9.596	1	.002
20-30 years of experience	.570	.372	2.352	1	.125
30-40 years of experience	0 <sup>a</sup>			0	
Female	.717	.234	9.353	1	.002
Male	0 <sup>a</sup>			0	
High school degree	-.202	.280	.517	1	.472
University degree	0 <sup>a</sup>			0	

Link function: Logit.

a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

## Hypothesis Testing

Results from the ANOVA as well as the ordinal logistic regression analysis established that among the independent variables only 1-20 years of work experience had a significant impact on occupational stress as its p-value was statistically significant at 95% confidence level, supporting the hypothesis:

H2: Employees with less work experience show higher levels of stress than employees with more work experience.

Moreover, ordinal logistic regression analysis showed that 1-20 years of work experience and gender have a significant impact on stress adversely affecting job performance as their p-values were statistically significant at 95% confidence level, supporting the hypothesis:

H3: Stress adversely affects employees' job performance.

Results from the independent t-test and ordinal logistic regression analysis revealed that sector of employment has no significant impact on occupational stress as its p-value was not statistically significant at 95% confidence level, rejecting the hypothesis:

H1: Public sector employees experience higher levels of stress than private sector employees.

## Conclusion

The findings of this quantitative study revealed a relatively high prevalence of occupational stress among employees in Kosovar organizations, reflected by the mean score 3.15. Respondents working in the public sector appeared to be experiencing higher levels of stress than those working in the private sector, with respective mean scores of 3.20 and 3.08; however, the difference proved statistically not significant, rejecting hypothesis H1.

Results showed that years of work experience, however, seemed to predict occupational stress. The ANOVA and the ordinal logistic regression analysis established that 1-20 years of work experience had a statistically significant impact on occupational stress, which confirmed the hypothesis H2 that employees with less work experience show higher levels of stress than employees with more work experience.

Stressors pertaining to demand, control, support, relationships, role and change appeared to be causing occupational stress among employees, all showing positive significant correlation with stress. Demands, such as work load, were reported to cause stress among respondents, alongside issues with control, such as the inability to plan the work. Respondents reported that poor relationships within the organization as well as uncertainty about roles and change in the organization to trigger stress. It was shortcomings in the organization's support system, however, that proved the highest positive correlation with stress, indicating that this aspect made employees most vulnerable to stress.

Moreover, ordinal logistic regression analysis showed that 1-20 years of work experience as well as gender have a statistically significant impact on stress adversely affecting job performance, supporting hypothesis H3 that stress adversely affects job performance of employees with 1-20 years of work experience as well as of female employees.

Although this paper has contributed to the existing body of knowledge, especially pertaining to developing countries such as Kosovo, it still carries limitations that need to be addressed in the future by other scholars. The applied methodology made it difficult to identify specific effects that may be caused by stress. A more thorough study examining the physiological and psychological health effects of occupation stress is necessary, which requires a multidisciplinary analysis. Empirical studies could also analyze the prevalence of stress in various sub-sectors by examining activities to understand which types of work cause higher levels of stress on employees. In this way, more in-depth information will be gathered and awareness on the topic will be increased.

This paper demonstrated that there is prevalence of occupational stress in Kosovo's organizations and that there are several stressors that trigger stress among employees. This means that companies and public institutions in Kosovo maintain an insecure work environment and do little towards cultivating a stable and positive work environment, leaving employees stressed and insecure about tomorrow. Thus, there is a need to change the approach to managing occupation stress in order to minimize its impact on performance as well as employee wellbeing.

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