



RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPACT OF COVID19 PANDEMIC ON WORK-RELATED STRESS AMONG UNIVERSITY FACULTY: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

University faculty are “frontliners” too and vulnerable to feel stressed and overwhelmed this COVID19 pandemic. This study investigated on the impact of COVID19 pandemic on work-related stress of private university faculty. The study confirmed both negative and positive impact of COVID19 on work-related stress among faculty. On the adverse side, novel corona virus crisis resulted to extra burden on role overload, feeling of powerlessness and poor peer relations stress level of the faculty. Amidst Corona virus crisis, the faculty gain little positive but significant impact on their wellbeing because they experienced state of self-significance, realized own’s potential, rewarded, and remunerated and felt responsible for co-employees. This makes the overall level of work-related stress among faculty members insignificantly different pre and during COVID-19 pandemic. However, the impact of corona virus crisis on role overload, powerlessness, and poor peer relation may negatively influence health and work productivity if the condition persists. Hence, reducing workload, employing empowerment and collegial activities may be points of consideration for the university administrators to help to ease up the burden brought about by this pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace stress is increasing along with the advent of COVID 19-pandemic. Even if faculty are working from home, the COVID-19 pandemic has probably changed the way faculty works. The major shift in learning platform from face-to-face to remote learning platform can be overwhelming. This includes additional burden but not limited to preparation of new normal modules, delivery of new teaching-learning strategies, checking of digital learning assessments, complying with deadlines and many more teaching related jobs. Zoom fatigue or any other online conference related fatigue is real and taking extremely burden on brain and mental health. Additionally, according to Workplace Intelligence, that corona virus crisis took significant toll on mental health because of the new remote work expectations and indistinct boundaries between personal and professional lives [Wood, 2020]. Several recent studies recorded spiked in workplace stress that can lead to burnout and may boomerang to quality of teacher’s work performance. The business sector recognizes that stress have serious impact on productivity and to the company at large. Moreover, work-related stress can induce certain physical symptoms but not limited to elevated heart rates, fatigue or burnout, loss or change of appetite, difficulty sleeping, muscle tension, frequent headaches, persistent nausea and dizziness. It can also affect the faculty to manifest certain emotional or psychological symptoms of anger, irritation, denial, feelings of

uncertainty, nervousness, constant worrying, lack of motivation, loss of confidence, low self-esteem, racing thoughts, sadness, depression, hypersensitivity, feelings of guilt or lack of contribution. Behaviorally, faculty will have difficulty concentrating or the inability to focus, poor judgement, reduced decision-making, neglect of work and/or familial responsibilities, procrastination or reduced work performance. These mental health concerns resulting from sustained and heightened stress level can result in lost workdays, lower employee productivity, and high job turnover rates. In turn, these circumstances can upsurge the expense outlays of organizational staffing and health benefits. Failure to cope or adapt to stressful conditions results in poor teaching performance and has repercussions for the stability of educational organizations. This prompted the researchers to compare the level of work-related stress prior and during Corona Virus pandemic among private university faculty.

METHODS

The study is a non-experimental research specifically, longitudinal descriptive study wherein the researchers repeatedly surveyed the work-related stress of the same respondents a year ago (November 2019/pre-COVID-19 pandemic) and during the COVID-19 pandemic (November 2020). Neither manipulation of data nor intervention was employed in this study. The population of this study were the faculty members from a private university in Manila. The researchers used Raosoft calculator to get sample size with 5%

margin of error. Stratified proportionate sampling which is a probability sampling technique was employed wherein the researcher divided the entire population into different subgroups or strata then randomly selected the final samples proportionally from the different strata. There were 200 faculty members who participated in the study and the number of respondents from each subgroup was determined by their number relative to the entire population from six different disciplines namely, Institute of Accounts Business and Finance (IABF), Institute of Nursing (IN), Institute of Education (IE), Institute of Arts and Science (IAS), Institute of architecture and fine arts (IARFA), Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management (ITHM). The researchers utilized a standardized 40-item 4-point Likert questionnaires that determined work-related stress index of the faculty. This questionnaire is adapted from Srivatava & Singh [Ahmad, 2015]. The Occupational Stress Index has the reliability of the scale measured through split-half (odd-even) method and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scales with overall score of 0.935 and 0.90, respectively. The 12 subscales also underwent split-half method, and all the sub-scales were found statistically reliable. The study was conducted in a private university located in Manila. This university was chosen because it is one of the leading universities in the Philippines. It has maintained its good reputation in the academic field for almost a century. This study underwent ethical review. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

RESULTS

More than half of the respondents are females (56%) and lecturer full time (58%) non-regular faculty. Also, majority have master's degree (64%), almost one thirds were receiving more than P600,000.00 annual income and almost half have 27-30 units load for the current semester. The respondents were dominated by faculty of Arts and Sciences (45%) followed by Accounts, Business and Finance (21%), then Architecture and Fine Arts (12%), Education (9%), Nursing (7%) and Tourism and Hotel Management (6%). It can be inferred from Table 1 that pre-COVID-19 pandemic, the faculty from a private university in Manila have low work-related stress on the areas of role ambiguity ($x=2.37$); role conflict ($x=2.60$); poor peer relations ($x= 2.40$); intrinsic impoverish ($x= 2.51$); and low status ($x=2.30$). Moreover, they have moderate level of occupational stress on the areas of role overload ($x=3.04$); unreasonable group and political pressure ($x= 2.63$); responsibilities for persons ($x= 3.05$); under participation ($x=2.77$); powerlessness ($x=2.64$); strenuous working condition ($x=2.63$); and unprofitability ($x=2.92$). Overall, the private university faculty were enduring moderate level of stress relative to teaching job seven prior to COVID-19 global outbreak because of the voluminous workload, unreasonable group and political pressure, under-participation, powerlessness and responsibility for persons. Table 2 shows that there is large negative impact of COVID19 in the role overload (3.74) and powerlessness (3.42) classified as high level of stress as compared to the moderate level of stress pre-COVID-19. In addition, Corona virus crisis brought about small but significantly negative impact on poor peer relations of faculty. Amidst all the negative impact, surprisingly, COVID19 resulted small but significant positive implications on the well-being of the faculty particularly on the areas of Intrinsic impoverishment, Unprofitability, Responsibility for Persons' population and Low status. This may have given rise to insignificant difference (0.09 p-value) in the level of work-

related stress among private university faculty pre and during COVID-19 pandemic.

DISCUSSION

Well-being is an important issue for all of us, particularly in this corona virus crisis. Academic institutions bestow a great deal of obligation on faculty to nurture the students in all aspects of their development. But we can hardly realize that faculty themselves may be affected by this pandemic, enduring burnt-out and many forms of stress which are neither being acknowledged nor addressed. COVID19 brought about significantly large negative work-related stress specifically on role overload and powerlessness among faculty respondents. Considering these areas are at moderate stress level pre-COVID19, the emergency shift of all academic institution to remote education have caused faculty to come up with solution appropriate for "new normal" classes. The bottom line effect of all these academic shift rushed the faculty to undergo training for online learning modalities, come up with new normal modules, prepare the course information booklet, simulate the course syllabi to online learning, get a grip of the uses and functions of the LMS which naturally piles up workload. Role overload is described by the faculty employee's feeling of encumbered workload and having too many role weights and given too limited time to fulfill it. Study finding supports the claims the local newspaper that faculty doubles the workload because of the suspended face-to-face classes amidst the continuing COVID-19 threat [Adonis, 2020]. A university faculty feels overloaded when work output expectations exceed his/her resources (e.g. time, reference books, poor internet connectivity) or personal capability like given with new/unfamiliar teaching assignment or multiple module preparations [Verburgh, 2017].

Moreover, the tri-platforms learning-Mix Online Learning (MOL), Asynchronous Online Learning (AOL), Total Asynchronous Learning (TAL) laid triple work efforts for the faculty. The sudden universal implementation of the different learning modalities brought about by the pandemic caught almost all university faculty members to cope with enormous uncertainties. More than their health issues and the thought of losing an income, the news of people acquiring the infection, the saturated hospital bed occupancy, the dying health care practitioners, announcement of lockdown, curfew hours, the indeterminate end to the pandemic, the absence of COVID19 vaccine, the unending closure of so many establishments, the bankruptcy declaration of so many companies, the returning OFW's who lose their jobs abroad, the shortage of food supplies in supermarket and many others are too much for our lives to wallow in stress. As university faculty members ourselves felt same, it is undoubtedly causing stress but had to bank on the "new normal" cliché to keep you going. It is understandable at a certain level when you need not just be a spectator but, had to be part of the whole community doing the same. Arguably the volume of work-related requirement come unexpectedly as days passes by when the severity of the pandemic increase day by day. Faculty members had to contain the increasing workload which may be necessary to prepare needed tools and instrument for the opening of an online teaching which is entirely new scheme for some, which is true only on articles and academic papers, which is only a new concept to many universities, which is too vague for other universities, and which is a sudden paradigm shift of education

Table 1. Work-related Stress Level of Private University Faculty Pre-COVID 19 pandemic and during COVID-19 Pandemic

Stress Index	2019			2020		
	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Role Overload	3.04	0.72	*Moderate	3.74	0.65	High
2. Role Ambiguity	2.37	0.74	Low	2.45	0.80	Low
3. Role Conflict	2.60	0.52	Low	2.57	0.68	Low
4. Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure	2.63	0.76	Moderate	2.65	0.81	Moderate
5. Responsibility for Persons	3.05	0.77	Moderate	2.90	0.94	Moderate
6. Under Participation	2.77	0.65	Moderate	2.76	0.75	Moderate
7. Powerlessness	2.64	0.80	Moderate	3.42	0.89	High
8. Poor Peer Relations	2.40	0.66	Low	2.51	0.52	Low
9. Intrinsic impoverishment	2.51	0.64	Low	2.36	0.66	Low
10. Low status	2.30	0.71	Low	2.20	0.72	Low
11. Strenuous working condition	2.63	0.69	Moderate	2.55	0.77	Moderate
12. Unprofitability	2.92	0.88	Moderate	2.74	0.88	Moderate
Overall	2.66	0.71	Moderate	2.74	0.41	Moderate

*1.0-1.80 Very Low; 1.81-2.60 Low; 2.61- 3.4 Moderate; 3.41-4.20; High; 4.21-5.0 Very high

Table 2. Difference in Work-related Stress among Private University Faculty Pre-COVID 19 and during COVID-19 Pandemic

Work-Related Stress Index	Computed t-value	Critical Value	p-value	Decision	Effect size
Role Overload	-13.75	[-1.9720; 1.9720]	0.000	H0 is rejected.	0.97 negative large
Powerlessness	-13.79		0.000	H0 is rejected.	0.97 negative large
Intrinsic impoverishment	3.31		0.001	H0 is rejected.	0.23 positive small
Unprofitability	2.89		0.004	H0 is rejected.	0.20 positive small
Responsibility for Persons	2.75		0.006	H0 is rejected.	0.19 positive small
Poor Peer Relations	-2.36		0.019	H0 is rejected.	0.17 negative small
Low status	1.99		0.048	H0 is rejected.	0.14 positive small
Strenuous working condition'	1.64		0.103	H0 is accepted.	0.12 positive small
Role Ambiguity	-1.53		0.128	H0 is accepted.	0.11 negative small
Role Conflict	0.82		0.412	H0 is accepted.	0.06 positive small
Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure's population	-0.37		0.71	H0 is accepted.	0.03 negative small
Under Participation	0.22		0.828	H0 is accepted.	0.02 positive small
Overall	-1.59		0.113	H0 is accepted.	0.11 negative small

**p-value ≤0.05 – significant, p-value >0.05 - not significant

to others. Online learning entails even more complications with the introduction of different modes of learning where many faculty members may not have been trained to handle. Additionally, COVID19spiked the powerlessness stress index among the university faculty. It is a communal experience during an COVID-19 infectious disease outbreak, especially teachers battle with invisible enemy (virus) with which may be strange to us all. These may trigger heightened feelings of distress and anxiety that can pose high risk of getting sick [En Español, 2020]. Moreover, teachers feel powerless during online classes because despite their best efforts, the goal to provide the optimal learning experience to students seems difficult to achieve.

The mere fact that government made pronouncement on how education be operationalized with the pandemic in our midst with an added clause of an inclusive education concept by all learning institutions demands a new paradigm. The introduction of different learning modalities is just one too many to consider whether it be effective without a validated outcome. Furthermore, stress index on powerlessness rest also in not being able to do something about the necessary technology infrastructure like internet, digital learning tools like computer, desktop, and laptop necessary for digital learning or online learning in a new normal learning environment. These and more are causing undue stress to faculty members who have no recourse but to adjust and keep on adjusting to accommodate students challenge by intermittent internet connection, with only one laptop shared with kid brothers or kid sisters who are also on online learning.

Even if majority of our students can work around with technology-based learning because the school provide it for them, it is entirely different with their situation at home. This alone causes so much stress on the part of the students as reflected in their quality of work submitted to their teachers. This again is a burden on the teachers who wants quality output to maintain quality standard of the school but had to loosen up his grip of standard as she can be engulf by empathy that makes him powerless. The Philippines has almost slowest internet speeds [Kemp, 2020] and this drew the ire of the many faculty who engages in online teaching. This too caused all academic institution and even government to look at possession information resources procurement in a haste to remedy the emergence of a mainstream educational platform. Faculty members are no exempt in this problem causing them to feel inadequate for their students. In like manner, stress indices manifested moderate to high stress contributor. Moreover, COVID19 pandemic produced little but significant negative impact on poor peer relations work-related stress index among faculty respondents. This may be attributable to conflicts arising from miscommunication related to working distantly [Firmin *et al.*, 2013]. Failure to receive close guidance from senior colleagues is another stress inducer for faculty given with new and unfamiliar assignment [Vyas, 2018]. This stress makes faculty peer group more cantankerous and difficult to deal with particularly produced by domino effect of role overload experience during COVID19 pandemic. On the positive note, COVID19 caused small but significant impact among private university faculty on areas Intrinsic impoverishment, Unprofitability, Responsibility for Persons'

population and Low status. This may be ascribed to having challenging nature of work, job security, high paying salary and reputable job experience of private university faculty despite COVID 19 pandemic. This may have set the equilibrium in the stress level of the faculty that although the coronavirus disease pandemic can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions to many [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020], the findings of the study show otherwise. In general, the level of work-related stress among private university faculty does not significantly differ pre and during corona virus pandemic. Because the university faculty respondents have high educational attainment, they possess the capability to investigate about the information to prevent contracting COVID-19 and understand how to protect the people they care about make an outbreak less stressful for them. This study affirmed the claims of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that the ability to discern fake news about COVID19 and determine facts about it can help reduce stress and stigma.

CONCLUSION

COVID19 pandemic brought positive and negative impact on work-related stress of university faculty. Adversely, the faculty being the key player in our educational system experienced significantly large negative impact role overload, feeling of powerlessness and poor peer relations stress level by corona virus pandemic compared to a year back experience. Repercussion of this may negatively influence the health of the faculty, teaching-learning outcome and educational business industry standing in the long run. Stress related to COVID19 exempts no one, but this study states that generally, the work-related stress level of the university faculty does not significantly differ pre and during COVID19 because of its compensatory small positive impact on the state of self-significance, realizing one's potential, reward and remuneration and responsibility for co-employees. This may show that since the university faculty are all learned individuals equipped with fortitude and working in an institution that exerts effort to support the faculty, they have the capacity to deal with impact of outbreak of Corona virus in more tolerable state. However, the large negative impact of novel corona virus outbreak among faculty should never be neglected for it may cause future ill implications. Hence, reducing workload, employing empowerment and collegial activities may be points of consideration for the university administrators to help to ease up the burden brought about by this pandemic.

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