



Analysis of Factors Causing Employee Stress in the Work Environment: A Grounded Theory Study

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Abstract

Background: Stress at work is a common thing for us as humans. Stress is feedback that must be passed by humans in doing a job. **Objective:** This study aims to deeply understand the experience of work stress in office employees of various ages and positions. **Methods:** Using a grounded theory approach, this research uncovered the phenomenon of work stress from the subjective perspective of the employees. Seven participants from various backgrounds were involved in in-depth interviews conducted through Google Meet and recorded using Google Docs. Data analysis resulted in the finding that work stress in office employees is influenced by various factors. Through the grounded theory method, we found that there were 25 codes, 9 categories and 4 major themes with a total score of 31. From the data, we found that the major themes that contribute to causing work stress in employees are responsibility, environment, leadership and employee rights. **Results:** The findings of this study can be used to develop more effective intervention programs in reducing work stress and improving employee well-being. The findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of work stress in the context of office work in Indonesia. The implication of this research is the need for company management to better understand the factors that cause stress for their employees. **Conclusion:** This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the field of human resource management and occupational health.

Keywords:

Stress Factors; Work Stress;
Work Environment; Workload;
Conflict

INTRODUCTION

Working is mandatory for humans to meet the needs of their daily lives. By working, humans can get income/money to meet these needs. In the journal *The Influence of Working Mothers and the Role of Fathers in Coparenting on Children's Learning Achievement* (2008) by Siti Nurhidayah, work is an activity or activity that is carried out to earn money or livelihood. According to Opan Arifudin in the journal *The Effect of Compensation on Employee Performance at PT. Global Media* (2019), humans have many needs in their lives, such as eating, drinking, clothing, shelter, and other needs.

In working there are many benefits that will be obtained by humans such as to meet the needs of life, increase friendships, increase productivity and learn to solve problems (De Janasz, Dowd, & Schneider, 2019; Grant & Parker, 2018), but by working humans can also experience stress with the life they lead (Sonntag & Fritz, 2019). There are several signs that can be seen if a person is stressed at work such as not coming to the office for various reasons,

coming to the office late, coming to the office but not in the office (only attendance only) (Cooper, Quick, & Schabracq, 2017; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Karatepe & Olugbade, 2017).

Stress at work is a common thing for us as humans. Stress is feedback that must be passed by humans in doing a job. Work stress is a situation in which individuals get pressure or tension in their work environment which results in individuals responding negatively and feeling burdened in completing their obligations (Mangkunegara, 2017). When a person experiences stress, he can be exhausted both physically and psychologically and has the potential to cause physical, psychological, emotional, cognition, and motivational disorders as well. Thus, stress can cause a mixture of disorders that are quite chronic if experienced by a person. *Rivai, Wenur 2018 page 53.*

To relieve the effects of stress, many people use drugs both legally and illegally. For those who are already on the threshold of stress, usually get around it by taking anti-sedative drugs. There are some of these anti-sedatives that are over-the-counter, and there are some that must be compliant based on the doctor's advice. The use of these stress relievers is usually only temporary. Therefore, to relieve stress, steps are needed that can later be healthier/in accordance with the human condition.

Work stress can affect physical and psychological balance, thought processes, and emotions that result in poor conditions to provide good performance (Herdiana & Sary, 2023; Paramita & Sudhartio, 2022; Supanto et al., 2022). If stress continues to increase to its critical point, then work performance is zero, meaning that workers experience a mental breakdown, become sick or unable to work anymore, become desperate, quit or run away from work and may have an impact on layoffs.

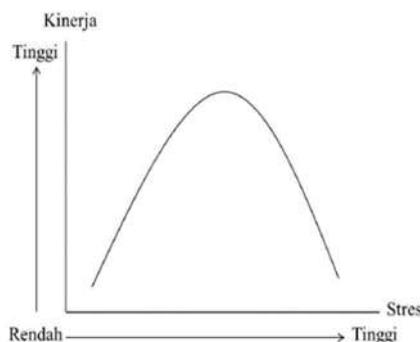


Figure 1: Inverted U Relationship of Work Stress with Performance

Source: Robbins and Judge (2018)

Based on the above explanation, the researcher agreed that stress in the work environment is not expected because it will have an impact on employee performance, which ultimately has an impact on company productivity. Most research on work stress uses a quantitative approach, which places more emphasis on generalizing research results. In fact, each individual has a unique and complex stress experience, so a qualitative approach such as ground theory is needed to understand this phenomenon in depth. Therefore, the researcher tried to analyze "Factors Causing Employee Stress in the Work Environment as a Grounded Theory Study". This research will be carried out by interviewing several employees in a company where the identity of the employee will not be displayed. The interview process that we conducted was to explore the specific causes of stress in employees with deep interviews. There are several

challenges that we face in conducting research using this method, including:

Time and Resources

The repetitive process of collecting and analyzing data requires considerable time and resources.

Limitations of Subjectivity

As a qualitative method, grounded theory can be influenced by the subjectivity of researchers. Therefore, researchers must remain objective and try to minimize bias.

Analytical Skills

Researchers need to have good analytical skills to code and interpret data effectively.

This study aims to develop a theory that is grounded in empirical data on the experience of work stress. Using a grounded theory approach, this study will identify categories and themes that arise repeatedly from data obtained through in-depth interviews with employees. The final goal of this study is to build a conceptual model that can comprehensively explain the phenomenon of work stress in a specific organizational context.

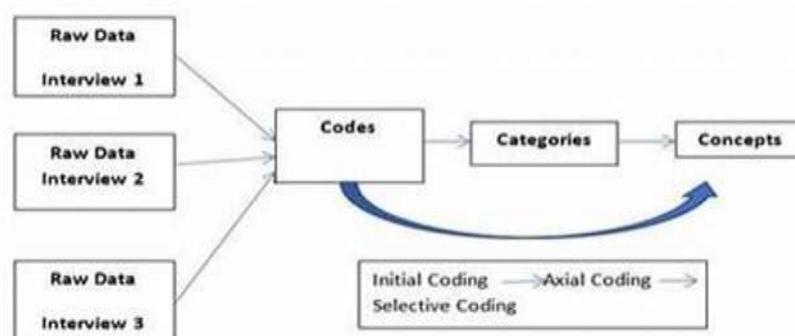
This research is expected to make a significant contribution in the field of human resource management and occupational health. The findings of this study can be used to develop more effective intervention programs in reducing work stress and improving employee well-being.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative research methodology with a grounded theory approach. Qualitative research focuses on a deep understanding of a phenomenon that occurs in social life by looking at the perspective of the person who experiences the phenomenon (Head et al., 2023; Sprake & Palmer, 2022). Then, Grounded Theory itself is a methodological approach in research that seeks to formulate theories that derive directly from the data that is researched and interpreted, allowing the formation of theories rooted in empirical evidence (Idris et al., 2024; Kurniawan et al., 2026; Marsudi et al., 2022). In the context of stress cause research, researchers will collect data from various sample of respondents, through in-depth interviews, to then identify patterns, categories, and themes that appear repeatedly. Systematically the following steps are carried out in this study, including:

- 1. Looking for phenomena to be used as a research theme.** In connection with October 10 being commemorated as World Mental Health Day, the three of us agreed to discuss the phenomenon of stress in employees that occurs in the work environment.
- 2. Search and read a variety of literature related to stress.** After determining the phenomenon that we will research, we conduct a literature study about stress itself. Various ideas emerged from the causes of stress, the impact of stress itself to how to manage stress well. However, because this study is only devoted to one grounded theory and does not want to use too many problems, we took "stress causes" as our study using the grounded theory method.
- 3. Prepare Research Design.** As explained in the Introductory Chapter, the researcher uses a qualitative research methodology to research the factors that cause employee stress in the work environment with a grounded theory approach, where the sample used is a theoretical sample, meaning that the sample is determined based on the researcher's interest in finding a theory.

4. **Collect research data.** In this study, we collected data by conducting interviews with 7 respondents who worked in the place where we worked. Due to the limited time we had, we conducted interviews by way of face-to-face interviews directly in the same place or indirectly, namely by conducting interviews using Video Call using Google Meet. The interview was conducted for several minutes by asking "Factors that cause respondents to experience stress in the work environment". Interviews are conducted spontaneously or without prior briefing, nor are there any prior notice or no prior notice of when they will be interviewed.
5. **Processing and Analyzing Data.** The researcher uses google docs in processing the data from the interview recordings, from the results of this recording, we *convert* from voice recordings to editorial in the google docs that we use, as for the processing and analysis of our data in accordance with the grounded theory process below:



Gambar 2: Grounded Theory Process

Initial code is a short word or phrase that indicates an important feature of visual data. This step includes the development of a large amount of code. The redundant codes will be merged and the codes will be given new names. After removing the redundant code, it will be modified from the raw data. After modifying the code, it will be organized into categories. This explains that the main topics will be grouped together with each important topic. Thus, there will be a long list of categories and sub-categories along with their associated codes. The initial list will be modified by combining the two categories. Therefore, the transfer of the initial data to the category identification and from the identified category to the emerging concept is part of the analysis process. Categories and sub-categories will be reviewed again after removing redundancy and identifying critical elements. The final step of this process includes the identification of concepts related to the code and categories that have been identified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It took the researcher two days to find the right Respondent according to the research theme. Our respondents are looking for in our own work environment. The Respondent population is spread across various positions with different working periods. The following is the demographic data of the respondents in this study:

Table 1. Respondent Demographic Data

Respondent	Departments	Tenure
1	Secretary	30 years
2	Marketing Executive	15 years
3	General Service Manager	30 years
4	Officer	28 years
5	Staff	1 years
6	Staff	1 years
7	Supervisor	17 years

In the interview process, the researcher asked the Respondent questions about whether or not the Respondent had experienced stress in the work environment. As a result, all Respondents had a stressful experience in the work environment. Then, the researcher proceeded to the core question, namely what are the factors that cause them to experience stress in the work environment. From the results of the answers of the seven respondents, we obtained as many as 25 codes which we then categorized into 9 categories of causes of employee stress in the work environment, including work period, superior's leadership style, the right to self-defense, workload exceeding ability, employee health, duties and responsibilities, communication between employees and superiors, conflicts in work completion, and work facilities.

Tabel 2. Hasil Coding Category

Respondent	Coding	Category								
		Perse kerja	Gaya kepemimpinan	Hak untuk self defense	Beban kerja melebihi kemampuan	Asesitas karyawan	Tanggungjawab	Komunikasi antar karyawan dan atasan	Facilitas kerja	Hardi dalam penyelesaian pekerjaan
R1	1. Masalah yang cukup lama di posisi yang sama	1								
	2. Atasan yang toxic		1							
	3. Tidak dapat kesempatan membela diri atau mengajukan saat dibutuhkan			1						
	4. Jempol pinggang untuk semua karyawan tambahan					1				
	5. Pekerjaan dibelikan yang menyita waktu					1				
	6. Atasan yang kasar dalam memberi perintah		1							
R2	1. Jabatan yang menuntut tanggung jawab tinggi						1			
	2. Tuntutan target yang sulit tercapai				1					
	3. Tekanan dari atasan yang menuntut untuk selalu patch									
R3	1. Diberi pekerjaan diluar jangkauan atau tanggungjawab					1				
	2. Lingkungan kerja atau rekan yang toxic								1	
	3. Teman kerja yang tidak mau bekerja sama								1	
R4	1. Hubungan antar anggota tim yang tidak harmonis									1
	2. Job load atau beban pekerjaan yang sudah over load				1					
	3. Atasan yang selalu mendadak dalam memberi instruksi		1							
	4. Faktor kesehatan yang memicu stress					1				
	5. Fasilitas kerja yang tidak baik								1	
R5	1. Atasan member instruksi secara memaksa		1							
	2. Diminta mengerjakan pekerjaan diluar				1					
	3. Atasan yang tidak hormat		1							
	4. Kurangnya komunikasi sesama karyawan								1	
	5. Beban kerja yang menyita waktu istirahat dan libur					1				
R6	1. Tekanan dari sesama karyawan (Buli)									1
	2. Tenggak waktu pekerjaan yang terlalu mepet				1					
R7	1. Atasan sulit diajak diskusi terkait pekerjaan								1	
	2. Tidak dibelikan dalam pengambilan keputusan sesuai jabatan								1	
	3. Diminta mengerjakan pekerjaan diluar				1					
	4. Rotasi/mutasi dan promosi yang tidak transparan							1		
	5. Kesulitan berkomunikasi dengan karyawan beyond hirarki								1	
	6. Atasan member instruksi dengan bahasa yang kasar		1							
	7. Fairness treatment atau keadilan perlakuan sesama karyawan									1
TOTAL		1	7	1	8	1	2	1	1	4

The lowest category with a value of one is the working period, the right to self-defense, employee health and work facilities. Employee boredom is a natural thing and can be experienced by all employees, including employees with a long working period. However, in

an era like today, where awareness of the importance of mental health is well understood by the public, almost all employees in every office have their own way to keep them mentally healthy, which can ultimately overcome the level of boredom in their work environment. Then, the next category that has a low score is employee health. If we look deeper into the employee health category, the answer referred to in this study is the Respondent's answer which explains that his health which declines over time causes the Respondent to be unable to optimally carry out his obligations as an employee. This is what causes him to be stressed in his work environment. Although today's employees can prevent their health and mental health from being maintained, this employee health factor should be a special concern from the Company. In addition, work facilities are also important things that must be of concern to the Company. Work facilities are a supporting factor or one of the support systems of employees in carrying out their obligations. The last category that has a low score is the employee's right to self-defense. The Right to Self Defense referred to here comes from the Respondent who answers with the coding "Cannot have the opportunity to defend himself or explain when blamed". Every Superior should give equal opportunities to all his subordinates to express their opinions.

Furthermore, duties and responsibilities are the categories that cause employees to be stressed in their work environment. These duties and responsibilities have a value of 2, where this value is obtained from 2 Respondents. One of them considers that his high position is a stressful factor. The higher a person's position in the office, of course, the higher the responsibilities will also be bearded. Conflicts in job completion are also a factor that causes employee stress. Conflicts in completing work that we get from our coding results include toxic co-workers, co-workers who do not want to work well so that they cause disputes, disharmonious relationships between team members and bullying. This conflict category has a score of 4, two from the same Respondent, two from different Respondents. Following the category of communication between employees and superiors and the category of leadership style of superiors which are factors that cause employee stress. If explored, these two categories appear to have similarities in coding, such as bosses who are difficult to talk to about work-related and bosses who are rude in giving instructions. However, the researcher agreed to distinguish the coding category into two, namely Communication between employees and superiors and superiors' leadership style. We use the boss character approach in determining which coding we put into the category of superior leadership style. Of course, a boss who is difficult to talk to about this job is not included in the superior's character approach. According to the researcher, this is due to the lack of communication from superiors to their subordinates caused by the possibility of not having much time to discuss. Then for coding a rude boss, according to this researcher, it has entered into the personal character of the boss who is indeed rude in his words.

The last category that has the highest score, which is 9, is the workload that is beyond the employee's ability. Workload according to Meshkati in Astianto and Suprihhadi (2014) can be defined as a difference between the capacity or ability of workers and the demands of the work that must be faced. Considering that human work is mental and physical, each has a different level of burden. Too high a load level allows excessive energy consumption and overstress, on the other hand, too low a load intensity allows boredom and saturation or under stress. Therefore, it is necessary to strive for the optimal level of loading intensity that exists between the two extreme limits and of course the difference between one individual and

another. From a total of 9 categories with a total score of 31, the researcher narrowed it down to 4 *Themes*, including *leadership*, employee rights, responsibility and *environment*.

Table 3. Themes Coding Results

No	Category	Scoring	Themes	Leadership	Employee Rights	Responsibility	Environment
1	Tenure	1		1	1		
2	Superior Leadership Style	7		7			
3	Right to Self-Defence	1		1			
4	Workload Exceeds Capacity	9		9			
5	Employee Health	1		1			
6	Duties & Responsibilities	2		2			
7	Communication Between Employees and Superiors	5		5			
8	Work Facilities	1		1			
9	Conflicts in Job Settlement	4		4			
	TOTAL	31		7	3	11	10

In this study, there are 4 main causes or factors that cause employee stress in the work environment, including:

1. Responsibility
2. Leadership
3. Employee rights
4. Environment

CONCLUSION

This study, employing a grounded theory approach through in-depth interviews with seven office employees of varying positions and tenures, successfully identified 25 codes, 9 categories, and 4 major themes that contribute to work stress in the office environment, namely *Responsibility*, *Leadership*, Employee Rights, and *Environment*, with a total coding score of 31. Among these, workload exceeding employee capacity emerged as the single most significant stressor, recording the highest category score of 9, followed closely by the *environment* theme which encompasses interpersonal conflicts, toxic workplace dynamics, and inadequate work facilities and the *responsibility* theme, which reflects the mounting pressures associated with duties and positional accountability. The *leadership* theme, encompassing superior leadership style and communication between employees and superiors, was also confirmed as a critical determinant of workplace stress, underscoring the extent to which managerial behavior shapes the psychological well-being of subordinates. Collectively, these findings affirm that work stress in the office context is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be addressed through isolated interventions; rather, it requires a comprehensive organizational response that includes periodic workload assessment and redistribution, the cultivation of participative and communicative leadership, the establishment of fair and safe

working environments, and the consistent fulfillment of employee rights. For future research, it is recommended that studies expand the sample size and geographical scope to include employees from diverse industries and organizational structures across Indonesia, in order to test the generalizability of the four-theme model identified in this study. Future research could also adopt a mixed-methods design combining qualitative grounded theory with quantitative measurement instruments such as validated work stress scales to not only identify the causes of stress but also quantify their relative magnitude and examine their direct impact on employee performance, turnover intention, and overall organizational productivity.

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