

Abstract

Occupational stress can no longer be considered occasional. It is increasingly becoming a very important phenomenon, affecting all categories of workers in every country and warrants urgent attention.

The present study was carried out to assess the prevalence and correlates of occupational stress in middle level managers and operational staff members in domestic commercial banks in the Colombo district. It also intended to assess the effectiveness of an occupational stress management intervention conducted for middle level managers.

The study consisted of three components. Component one of the study validated three selected scales of an instrument, the Job Content Questionnaire before its application in the main study to assess the prevalence of iso-strain and high job strain, which measure occupational stress. Component two was a cross-sectional study done to assess the prevalence and correlates of occupational stress in middle level managers and operational staff members in domestic commercial banks in the Colombo district. Component three was a cluster randomized controlled study carried out to assess the effectiveness of an occupational stress management intervention for middle level managers.

The validated decision latitude, psychological demands and social support at work scales of the JCQ consisting of 22 items were found to be a valid and reliable instrument to assess occupational stress in banking workers. The Cronbach's alpha for decision latitude, psychological demands and social support were 0.71, 0.61 and 0.8 respectively for the total group.

The study revealed that high job strain and iso-strain are occupational health problems of bank workers. The prevalence of iso-strain and high job strain among middle level managers was found to be 10.2% (95% CI 8.1-12.3) and 17.8% (95% CI 15.1-20.5) respectively.

The prevalence of iso-strain and high job strain among operational staff members was found to be 14.5% (95% CI 12.1-16.9) and 24.4% (95% CI 21.5-27.3) respectively. Operational staff members perceived more iso-strain as well as high job strain than the

middle level managers according to the present study and the difference was found to be statistically significant at ($p=0.049$) and ($p=0.01$) respectively.

Iso-strain among male middle level managers was 10.5% (95% CI 8.3-12.7) compared with 9.7% (95% CI 7.6–11.6) among females, while high job strain among male and female middle level managers were 18.3% (95% CI 15.6–21.0) and 17.2% (95% CI 14.5–19.9) respectively. These differences were not significant ($p>0.05$).

The prevalence of iso-strain among male and female operational staff members was 15.4 % (95% CI 13.0–17.8) and 13.6% (95% CI 11.3–15.9) respectively, while a slightly higher level of high job strain among both male 26.7% (95% CI 23.7–29.7) and female operational staff members 22.4% (95% CI 19.6–25.2) was observed. The difference among males and females for iso-strain was not statistically significant ($p>0.05$) but the difference in high job strain among male and female operational staff members was found to be significant ($p=0.04$).

It was found that taking office work home (OR 3.1; 95% CI 1.3-6.9) and job dissatisfaction (OR 7.8; 95% CI 3.6-16.8) were significant correlates of iso-strain among middle level managers with a significance of ($p=0.009$) and ($p<0.001$) respectively after adjusting for confounding. Taking office work home (OR 2.3; 95% CI 1.2-4.5) and job dissatisfaction (OR 3.3; 95% CI 1.8-5.9) were identified as significant correlates of high job strain among middle level managers as well, with a significance of ($p=0.01$) and ($p<0.001$) after adjusting for confounding. However reduction of the time spent with the family was found to be significantly correlated ($p=0.02$) only with high job strain after adjusting for confounding (OR 5.6; 95% CI 1.3-23.9) in the present study.

Among operational staff members the factors identified as significant correlates of iso-strain after controlling for confounding in the logistic regression model at 0.05 significance level were: perceived anger due to work related problems at home (Adjusted OR 1.8; 95% CI 1.1–2.9), perceived job insecurity (Adjusted OR 2.7; 95% CI 1.7–4.4), perceived lack of opportunity for promotions (Adjusted OR 3.5; 95% CI 1.9–6.2), perceived job dissatisfaction (Adjusted OR 1.9; 95% CI 1.1–3.3), perceived inability of coping work stress (Adjusted OR 3.0; 95% CI 1.8–4.9) and service of ten years or less in the currently working bank (Adjusted OR 2.5; 95% CI 1.5-4.2).

Among operational staff members, the factors identified as significant correlates of high job strain after controlling for confounding in the logistic regression model at 0.05 significance level were: perceived anger due to work related problems at home (Adjusted OR 1.8; 95% CI 1.2–2.7), perceived job insecurity (Adjusted OR 2.0; 95% CI 1.3–3.1), perceived lack of opportunity for promotions (Adjusted OR 1.9; 95% CI 1.2–2.9), perceived job dissatisfaction (Adjusted OR 1.6; 95% CI 1.03–2.5), perceived inability of coping work stress (Adjusted OR 2.0; 95% CI 1.4–3.0), perceived delays in data processing (Adjusted OR 1.5; 95% CI 1.002 – 2.1), age less than 35 years (Adjusted OR 1.9; 95% CI 1.2–3.3) and being unmarried, divorced or separated (Adjusted OR 1.5; 95% CI 1.003–2.3).

The occupational stress management intervention was not found to be effective ($p > 0.05$) to reduce occupational stress among middle level managers. However, levels of iso-strain and psychological distress reduced more in the study group than the control group in the present study.

The problem of iso-strain and high job strain indicating high level of occupational stress among middle level managers and operational staff members in the banks should be considered seriously and the relevant authorities as well as the workers in the banks should be made aware of this problem. The health authorities too should consider this issue as a priority in occupational health and activities should be planned to manage this problem effectively.

Further research is recommended to find out risk factors of occupational stress in depth and to find out effective stress management interventions as well as mode of delivery of the interventions. In addition, research should be carried out to assess associations of occupational stress and non-communicable diseases. These findings should be taken into consideration when planning interventions on health promotion for banking employees in the future.