A Qualitative Study of Work Stress and Employees' Expectations of Stress Management Interventions in Context of Indian Oil & Gas Industry Professionals

Track-5

Human Resource Management and Social Development

Abstract Submission

To

The 7th International Conference on Energy &

Infrastructure Management (ICEIM-2020)

February 27-28, 2020

Satish Panday
Associate Professor (Organizational Behavior & HRM)
School of Petroleum Management
Pandit Deenadayal Petroleum University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India
E-mail: Satish.pandey@spm.pdpu.ac.in; satishpandey_99@yahoo.com

Dinyar M. Pestonjee
GSPL Chair Professor
School of Petroleum Management
Pandit Deenadayal Petroleum University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India
E-Mail: pestonjee@hotmail.com

Abstract

Key Words: Stress management, qualitative analysis, work environment

The work environment of the Oil & Gas industry is considered very difficult and highly risky in terms of safety and occupational hazards. The professionals employed in upstream (exploration and production) industry work under difficult work conditions e.g. adverse weather, risk of fire, gas leakage, oil spill, unexpected technical failures to name a few. Physical work conditions are identified as major work stressors for on-shore and off-shore professionals (Parkes 1993, 1998). Another important stressor is *physical and social isolation*; as most of the workers and professionals are located in remote locations (mostly on seashores or deep sea oil installations). They are far away from their family, no social contacts with their friends and family, and work for continuous long hours in very crowded work stations (oil rigs). The combined impact of crowding and social isolation leads to workplace aggression and bullying behavior in some cases (Warren Shepell Report 2005). There are complaints of psychosomatic health problems, sleep disorders, sea sickness, alcohol and drug abuse, smoking and obesity naming a few, among oil professionals (Parkes 1998).

There are some research studies conducted by few scholars on offshore professionals (Parkes 1993, 1998), working women (Miller 2002, 2004), spouses of oil professionals (Parkes et al 2005) in UK and Canada Oil industry. We could not find any study conducted in Indian upstream industry. There are some factors that may differentiate work environment on oil rigs in Indian sub-continent e.g. warm climate against extremely cold climate in North Sea and Canada. Workforce demography may be another critical factor that may be important determinant of workplace behavior of workers. Although Indian oil and gas industry is dominated by government-controlled public sector oil companies (e.g. ONGC, Oil India, Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum, GAIL) but there are many big private players (e.g. Reliance Industries Ltd., Essar Oil) are emerging in the market in a more deregulated economic environment. The research literature on work stress suggests the need of a robust research study to understand overall impact of stressful work environment on workplace productivity, lifestyle, health and well-being of oil and gas industry professionals.

The present study is aimed to understand impact of work environment on perceived work stress of oil & gas professionals working in Indian oil/gas companies and their expectations about stress management interventions in context of their organizations. To understand dynamics of work stress in Indian oil and gas industry companies, we decided to adopt qualitative approach in this research study. ". A convenient sample of 51 male executives who possess an average of seven years' experience from 16 leading companies in the Oil & Gas industry in India were

interviewed face-to-face by using open-ended questions that focus on work conditions, work stress, reasons of work stress, impact of work stress on individuals' professional, personal, family and social life. The interviews also covered questions on employees' expectations from their organizations about organizational interventions to manage stress at individual, team and organizational levels. The verbatim responses on interview questions were recorded by field investigators in structured questionnaire sheets. These responses of participants were coded into specific theoretical categories by using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. This categorization process helped us to identify different factors influencing perceived work stress of participants, impact of work stress on their professional/personal/family/social life and their expectations about organizational stress management interventions. We divided respondents into 3 sub-groups- High Stress (N1= 25), Medium Stress (N2= 12) and Low Stress (N3= 14) on the basis on their ratings to one simple question asked about their perceived level of stress. Patterns of responses across these three sub-groups revealed many interesting findings about work environment and factors influencing work stress of participants of the study. For example, deadlines, project management issues, lack of resources, high responsibility and multitasking were cited as most dominant reasons of high work stress in the work environment of oil/gas industry professionals. Respondents of our study also agreed that work stress had significant impact on their professional, personal, family and social life. It leads emotional and behavioral problems (mood disturbances, depression, increased anxiety and anger) at personal level; increased work-family conflict, neglect of spouse and children, displacement of stress to family members at family level; neglect of social relationships and friends in social life; and negative impact on performance and work-related decisions in professional life.

Regarding employees' expectations about their organization's role in stress management interventions, majority of our respondents agreed that organizations can definitely play a major role in managing work stress of employees at individual, team and organizational levels by adopting various organizational processes and mechanisms. Some of these processes/mechanisms are well-organized workplace, proper allocation of work among team members, sports/recreational facilities at workplace, stress management training, open communication between management & employees, employee involvement in management decisions, employee-friendly policy, family work culture, management's support to employees, team-building activities, mentoring and coaching of employees and stress-free, supportive/positive work environment. Although patterns of these responses varied across high stress, medium stress and low stress groups but overall trends support high expectations of employees' on stress management interventions from their employer organizations. The findings of this study may provide many insights to HRD managers in designing workplace stress management interventions for creating a positive, proactive work culture which induce positive stress for better performance and achieving excellence. Although study is based on limited sample of oil/gas industry professionals but these findings may also be generalized to designing stress management interventions for other occupational groups or industries.

References

1. Miller, G. E. (2002). The Frontier, Entrepreneurialism, and Engineers: Women Coping in a Web of Masculinity in an Organizational Culture. *Culture and Organization*, Vol. 8 (2), 145-160.

2. Miller, G. E. (2004). Frontier Masculinity in the Oil Industry: The Experience of Women Engineers. *Gender, Work and Organization*. Vol. 11 No. 1, 47-73.

3. Parker, K. R. (1993). Human Factors, Shift Work and Alertness in the Offshore Oil Industry. *OTH 92 389, Health & Safety Executive, Offshore Technology Report*.

4. Parkes, K. R. (1998). Psychosocial Aspects of Stress, Health and Safety in North Sea Installations. *Scandevian Journal of Environmental Health*, Vol 24 (5), 321-333.

5. Parkes, K.R., Carnell, S. C. and Farmer, E. L. (2005). "Living Two Lives"- Perceptions, Attitudes and Experiences of Spouses of UK Offshore Workers. *Community, Work and Family.* Vol. 8, No. 4, November 2005, pp. 413_/437.

6. WarrenShepell Report (2005) on "Occupational Stress and Health in the Oil & Gas Industry".

http://www.morneausobeco.com/_brochures/reports/ir_oilandgasindustry_en_report_SFGI2005.pdf