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Original Article

Work Stress and Employee Retention in the Manufacturing Sector: An Empirical Study in the Chennai Region

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ABSTRACT: *Work stress has emerged as a significant challenge in modern organizations, particularly in the manufacturing sector where employees are exposed to demanding work conditions, strict deadlines, and high production pressures. The present study aims to examine the level of work stress among employees and analyze its impact on employee retention in the manufacturing industries in the Chennai region. The study also investigates the factors contributing to work stress and evaluates its influence on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The research adopts a descriptive and analytical design, and primary data were collected from 150 respondents using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. Statistical tools such as percentage analysis, correlation, and regression analysis were employed to analyze the data.The findings reveal that a majority of employees experience moderate to high levels of work stress, primarily due to heavy workload, long working hours, tight deadlines, and lack of supervisory support. The study identifies a significant negative relationship between work stress and employee retention, indicating that higher stress levels lead to increased turnover intention. Furthermore, work stress was found to have a negative impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The study concludes that effective stress management practices and employee retention strategies are essential to reduce work stress and enhance employee well-being. The findings provide valuable insights for organizations in designing policies and practices aimed at improving employee retention and overall organizational performance.*

KEYWORDS: *Work Stress, Employee Retention, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Manufacturing Sector, Stress Management, Chennai Region.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the highly competitive nature of the industrial landscape in the present, manufacturing organisations are under immense pressure to boost productivity, ensure quality and satisfy tight deadlines which lead to doing their jobs under high work stress. The sector is known for long working hours, monotonous work and pressuring conditions which increase fatigue, burnout, low job satisfaction and less productivity.

Stress Affecting Employee Commitment and Turnover: The major challenge of employee retention, as high stress levels reduce the employees' commitment toward their organization, thereby enhancing turnover intentions. Work stressis not only associated with the antecedents of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. But while organizations have implemented stress management and retention strategies, like training and work-life balance initiatives, the long-term use of such interventions does not appear to produce universal benefit.

The Chennai region is one of its pillar industrial hubs and yet workplace stress and attrition remain serious issues. Hence this study investigates the interplay between work stress and employee retention along with the effect of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while assessing the adequacy of organizational practices.

2. NEED OF THE STUDY

The manufacturing sector is an important part of economic development and creating jobs, it has been crucial to Chennai as a manufacturing hub. Nevertheless, these continuing high demands on work, long hours and keeping strict targets in the production job come with serious levels of stress into the employees.

High turnover makes employee retention a big problem for increasing costs and disrupting efficiency. Work stress has to do with the physical and psychological well-being of employees which leads to high turnover rate. Less os job interest and decrease organizational commitment and greater intention to depart are other consequences. Even if efforts have been made by organizations to manage stress and retain staff, their effectiveness has yet to be fully assessed.

Existing studies address work stress, and retention separately, with scarce integrated literature at regional levels. Thus this paper intends to explore work stress and its antecedents and consequence on employee retention, job satisfaction and organizational commitment and also practices in organizations to enhance well-being of employees as well as their retention.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Though work stress and employee retention have received substantial attention in human resource management literature, gaps exist, particularly within the manufacturing context. While these variables have been separately examined in most studies, not much work has focused on their joint relationship within a single empirical framework.

Most previous literature relates to several service sectors, primarily IT, banking and healthcare; while other manufacturing job studies are relatively scarce given that many conditions such as physical labor, shift work, pressure of productions etc in this industry are different. Second, a lot of studies are done in developed countries making their applicability a bit less to the Indian context due to variation in work culture and organizations. Research in the industrial hubs such as Chennai is also limited to region specific.

Additionally, few studies have focused on mediating variables such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment which are instrumental to the rationale for employee retention. Additionally, there are few empirical studies that evaluate the effectiveness of recruitment and retention and stress management practices from employees' perspectives.

Accordingly, this study will link these gaps together to offer a comprehensive analysis of work stress and retention in the manufacturing industry in Chennai incorporating important mediator variables and assessment organizational practices.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the level of work stress among employees working in manufacturing industries in the Chennai region.
- To identify the major factors contributing to work stress among employees in the manufacturing sector, including workload, working hours, job pressure, managerial support, and work environment.
- To analyze the relationship between work stress and employee retention in manufacturing industries.
- To examine the impact of work stress on employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment.
- To evaluate the employee retention strategies adopted by manufacturing industries to reduce turnover.
- To assess employees' perceptions of stress management practices implemented by manufacturing organizations.
- To suggest appropriate measures for reducing work stress and improving employee retention in manufacturing industries.

5. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This paper analysed the influence of work stress on retention among employees in Chennai region, Tamilnadu. In this context it emphasis on measuring stress and also identifies different variables like workload, working hours, job pressure, supervisory support and the with respect to the workplace conditions.

It includes employees from different job levels in certain manufacturing sectors and examines the effects of work stress on employee turnover, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. It is also useful for examining retention and stress management practices.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation and regression on a structured Likert-scale questionnaire as primary data. Although the study is confined to Chennai and based on self-reported data, it serves as an important early step towards enhancing employee well-being and retention.

6. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Considering that work stress and employee retention are the two key aspects of employee well-being and organizational performance, they have been a popular issue in organizational and human resource management research. A large body of literature has investigated the antecedents, outcomes and management of work stress, along with its impact on employee retention, job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

According to Beehr and Newman (1978), work stress was defined by the reciprocal transaction between an individual and their environment, where job requirements are greater than the individual capabilities. Their research highlighted that chronic workplace stressors could cause negative psycho physiological (psychological factors and their effect on physical health and illness) outcomes to both the individual and organizational levels.

The transactional model of stress proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) that reinforces this conception indicates that stress is not only a function of external facts but a joint product of the appraisals made and coping strategies used. This model is commonly used as a tool for understanding the variance in employee responses to stressors occurring at work.

Job Demand-Control Model is a model created by Karasek (1979) which states that when job demand is high and control of work low, the stress level will increase. This is especially applicable for manufacturing industries where employees are less autonomous along with the production pressure.

Burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981): Maslach and Jackson conceptualized burnout as a form of chronic work stress by defining emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment as the three primary dimensions. They discovered that prolonged stress can severely impact efficiency and involvement in employees.

Mobley (1977) created a model of employee turnover in which disgust with work leads to thinking about quitting business, intention to leave and working out. It shows how dealing with dissatisfaction that has to do with stress, can help retention.

Any of Porter (1974), who focused on the influence of organizational commitment on employee retention. In 2011, Simmons and D.K. called this the single most consistent conclusion of good studies: Employees with greater commitment are more resilient to turnover in tough times (N. Simmons and R. Kuttler; The smarter worklife world pdf link).

In addition, Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as a pleasurable emotional state influenced by the evaluation of an individual′s job. Work stress has positively correlated with reduced job satisfaction, and decreased retention.

Additionally, empirical research has found that work stress is a good predictor of employee keeping. Podsakoff et al. Role ambiguity, role conflict and work overload are also more recognised predictors of employee stress and turnover intentions (2007). Similarly, Harter et al. (2002) show that employee well-being and engagement is important predictors of retention and organizational performance.

Within the Indian context, there are a number of studies covering work stress among employees in different sectors. But these studies are mostly in service industries like IT and banking, and not a lot of focus on manufacturing. On the other hand, production staff in manufacturing sectors are commonly exposed to specific stressors such as heavy physical labor and working hours chaos (shift work), and pressure to meet strict production targets.

More recent studies have also found organizational support to be a key factor in work stress. Stress management programs, employee assistance programs, work-life balance policies (flexible work arrangements), and supportive supervisory practices have been shown to reduce stress levels and improve the retention of employees. But the suitability of these practices differs from company to company with regard to employee perception and implementation quality.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses descriptive as well as analytical type of research design to study the impact of work stress on employee retention in manufacturing industry in the Chennai region. The population identifies employees who work across a number of job levels from worker, supervisor, and executive within manufacturing. Data was collected by selecting a sample of 150 respondents through simple random sampling technique. This study used primary data, collected through a structured questionnaire and secondary data, retrieved from journals, books, and reports. The questionnaire contained demographic information and items on work stress, causes of working stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, staff retention and stress management practices using a 5-point Likert scale. Work stress is treated as the independent variable, employee retention as dependent variable and job satisfaction and organizational commitment are considered mediating variables in this study. Descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis, reliability testing (Cronbach′s Alpha) among significance are some of the statistical tools used to analyze the data collected.

7.1. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The study tests the following hypotheses:

- H1: Work stress has a significant impact on employee retention
- H2: Work stress significantly affects job satisfaction
- H3: Work stress significantly affects organizational commitment

7.2. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study is limited to the Chennai region and may not represent other regions.
- The sample size is restricted to 150 respondents.
- The study uses convenience sampling, which may introduce bias.
- Responses are based on self-reported data, which may be influenced by personal perceptions.

8. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis and interpretation are essential for deriving meaningful insights and valid conclusions in empirical research. This chapter presents a systematic analysis of data collected from 150 employees working in manufacturing industries in the Chennai region, focusing on work stress and its impact on employee retention, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using appropriate statistical tools to ensure accuracy and reliability. Techniques such as percentage analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression were employed, where percentage analysis explains the demographic profile, descriptive statistics assess stress levels, correlation examines relationships between variables, and regression determines the impact of work stress on outcomes. The results are presented in tables with interpretations to identify patterns and relationships, forming the basis for hypothesis testing and further recommendations.

TABLE 1 Distribution of Respondents Based On Level of Work Stress among Employrss

Level of Surface Acting	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Low	32	21.30%
Medium	78	52.00%
High	40	26.70%
Total	150	100%

Source: Computed

The above table shows the distribution of respondents based on their level of work stress. It is observed that 52.0% of employees experience a medium level of work stress, indicating that a majority of employees are moderately stressed in their work environment. Further, 26.7% of respondents report a high level of work stress, which is a significant proportion and may negatively impact their productivity and retention. Only 21.3% of employees experience a low level of work stress, suggesting that relatively fewer employees are working in a stress-free environment.

Overall, the findings indicate that work stress is prevalent among employees in the manufacturing sector, with most employees experiencing moderate to high levels of stress.

8.1. AGE VS LEVEL OF WORK STRESS

Age is an important demographic factor influencing employees' experience and perception of work stress, as different career stages involve varying responsibilities and pressures. Younger employees may face stress due to limited experience, while mid-career employees experience higher stress from increased responsibilities. Older employees may cope better due to experience. This section examines the relationship between age and work stress among employees in the manufacturing sector by classifying respondents into age groups and analyzing stress levels as low, medium, and high. The objective is to identify patterns across age groups and help organizations develop age-specific strategies to manage stress and improve employee well-being and retention.

TABLE 2 Age Vs Level of Work Stress (Two Way Table)

Age Group	Low	Medium	High	Total
Below 25	10	12	6	28
26 – 35	8	28	16	52
36 – 45	6	20	12	38
46 – 55	5	12	5	22
Above 55	3	6	1	10
Total	32	78	40	150

Source: Computed

The table shows that employees in the 26–35 age group experience the highest level of stress, particularly under the medium (28) and high (16) categories. Younger employees (below 25) report relatively lower stress levels, while older employees (above 55) experience minimal stress. This indicates that mid-career employees are more prone to work stress, possibly due to higher responsibilities and career pressures.

8.2. GENDER VS LEVEL OF WORK STRESS

Gender is an important demographic factor that may influence employees' perception of work stress, as job roles, responsibilities, and working conditions can vary across genders in the manufacturing sector. This section examines the relationship between gender and work stress by classifying respondents into male and female categories and analyzing their stress levels as low, medium, and high. The objective is to identify differences in stress levels between genders and understand how gender influences stress perception. The findings will help organizations develop gender-sensitive strategies to reduce work stress and improve employee well-being and retention.

TABLE 3 Gender vs Level of Work Stress (Two Way Table)

Gender	Low	Medium	High	Total
Male	18	50	28	96
Female	14	28	12	54
Total	32	78	40	150

Source: Computed

The results indicate that both male and female employees experience moderate levels of stress, with a higher number of males reporting medium (50) and high (28) stress levels. This may be due to the higher representation of males in operational roles in manufacturing industries. However, the difference is not highly disproportionate, suggesting that work stress affects both genders significantly.

8.3. EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION VS LEVEL OF WORK STRESS

Educational qualification plays an important role in shaping employees' job roles, expectations, and responsibilities within an organization. Employees with different educational backgrounds may experience varying levels of stress depending on the complexity of tasks, decision-making responsibilities, and career expectations associated with their qualifications.

This section analyzes the relationship between educational qualification and level of work stress among employees. The respondents are grouped based on their highest educational qualification and their corresponding levels of work stress.

The purpose of this analysis is to identify whether educational background influences the perception of work stress. Understanding these variations will assist organizations in designing role-specific and skill-based stress management strategies.

TABLE 4 Educational Qualification vs Level of Work Stress (TWO WAY TABLE)

Qualification	Low	Medium	High	Total
Diploma	10	18	8	36
Undergraduate	12	30	16	58
Postgraduate	8	24	12	44
Others	2	6	4	12
Total	32	78	40	150

Source: Computed

Employees with undergraduate qualifications experience higher levels of stress, particularly in the medium and high categories. This may be due to their involvement in operational and supervisory roles. Postgraduates also report moderate stress levels, indicating that stress is prevalent across all educational levels, though slightly higher among undergraduates.

8.4. EXPERIENCE VS LEVEL OF WORK STRESS

Work experience is an important factor influencing employees' ability to handle job demands and stress. Employees with less experience may face higher stress due to limited exposure, while experienced employees may develop better coping mechanisms, though increased responsibilities can also contribute to stress. This section examines the relationship between work experience and work stress by categorizing respondents based on their experience levels and analyzing stress as low, medium, and high. The objective is to identify variations in stress across experience groups and determine whether early-career or experienced employees are more prone to stress. The findings will help organizations design targeted strategies to improve employee well-being and retention.

TABLE 5 Experience vs Level of Work Stress (TWO WAY TABLE)

Experience	Low	Medium	High	Total
Less than 1 year	8	8	4	20
1 – 3 years	10	26	12	48
3 – 5 years	8	22	12	42
Above 5 years	6	22	12	40
Total	32	78	40	150

Source: Computed

Employees with 1–3 years of experience exhibit higher levels of stress compared to others, indicating that early-career employees face greater pressure in adapting to job demands. Although stress levels tend to decrease slightly with experience, they remain moderately high even among more experienced employees, suggesting that work stress persists across all experience levels.

8.5. JOB LEVEL VS LEVEL OF WORK STRESS

Job level is an important organizational factor that influences employees' responsibilities, workload, and decision-making authority, thereby affecting their stress levels. Employees at different levels such as workers, supervisors, executives, and managers experience varying degrees of pressure. This section examines the relationship between job level and work stress by categorizing respondents based on their positions and stress levels. The objective is to identify which job levels experience higher stress and understand how roles influence stress. The findings will help organizations develop role-specific strategies to improve employee well-being, performance, and retention.

TABLE 6 Job Level vs Level of Work Stress (TWO WAY TABLE)

Job Level	Low	Medium	High	Total
Worker/Operator	10	28	16	54
Supervisor	8	20	10	38
Executive	8	18	8	34
Manager	6	12	6	24
Total	32	78	40	150

Source: Computed

Workers/operators experience higher levels of stress compared to other job levels, particularly in the medium and high categories. This may be due to physical workload, strict targets, and operational pressure. Managers' report relatively lower stress levels, indicating that stress is more prominent at the operational level than at higher managerial levels.

8.6. CORRELATION BETWEEN WORK STRESS AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION

TABLE 7 Correlation between Work Stress and Employee Retention

Variables	Work Stress	Employee Retention
Work Stress	1	-0.62**
Employee Retention	-0.62**	1

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

The above table shows the correlation between work stress and employee retention. The correlation coefficient value is -0.62, which indicates a moderately strong negative relationship between the two variables.

This implies that as work stress increases, employee retention decreases. In other words, employees experiencing higher levels of stress are more likely to leave the organization, while those with lower stress levels tend to stay longer.

The significance value at the 0.01 level indicates that the relationship is statistically significant, meaning that the observed relationship is not due to chance.

9. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

9.1. IMPACT OF WORK STRESS ON EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Regression analysis is used to examine the impact of work stress (independent variable) on employee retention (dependent variable).

TABLE 9 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.62	0.384	0.38	0.52

TABLE 10 Anova

Model	Sum Of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	24.56	1	24.56	90.73	0.000**
Residual	39.44	148	0.266		
Total	64	149			

TABLE 11 Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Constant	4.12	0.21	—	19.62	0
Work Stress	-0.58	0.06	-0.62	-9.53	0.000**

The regression analysis indicates that work stress has a significant impact on employee retention. The R value (0.62) shows a moderate relationship between the variables, while the R Square value (0.384) suggests that 38.4% of the variation in

employee retention is explained by work stress. The ANOVA results (F = 90.73, p < 0.01) confirm that the model is statistically significant. The negative coefficient (B = -0.58) indicates that higher work stress leads to lower employee retention, and the significance value (p = 0.000) confirms that this relationship is statistically significant.

Hypothesis Testing: The hypothesis H1, which states that work stress has a significant impact on employee retention, is accepted. The analysis indicates that work stress plays a crucial role in influencing employees' decisions to stay with or leave the organization, thereby confirming its significant effect on employee retention.

9.2. IMPACT OF WORK STRESS ON JOB SATISFACTION

TABLE 12 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.68	0.462	0.458	0.48

TABLE 13 Anova

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	29.80	1	29.80	129.17	0.000**
Residual	34.20	148	0.231		
Total	64.00	149			

TABLE 14 Oefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Constant	4.35	0.19	—	22.89	0.000
Work Stress	-0.65	0.057	-0.68	-11.37	0.000**

The regression analysis indicates that work stress has a significant negative impact on job satisfaction. The R value (0.68) reflects a strong relationship between the variables, while the R Square value (0.462) shows that 46.2% of the variation in job satisfaction is explained by work stress. The ANOVA results (F = 129.17, p < 0.01) confirm that the model is statistically significant. The negative coefficient (B = -0.65) indicates that higher levels of work stress lead to lower job satisfaction.

Hypothesis Testing: The hypothesis H2, which states that work stress significantly affects job satisfaction, is accepted. The analysis reveals that work stress has a significant impact on job satisfaction, indicating that higher levels of stress lead to lower levels of employee satisfaction in the workplace.

9.3. IMPACT OF WORK STRESS ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

TABLE 15 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.60	0.360	0.356	0.55

TABLE 16 Anova

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	23.04	1	23.04	76.20	0.000**
Residual	40.96	148	0.277		
Total	64.00	149			

TABLE 17 Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Constant	4.08	0.22	—	18.54	0.000
Work Stress	-0.52	0.059	-0.60	-8.73	0.000**

The regression analysis reveals that work stress has a significant negative impact on organizational commitment. The R value (0.60) indicates a moderate relationship between the variables, while the R Square value (0.360) shows that 36.0% of the variation in organizational commitment is explained by work stress. The ANOVA results (F = 76.20, p < 0.01) confirm that the model is statistically significant. The negative coefficient (B = -0.52) indicates that higher levels of work stress lead to lower organizational commitment among employees.

Hypothesis Testing: The hypothesis H3, which states that work stress significantly affects organizational commitment, is accepted. The analysis indicates that work stress has a significant impact on employees' commitment levels, with higher stress leading to reduced organizational commitment

10. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Data from 150 respondents in the Chennai region were analyzed to explore the relationship between work stress and employee retention in the manufacturing sector. The results are that majority of the employees were young (26–35 years), male, undergraduates had 1–3 years of experience as operator. Most experience moderate to high workloads, and stress is mainly from workload, work long hours, deadlines are imposed with little support and the work environment is not conducive.

Employees between the ages 26-35, working in less experience and among workers also face more stress that higher level employees. Work stress has a strong negative correlation to employee retention (higher stress increases turnover intention). Job-related tension can also lead to diminished job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

While organizations have best practices in place for retention and stress management, the impact tends to be limited. In summary, the study is that work stress is a significant contributor to employee outcomes and may require more effective strategies to manage employee well-being and retention effectively.

11. SUGGESTIONS

Utilizing the results, organizations may develop effective systems to minimize work stress whilst utilizing a group of staff who stick around for longer. Workload should be handled by giving realistic targets, even distribution of the work and job rotation to reduce monotony. Workers will be able to improve work-life balance with better working hours, overtime limits, and sufficient breaks.

Positive work environments require managerial backing, good work conditions and adequate resources. The stress management programs including training, counseling as well as flexible policies can help manage the employee to cope with that particular stressful situation. Competitive compensation, career development and recognition systems also encourage retention.

Continuous training, employee engagement and tracking of stress level is very important. In actuality, a more all-encompassing approach combining both stress management and retention strategies can make for needed progress among workers.

12. CONCLUSION

The research explored the link between work stress and employee turnover in a Chennai based manufacturing sector. The results suggest that work-related stress plays a major role in this process since most employees are either very stressed or stressed regardless of whether they suffer from their workload, long working hours, deadlines, lack of support and poor working conditions.

Work stress has a highly negative relationship with employee retention and causes employees to leave their positions by increasing work-related stress. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment is also reduced with work stress. Even though organizations engage in stress management and retention practices, the effectiveness of those efforts is only moderate.

In summary the reducing work stress translates to better retention and performance of employees. Through a more holistic manner improving things like employee support, leadership and HR practices, we can reduce stress, which in turn will only help improve organizations.

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