

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN WHITE-COLLAR
AND BLUE-COLLAR PROFESSIONALS
AND JOB STRESS LEVELS**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present research was to assess the levels of job stress among white-collar and blue-collar professionals. It was hypothesized that blue-collar professionals would have high level of job stress as compared to white-collar professionals.

A total number of eighty professionals, including forty white-collar and forty blue-collar professionals participated in the study. In order to assess the level of stress among the white-collar and blue-collar professionals "The Professional Life Stress Scale" was administered.

The t-test and other Descriptive Statistics were computed for the statistical analysis of the data. The research findings suggest the evidence that blue-collar professionals have high level of job stress as compared to white-collar professionals ($t = 3.817, df = 78, p < .05$).

INTRODUCTION

Stress is the condition that results from a person's response to physical, emotional or environmental factors. It can be referred to mental tension and arousal of the bodily responses to different demands. Stress has been proven beyond doubt to make people ill and evidence suggests that it can cause a number of ailments and diseases. Stress is usually thought of in negative terms. It is thought to be caused by something bad. In other words stress is experienced when a need is not met. Imagine a biomechanical thermostat, whenever an individual experiences hunger, he or she actually receives an error signal in the brain telling them that their blood sugar level is low and they need to top it up. The same is true for other needs. When we are unable to meet a need, we seek fulfillment elsewhere by changing our environment.

It isn't easy to find a generally acceptable definition of 'stress.' Doctors, Engineers, Psychologists, Management Consultants, Linguists and Laypersons all use the word in distinct ways. A useful definition is that stress is a demand made upon the adaptive capacities of the mind and body. If these capacities can enjoy the demands made on them and deal with the stimulation involved, then stress is welcomed and is helpful. If they can't and find the demand debilitating, then stress is unwelcomed and unhelpful. This definition is useful in three ways; (1) stress can be both good and bad, (2) the number of events does not determine whether we're stressed or not, it is our reactions to them, and (3) the definition tells us that stress is a demand made upon the body's capacities. If the capacities are good enough, the individual responds well. If they aren't, they would give way (Fontana, 1989).

Stress can lead to distress and crises in life. Stress can affect a person's well being much more than ones mood or mental state. It can make people

moody, anxious and unable to cope with emotional demands. Stress can be caused by various factors known as stressors. Stressors can be internal and external. Internal stressors are physical ailments such as infections or psychological problems such as worrying about something. External stressors are physical conditions such as heat or cold or a stressful environment such as harsh working conditions or abusive relationships. The work can be the source of both internal and external stressors. Stressors are also described as either short term (acute) or long term (chronic). The working environment or job can generate both acute and chronic stressors but is more likely to be a source of chronic stressors. (Terry, 1986).

Ivancevich and Matteson (1993) define stress simply as “the interaction of the individual with the environment” but they go on to give a more detailed working definition, as follows:

“An adaptive response mediated by individual differences and / or psychological processes that is a consequence of any external (environmental) action, situation or event that places excessive psychological and / or physical demands upon a person”.

Beehr and Newman (1978) defines job stress as “a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning”. Simply stress is defined as an adaptive response to an external situation that results in physical, psychological and / or behavioral deviations from organizational participants.

Stress at the work place reduces productivity, increases management pressures and makes people ill in many ways. Stress at work also provides

a serious risk for all employees and organizations carrying significant liabilities for damages and loss of production. The stress faced by professional workers is substantial. For many professionals, it is intrinsic to the job itself, where competing demands and pressures cannot be escaped. The sheer volume of work can also be overwhelming at times, whether one is a Social Worker, Teacher, Doctor or Manager. People in such kinds of jobs know, either from their own direct experiences or from observing colleagues, that stress can have very serious consequences. It can develop into a living nightmare of running faster and faster to stay in the same place, feeling undervalued, feeling unable to say 'no' to any demand but not working productively on anything. The signs of stress can include sleeplessness, aches and pains and sometimes physical symptoms of anxiety about going to work. What is more, people who are chronically stressed are no fun to work with. They may be irritable, miserable, lacking in energy and commitment, self-absorbed. They may find it hard to concentrate on any one task and cannot be relied on to do their share.

Common job stressors such as perceived low rewards, a hostile work environment, and long hours can also accelerate the onset of different diseases including the likelihood of heart attacks, depression and anxiety etc.

This is particularly true for blue-collar and manual workers. Studies suggest that because these employees tend to have little control over their work environments, they are more likely to develop cardiovascular diseases than those in traditional “white-collar” jobs. As far as blue-collar jobs are concerned, these refer to manual or technical labor, such as in a factory or in technical maintenance “trades.” Workers are members of the working class who perform manual labor and earn an hourly wage. They may be skilled or unskilled, and may involve factory work, building and construction

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trades, law enforcement, mechanical work, maintenance or technical installations. The term blue-collar is normally associated to the dignity of labor and hard work ethics.

A white-collar job refers to a salaried professional or a person whose job is clerical in nature, typically what you call a “desk job”. White-collar workers are usually salaried professionals who do work that is expectedly less “laborous” but typically more highly paid than blue-collar workers. White-collar posts are seen in the medical, legal, administrative or clerical fields. The name comes from the use of traditional white, formal shirts that workers wear in offices or places of work.

Dr. Rosenzweig, Head of the Westchester Counseling Center in White Plains, works closely with Employee-Assistance Programs within area companies in treating employees with work-related stress problems. Dr. Rosenzweig (2007) said. "Yet blue-collar workers are often in high-risk jobs, and when they're under stress they become accident-prone and a threat to themselves and others working with them."

According to Austrian Mikrozensus survey (1999), blue-collar workers face different job-related stress factors at work than the white-collar workers, the most reported factor is accident risk (54%). More than half (51%) are working under time pressure, and 45% of blue-collar workers are confronted with other forms of heavy physical workloads.

According to Wlodarski (2005) blue-collar jobs are nearly three times as likely to be subject to very high stress levels as Senior Managers (24.6%, compared with 8.6%). On the other hand it was found that stress on the job is not confined to white-collar workers; it is equally prevalent among blue-

collar workers (Singer, 1986).

As far as level of stress in Pakistani community is concerned, there are many factors related to this issue like low socio-economic status, lack of education, less job opportunities, less health awareness, large family system, incorporation of labor laws are the major cause of stress at the working and non working environment. Most of the Pakistani population is working in small industries, factories and performs manual work, where the work load and health risk factors are very common as well as the job insecurity is the major source of stress. That is why, researchers developed an interest to explore this issue. So on the basis of literature review, the following hypothesis is formulated:

“Blue-collar professionals would have high level of job stress as compared to white-collar professionals.”

METHOD

Sample:

The sample for the present research was collected from different areas of Karachi like Malir, Khokrapar, Nazimabad, Nishter road, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Mangopir and Jaffar Tayyar Society. From these areas different educational and other organizations were selected for data collection. The rationale behind selecting these areas was the generalizability of results.

Participants:

The sample of the present research consisted of eighty (80) white-collar and blue-collar professionals belonging to different areas of Karachi. They all have eight to twelve years of experience and their age range is between

35 to 45 years. They belong to lower to middle class socio-economic status. The educational level of blue-collar professionals was None to Primary and while the white-collar professionals had completed their Masters' degrees.

Participant's selection:

Some inquiry questions were asked for selecting the target sample following which the researcher provided them with a demographic form which was focused on the participant's name, gender, age, education, marital status, socio-economic status and occupation. An equal number of white-collar and blue-collar professionals participated from the same educational institutes and organizations.

Procedure:

The Heads of the different educational institutes and organizations were approached for the consent of data collection. Then researcher approached the participants. The introductory information, purpose of the research and the matter of confidentiality were assured to them. The sample was selected on the basis of inquiry questions and then the demographic form and the Professional Life Stress Scale were administered to the selected participants.

Statistical analysis:

The t-test and other Descriptive Statistics were performed for analyzing the data. All the statistics was computed on SPSS (version 11.0) and MS Excel.

Measures:

1. Demographic form measures the participant's name, gender, age, education, marital status, socio-economic status and occupation.
2. The Professional Life Stress Scale was used for assessing the level of

stress of white-collar and blue-collar professionals. The Professional Life Stress Scale was developed by Fontana in 1989 for assessing the professional life stress.

Operational definitions:

Blue-collar professionals are males and females belonging to lower middle class socio- economic status and their income ranges from 4000 to 7000 rupees per month. Their working grade was 1 to 5. Their education level was none to Primary schooling. Their work experience was eight to twelve years. They performed highly demanding manual work but had low decision making power.

White-collar professionals are males and females belonging to middle class socio-economic status and their income ranges from 15,000 to 20,000 rupees per month and their working grade is 17. Their education level was Masters. Their work experience was eight to twelve years. They performed less laborous work and had decision making power in their capacity of being Lecturers or Doctors.

RESULTS

Table 1

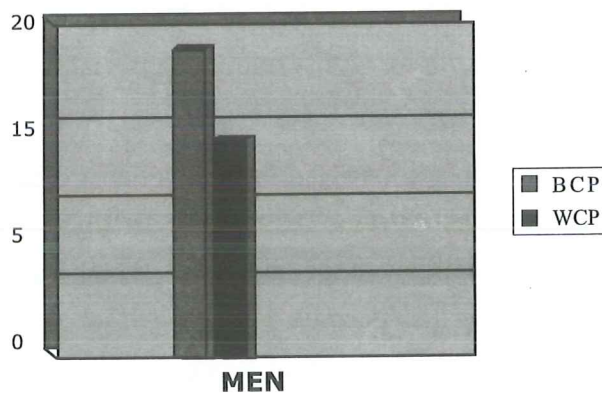
Table showing the Mean, Standard Error and t value of the job stress scores of blue-collar and the white-collar professionals

Groups	N	Mean	St. error	t-value	Table value	Significant level
White-collar professionals	40	12.025	1.298	3.813	1.658	0.05
Blue-collar professionals	40	17.4755				

The table indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the level of job stress of the white-collar professionals and the blue-collar professionals ($t = 3.813$, $df = 78$, $p < .05$).

Graph

Graph showing the mean scores of the job stress of white-collar professionals and the blue-collar professionals.



BCP = Blue-collar professionals

WCP = White-collar professionals

DISCUSSION

Jobs and careers are an important part of an individual's life. Along with providing a source of income, it helps to fulfill personal aims, build social networks and also serve professions or communities. They are also a major source of emotional stress. On the basis of literature review, it was hypothesized:

“Blue-collar professionals would have high level of job stress as compared to white-collar professionals.”

The result indicates that there is a statistically significant difference existing in the level of job stress among blue-collar professionals and white-collar professionals ($t = 3.817$, $df = 78$, $p < .05$). It is evident by table 1 and the graph that blue-collar professionals have a higher level of job stress as compared to white-collar professionals. It may be concluded that the blue-collar professionals suffer more because of their nature of job and low decision latitude as compared to the white-collar professionals. The main contributing factors could be their lack of education, low salary, working conditions, work load, job insecurity and no appreciation and recognition.

The people who are involved in blue-collar professions face more difficulties because of their low job status. They usually don't get the chance to talk about their difficulties to the authorities which makes the situation even worse for them, so they become the victim of job stress. Although the blue-collar professionals do manual work which is essential for any organization and without this any organization can not work properly / perfectly. So the blue-collar professionals are the basic elements of any

organization but there is no recognition and no appreciation for them, even no rewards as well as no chance of promotion that itself is an important reason of higher level of stress among blue-collar professionals.

Peterson (1999) discusses stress among blue-collar professionals because of job insecurity, less promotion chances and putting in lots of efforts in their jobs. When blue-collar workers feel emotional pain it is because they feel they do not hold jobs that give meaning to their lives and because of a drift from management or tied to bad management, they feel out of control. Their self esteem can be low, but not as low as the homeless, unemployed and very low skilled. In 1979, Karasek found that workers whose jobs rated high in job demands yet low in employee control (as measured by latitude over decisions) reported significantly more exhaustion after work, trouble awakening in the morning, depression, nervousness, anxiety, and insomnia or disturbed sleep than other workers.

As far as Pakistani community is concerned, stress is common over here among blue-collar professionals and the causes are low socio-economic status, lack of education, less job opportunities, less health facilities, large family system, working conditions and labor laws. It is believed that the work related tasks and health related risk factors are faced mostly by blue-collar professionals.

The most stress in society as a whole is experienced at opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum: the poor / unemployed and blue-collar professionals on the one hand, and the independently wealthy on the other. In the middle are the white-collar and managerial social groups – those who are generally perceived to suffer the most stress because they are tied to mortgages, work

deadlines and a host of responsibilities. But when it comes to experiencing stress, or lack of meaning in their lives, they in fact suffer the least. Deadlines and long hours at work may still be felt, but their results are not as debilitating to health as being poor, a blue-collar worker or exceptionally affluent. Looking at the bigger picture, the society itself, attitudes need to change here as well and governments have let them down on several fronts. Giving meaning to life – which equates to removing ‘stress’ from it - does not come from health campaigns but it can come from addressing the issues that drive the poor and the rich into feeling the most ‘stressed’. And for that we should look to government and/or the voluntary sector. As far as the government is concerned, the omens so far are not good. The initiative is with business to make changes in the workplace that can make a real difference.

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