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Effect of automatic negative thoughts and stress on job demand, job control and job support among school teachers

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Numerous definitions of stress exist in the literature and there is some controversy over the nomenclature as to whether the term stress, stressor, or strain should be used to define various aspects of stress (Thatcher & Miller, 2003). Buunk, De Jonge, Ybema & De Wolf (1998:148) identify three broad theoretical approaches to stress which may determine the ways in which the term can be used. They argue that these theories address stress primarily as a stimulus "in other words, as an event or situation that affects the individual and is potentially harmful". This theoretical approach is associated with the term stressor and implies the potential for stress inherent in a particular situation/environment. Many workplace studies of stress adopt this theoretical approach as they attempt to identify the work-related factors that place individuals' physical and psychological health at risk and which contribute to negative organisational outcomes. Alternatively, stress may be regarded as the "psychological or physiological response of the organism to an external threat" (Buunk et al., 1998:148). The term strain is often used to depict this approach to stress. Selye's (1978, cited in Buunk et al., 1998) A stressor is an environmental condition that includes a negative emotional reaction (Spector, 1998). People monitor their environments and through the appraisal process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) interpret situations as stressors, based on such factors as the extent to which the individual perceives a threat to well being (Spector & Fox, 2004). One of the most notable contributors to the field of occupational stress, Karasek (1990), says that job stress occurs because the 'demand' of the employment exceeds the 'controls' of the individual needed to interact with those demands. Karasek (1979) in his psychosocial effects of work environment reported mental strain results from the interaction of job demands and job decision latitude available to the workers. Based on this research Karasek developed the job strain model. The main features of this model includes job demand, job control and job support.

Job demand
Karasek (1979) defined job demand as a sum set of all potential work stressors, especially "Psychological Stressors involved in accomplishing the workload, stressors related to unexpected tasks and stressors of job related personal conflict". Karasek (1997a) referred to "the demands of modern workplace such as the intensity of output per hour, time pressure, concentration and social pressure". Job demand is defined as an independent variable that measures stressors in the work environment such as workload demand, time pressure and role conflict (Vander Doef & Mars, 1999; Karasek, 1985; Karasek, 1979).

Workload occurs when the amount of work exceeds the skill, knowledge and abilities of the individual. Role conflict is defined as the degree of incompatibility between the expectations of other person or between aspects of a single role. Role ambiguity is defined as the degree of uncertainty associated with the goals and means to perform one's role (Kahn & Boysiere, 1992).

Keywords: stress, automatic negative thought, job demand, job control and job support, school teachers

When persons are stressed, it is not always as a result of situations that happen to them. Many times people generate their own stress through pessimistic thinking. And there are times that small stresses are made into major ones by negative thoughts. Negative thinking can be triggered by almost any type of circumstance and is usually involved in depression, anxiety, anger, and relationship problems. Whether persons experience a situation as stressful or merely as a challenge depends on how they size it up in comparison with their own ability to deal with it. When negative thoughts occur in stressful situations, anxious or depressing thoughts are likely to relate to the specific incident at first. However, once a strong feeling state occurs (such as depression, anxiety, or anger), negative thoughts may spontaneously start to develop about a wide variety of issues unrelated to the triggering event. At that point, negative thoughts may seem to take on a life of their own.

Negative thoughts are especially likely to occur when persons are by themselves, in boring situations, or doing something that takes no effortful thinking (when the mind is in "neutral" so to speak). Automatic negative thoughts seem absolutely realistic and true, but most of the time they are not. In times of emotional upset, these thoughts are often distorted and excessively negative. And the longer they are dwelled on, the more upset the person is likely to become.

Numerous definitions of stress exist in the literature and there is some controversy over the nomenclature as to whether the term stress, stressor, or strain should be used to define various aspects of stress (Thatcher & Miller, 2003). Buunk, De Jonge, Ybema & De Wolf (1998:148) identify three broad theoretical approaches to stress which may determine the ways in which the term can be used. They argue that these theories address stress primarily as a stimulus "in other words, as an event or situation that affects the individual and is potentially harmful". This theoretical approach is associated with the term stressor and implies the potential for stress inherent in a particular situation/environment. Many workplace studies of stress adopt this theoretical approach as they attempt to identify the work-related factors that place individuals' physical and psychological
Karasek (1979) defined job control as the working individual's potential control over his task and his conduct during the working days. Job control is also referred to as decision latitude which mainly focuses on the person's ability to control his work activities. In addition, the decision latitude includes two components i.e. skill discretion and decision authority (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991). Job control is considered as a stress-reducing strategy in demanding jobs where there are high workloads and fast work pace; as higher job control allows job incumbents to transform the arousal triggered by high job demands into constructive behaviours (Van Yperen & Hagedoorn, 2003; Karasek, 1979).

Karasek's (1979) job demand control has been an influential theoretical foundation for various studies of job stress (Van Yperen & Hagedoorn, 2003; Cooper, Dewe, & Driscoll, 2001; Fox, Dewey & Ganster, 1993).

Keepin in view of the above, the following objectives and hypotheses were formulated

**Hypotheses of the study**

- There shall be significant relation in automatic negative thoughts and job demand, job control and job support among female school teachers
- There shall be significant relation in stress and job demand, job control and job support among female school teachers

**Participants**

The sample size was comprised of 100 female government school teachers between the age range of 30 to 45 years. The data was collected from the school teachers of district Hisar, Haryana. The convenience sampling was used to collect the data. The variables of educational status, teaching experience, socio-economic status and place of residence were controlled in the sense that teachers were post graduate, having 10-15 years teaching experience, belong to urban area and socio-economic status ranging from middle socio-economic status and belong to urban area. It is significant to emphasize that in addition to the advantage of homogeneity which resulted from this type of control, there is also an increased danger of bias. However, this type of control is appropriate from the view point of the focal theme of the present study.

**Instruments**

- **Automatic Thought Questionnaire (ATQ)**: Hollon & Kendall, 1986;
- **Job demand-control-support questionnaire (DCSQ)**: Theoell, 1988;
- **Perceived stress scale** (Cohen & Williamson, 1988): Psychological demands, control and social support in the work place were assessed by DCSQ, a 17-item questionnaire developed by Theoell et al., based on the Demand-Control-Support model. The demands and control subscales represent a shortened and modified version of Karasek's Job Content Questionnaire. The support items are oriented toward the atmosphere at the work-site.

**Statistical analysis**

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Method was used to analyse the results.

**Results and discussion**

The result as shown in Table 1 indicate that there was no significant relation in negative thoughts, job demand, and job control; however, there was significant negative relation in automatic negative thoughts and job demand and control component might be due to different reasons.
Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AN Thoughts</th>
<th>Demand</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AN Thoughts</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.428</td>
<td>0.279**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.18*</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.269**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**

The findings indicated that automatic negative thoughts were negatively related with job support. The results are in hypothesized direction and are in accordance with previous researchers. Researchers have also shown that social support at work has diverse beneficial effects on reducing both causes and effects of work stress (Cohen, 1988; House, 1981). Similarly, Cahill and Landsbergis (1996) found that job control and supervisor support had a stronger relationship with job dissatisfaction, stronger than with psychological strain, sleeping problems, and muscle strain among male post office mail handlers. Baker, Israel, and Schurman (1996) reported that job control had a stronger relationship with negative feelings of depression among 4,018 mail handlers. Schonfeld (1996) found that job control and supervisor support had a succinct relationship to distress in the profession. Psychology in Spain, 10, 88-96. Retrieved from http://www.psychologyinspain.com/content/full/2006/full/tp1-199099

The findings suggest that female school teacher do not bother about the job component like job demand, control and support. Several observational studies suggest that perceived stressful work conditions, suggest high work demands, lack of control at work and problems in interpersonal relations, are associated with poor mental health and self reported use of psychotropic drugs (Virtem, Honkonen, Kivimaki et al., 2005; Wang, Adin, & Patten, 2006; Wang, 2005, 2004). However, the nature of these associations is unclear because the evidence relies on self-assessments of work-related stressors. Instead of organizational realities, a negative perception of work may reflect subclinical or undiagnosed mental disorders.

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