Stress and Public Sector Managers: A Case of the Government Officers in Nepal

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Abstract- The study of work environment and other job related nexus work related stress is highly relevant for organizational health and performance. This study explores the level of stress among the government officers in Nepal working in different hierarchies using 16 factor framework. Study was conducted among the 284 technical and non-technical government officers. Simple random sampling technique was applied to select the respondents. The study documents several stylized facts about stress in public sector offices in Nepal. Data shows that non-technical officers are at higher stress level in comparison to their technical counterparts. Findings show different factors contribute differently to the job related stress across different hierarchies and nature of work. The study signals policy makers to design necessary organizational coping mechanisms to address the level of stress of working staffs.

Index Terms- Stress, Government managers, role ambiguity, role conflict, motivation

I. Introduction

Nepal has undergone series of socio-political changes and the country is experiencing more than decade long transition. Public sector, among others, have greater role to play to produce visible economic performances and ensure socio-political equity, empowerment and inclusion. As such, Nepalese bureaucracy is under pressure to meet paramounting people's expectations, which have been shaped by access to almost-zero global information cost, with limited resources and technologies Public Sector executives are living elements of government organizations, and through them, do these organizations achieve their individual goals directed to national priorities. As such, these public sector managers are under high stress conditions to execute these challenging roles. It is very essential to develop the healthy employee and work cultures to help to create better work environment and can perform effectively to ensure better result. In order to maintain a healthy workforce with the desired level of output in public sector organizations, it is imperative to explore what affects stress of these executives so that appropriate stress management plan can be implemented directed to optimising desired stress level that promotes performance of these executives.

Stress may have different connotations to different people and under different circumstances. Stress is the reaction that people have to excessive pressure or demands placed on them. Stress arises when people worry that they cannot cope. There are three distinct concepts can be identified. The first concept tasks stress as arousal. It says every individual has a fixed capacity to withstand the pressure and once this limits is exceeded the adverse change takes place and results in stress. The second concept views stress as demands. According to Selye (1956), stress is the organism's response to environmental demand. Stress response is an inherent body mechanism automatically comes into operation whenever demands are placed in the organism. The last concept sees stress as perceived threats of dangers. According to Lazarus (1976) it is neither a stimulus nor a response but arises when an individual perceives and evaluated the situation of threatening. With these concepts one can say stress may originate from a variety of sources. Pestonjee (1992) has identified three sectors of life from which stress may originate. They are: jobs and organization, social and intrapsychic sector. Stress itself is caused by many other factors. Executives are constantly exposed to stress during the work. Although, there is no such accounted figure valued for effect of stress in public sector in terms of loss to individual and work performance, effect must be significant in rupees value to the country. However, management of stress is not possible unless the employee is aware of the specific sources of stress.

Considering the level of stress felt by the Government officers of Nepal, the study has focused to identify the stress causing factors of Government officers.

II. Conceptual Schema

The sixteen factors models of stress antecedents have been employed to developed research questionnaire. The factors were identified through text book-factors on stress and preliminary interviews with high-level bureaucrats having substantial working experience in Nepalese public sectors.

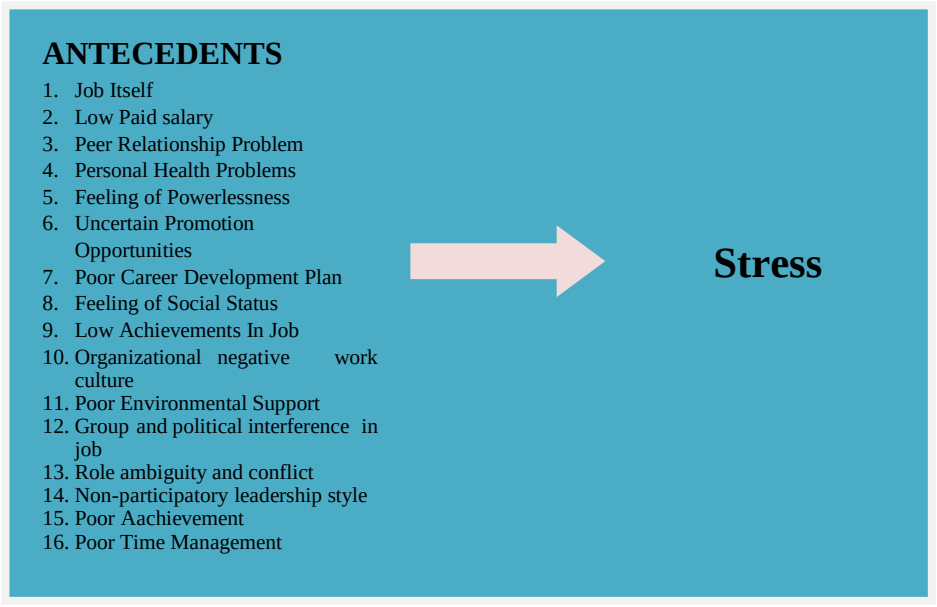

Figure 1. 16 factor Schema of factors Causing Work Related Stress.

III. METHODS

The study is based on the quantitative data collected by using the self-reported structured questionnaires. The cross-sectional data was collected to test the hypothesis. The sample of the present investigation comprised of 284 Nepal government employeesbelonging to section officer level to especial class (Secretary) levels, randomly selected from various Ministries and departments of government of Nepal. The study was conducted in 2013 in Kathmandu valley. The developed questionnaire was pre-tested among the 10% respondent of selected sample size to ensure the reliability and validity of instrument. Data was analyzed by using the SPSS (data analysis software) and descriptive analysis, ANOVA and multiple comparisons was done to present the data. The data presented in tabulation form in result.

RESULTS

In this study, out of 284 respondents, 80.3% were male. Similarly, education wise 80.6% had Master degree followed by 17.3% had Bachelor degree and 2.1% had PhD. Researcher has also collected the data from technical and non-technical group so the data shows that 53.5% were from technical field and rest were non-technical. Respondents were also categorized on the basis of their position. Position comprised from class III to I; the data shows that 56% were from class III followed by 26.4% from class II and 17.6% from class I respectively.

I. Individual Stress causing factors

There were various types of stress causing factors measured to know the opinion of respondents regarding their stress. Out of 284 respondents, 158 respondents reported that sometimes their job itself became stress causing factor. Comparatively, higher numbers of respondents reported 'sometimes' their low paid salary (101), peer relationship problem (182), personal health problem (179), Feeling of powerlessness (155), Uncertain promotion opportunities (106), Poor career development plan (106), Feeling of social status/recognition (145), Low achievement in job (138), Organizational negative work culture (125), .Poor environmental support (140), Group and political interference in job (129), Role ambiguity and conflict (185), Non-participatory leadership style (149), Poor achievement (148) and Poor time management (156) become their stress causing factors (Table 1).

Table 1: Stress causing factors- descriptive analysis

Stress Causing Factors						
Factors	**Group**	**Never**	**Sometimes**	**Frequently**	**Always**	**N**
Your Job itself	Class III	17	87	42	13	159
	Class II	14	44	11	6	75
	Class I	6	27	8	9	50
	Total	37	158	61	28	284
Low paid Salary	Class III	12	56	42	49	159
	Class II	5	21	26	23	75
	Class I	7	24	11	8	50

	Total	24	101	79	80	284
	Class III	37	103	19	1	159
	Class II	22	47	6	0	75
	Class I	13	32	2	0	50
Peer relationship problems	Total	72	182	27	1	284
	Class III	34	101	19	5	159
	Class II	22	47	6	0	75
	Class I	17	31	2	0	50
Personal health problems	Total	73	179	27	5	284
	Class III	26	93	33	7	159
	Class II	19	41	12	3	75
	Class I	19	21	8	2	50
Feeling of powerlessness	Total	64	155	53	12	284
	Class III	20	57	46	36	159
	Class II	11	25	18	21	75
	Class I	14	24	9	3	50
Uncertain promotion opportunities	Total	45	106	73	60	284
	Class III	18	57	53	31	159
	Class II	8	27	20	20	75
	Class I	13	22	8	7	50
Poor career development plan	Total	39	106	81	58	284
	Class III	28	92	31	8	159
	Class II	20	34	9	12	75
	Class I	18	19	8	5	50
Feeling of social status/recognition	Total	66	145	48	25	284
	Class III	21	78	46	14	159
	Class II	13	38	14	10	75
	Class I	21	22	4	3	50
Low achievement in job	Total	55	138	64	27	284
	Class III	13	69	49	28	159
	Class II	7	31	30	7	75
	Class I	9	25	15	1	50
Organizational negative work culture	Total	29	125	94	36	284
	Class III	11	78	48	22	159
	Class II	6	30	30	9	75
	Class I	4	32	10	4	50
.Poor environmental support	Total	21	140	88	35	284
	Class III	11	70	52	26	159
	Class II	10	34	20	11	75
	Class I	9	25	14	2	50
Group and political interference in job	Total	30	129	86	39	284
Role	Class III	9	103	37	10	159

ambiguity and conflict	Class II	8	50	15	2	75
	Class I	10	32	7	1	50
	Total	27	185	59	13	284
	Class III	13	70	57	19	159
	Class II	9	44	17	5	75
	Class I	10	35	3	2	50
Non-participatory leadership style	Total	32	149	77	26	284
	Class III	19	86	37	17	159
	Class II	15	40	15	5	75
	Class I	14	22	8	6	50
Poor Achievement	Total	48	148	60	28	284
	Class III	18	87	40	14	159
	Class II	12	43	15	5	75
	Class I	14	26	7	3	50
Poor time management	Total	44	156	62	22	284

Data source: Field survey, 2013

28 said job itself always became the stress causing factors followed by 80 said low paid salary, 1 said peer relationship problem, 5 said personal health problem, 12 said feeling of powerlessness, 60 said uncertain promotion opportunities, 58 said poor career development plan, 25 said feeling of social status, 27 said low achievement in job, 36 said organizational negative work cultural, 35 poor environmental support, 39 said group and political interference in job, 13 said role ambiguity and conflict, 26 said non-participatory leadership style, 28 said poor achievement and 22 said poor time management.

II. ANOVA for stress causing factors

There was significant difference found between low paid salary as a stress causing factor and response of government officers at the .012 significant level followed by personal health problem at the .013, uncertain promotion opportunities at .000, Poor career development plan at .008, Low achievement in job at .000, Organizational negative work culture at .009, Group and political interference in job at .012, Role ambiguity and conflict at .008, Non-participatory leadership style at .000 and poor time management at .03 (table 2).

Table 2: F –test for Stress Causing Factors

	ANOVA						
	Indicators	**Groups**	**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
		Between Groups	2.903	2	1.452	2.21	0.112
		Within Groups	184.562	281	0.657		
1	Your Job Itself	Total	187.465	283			
		Between Groups	8.133	2	4.067	4.533	0.012
		Within Groups	252.103	281	0.897		
2	Low paid salary	Total	260.236	283			
		Between Groups	0.592	2	0.296	0.844	0.431
	Peer relationship	Within Groups	98.489	281	0.35		
3	problems	Total	99.081	283			
		Between Groups	3.507	2	1.754	4.402	0.013
	Personal health	Within Groups	111.929	281	0.398		
4	problems	Total	115.437	283			
		Between Groups	3.172	2	1.586	2.764	0.065
	Feeling of	Within Groups	161.233	281	0.574		
5	powerlessness						

		Total	164.405	283			
6	Uncertain promotion opportunities	Between Groups	15.309	2	7.655	8.099	0.000
		Within Groups	265.564	281	0.945		
		Total	280.873	283			
7	Poor career development plan	Between Groups	8.948	2	4.474	4.927	0.008
		Within Groups	255.151	281	0.908		
		Total	264.099	283			
8	Feeling of social status/recognition	Between Groups	0.918	2	0.459	0.616	0.541
		Within Groups	209.476	281	0.745		
		Total	210.394	283			
9	Low achievement in job	Between Groups	11.991	2	5.996	8.381	0.000
		Within Groups	201.033	281	0.715		
		Total	213.025	283			
10	Organizational negative work culture	Between Groups	6.678	2	3.339	4.831	0.009
		Within Groups	194.234	281	0.691		
		Total	200.912	283			
11	Poor environmental support	Between Groups	2.616	2	1.308	2.039	0.132
		Within Groups	180.296	281	0.642		
		Total	182.912	283			
12	Group and political interference in job	Between Groups	6.444	2	3.222	4.475	0.012
		Within Groups	202.33	281	0.72		
		Total	208.775	283			
13	Role ambiguity and conflict	Between Groups	4.279	2	2.139	4.933	0.008
		Within Groups	121.876	281	0.434		
		Total	126.155	283			
14	Non-participatory leadership style	Between Groups	13.659	2	6.83	11.546	0.000
		Within Groups	166.211	281	0.591		
		Total	179.87	283			
15	Poor achievement	Between Groups	2.778	2	1.389	1.942	0.145
		Within Groups	200.94	281	0.715		
		Total	203.718	283			
16	Poor time management	Between Groups	4.461	2	2.231	3.561	0.03
		Within Groups	176.003	281	0.626		
		Total	180.465	283			

Data source: Field survey, 2013

The above table presents that there was no significant difference found between job itself as a stress causing factor and response of government officers at the .112 significant followed by Peer relationship problems at .431, Feeling of powerlessness at .065, Feeling of social status/recognition at .541, Poor environmental support at .132 and Poor achievement at .145.

III. Multiple Comparisons of individual stress causing factors

Multiple comparisons were done to know the mean difference between the classes regarding the different types of stress causing factors.

Table 3: Multiple Comparisons of stress causing factors

Dependent Variable	(I) Position	(J) Position	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
1. Your job itself	Class I	Class III	.079	.131	1.000
		Class II	.280	.148	.178
	Class III	Class II	.201	.114	.234
2. Low paid salary	Class II	Class III	.088	.133	1.000
		Class I	.493*	.173	.014
	Class III	Class I	.405*	.154	.026

3. Peer relationship problems	Class III	Class II	.106	.083	.601
		Class I	.053	.096	1.000
	Class I	Class II	.053	.108	1.000
4. Personal health problems	Class III	Class II	.182	.088	.122
		Class I	.269*	.102	.027
	Class II	Class I	.087	.115	1.000
5. Feeling of powerlessness	Class III	Class II	.145	.106	.515
		Class I	.272	.123	.083
	Class II	Class I	.127	.138	1.000
6. Uncertain promotion opportunities	Class II	Class III	.037	.136	1.000
		Class I	.633*	.177	.001
	Class III	Class I	.596*	.158	.001
7. Poor career development plan	Class II	Class III	.083	.133	1.000
		Class I	.513*	.174	.010
	Class III	Class I	.430*	.155	.017
8. Feeling of social status/recognition	Class II	Class III	.054	.121	1.000
		Class I	.173	.158	.817
	Class III	Class I	.119	.140	1.000
9. Low achievement in job	Class III	Class II	.053	.118	1.000
		Class I	.553*	.137	.000
	Class II	Class I	.500*	.154	.004
10. Organizational negative work culture	Class III	Class II	.085	.116	1.000
		Class I	.419*	.135	.006
	Class II	Class I	.333	.152	.087
11. Poor environmental support	Class II	Class III	.051	.112	1.000
		Class I	.280	.146	.170
	Class III	Class I	.229	.130	.235
12. Group and political interference in job	Class III	Class II	.158	.119	.553
		Class I	.405*	.138	.011
	Class II	Class I	.247	.155	.337
13. Role ambiguity and conflict	Class III	Class II	.155	.092	.281
		Class I	.322*	.107	.008
	Class II	Class I	.167	.120	.500
14. Non-participatory leadership style	Class III	Class II	.276*	.108	.033
		Class I	.576*	.125	.000
	Class II	Class I	.300	.140	.101
15. Poor achievement	Class III	Class II	.194	.118	.309
		Class I	.207	.137	.396
	Class II	Class I	.013	.154	1.000
16. Poor time management	Class III	Class II	.141	.111	.612
		Class I	.334*	.128	.029
	Class II	Class I	.193	.144	.546

Data source: Field survey, 2013

The table 3 shows that there was significant difference found between the class II and class I (p = .014) and class III and class I (p = .026) regarding the low paid salary. Similarly, there was significant difference between class III and class I regarding the personal health problem followed by class II and class I (p = .001) and class III and class I (p = .001) regarding the uncertain promotion opportunities, class II and class I (p = .010) and class III and class I (p = .017) regarding the poor career development plan, class III and class I (p = .000) and class II and class I (p = .004) regarding the low achievement in job, class III and class I (p = .006) regarding the organizational negative work culture, class III and class I (p = .011) regarding the group and political interference in job, class III and class I (p = .008) regarding the role ambiguity and conflict, class III and class II (p = .033) and class III and class I (p = .000) regarding the non-participatory leadership style and class III and class I (p = .029) regarding the poor time management.

IV. Total Stress causing factors

Opinion of respondents was collected to identify the stress causing factors. There was various stress causing factors like interest in job, salary, organizational culture, working environment, achievement, management, peers' relation, personal health …discussed during the interview survey. The prevalence of total factors on stress was measured by using F-test (table 4).

Table 4: F-test of total stress causing factors

Occupation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	995.016	2	497.508	9.731	.000
Within Groups	14366.206	281	51.125		
Total	15361.222	283			

Data source: Field survey, 2013

There was significant difference found between the total stress causing factors and response of respondents at f = 9.731, p= .000 significant level.

V. Multiple Comparisons of total stress causing factor

Table 5: Multiple Comparisons of total stress causing factors

(I) Position	(J) Position	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Class III	Class II	1.384	1.002	.504
	Class I	5.111*	1.159	.000
Class II	Class I	3.727*	1.305	0.014
Note: * the mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.				

Data source: Field survey, 2013

The data shows that there was significant difference found between the class III and I at the .000 followed by class II and I at the .014 on total stress causing factors in their mental health. Similarly, there was no significant difference found between the class III and II because p values is .504 which is greater than .05. It can be assumed that the perception of class II level staffs on their stress causing factors was different than the class III.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

Kyriacou (1989) defined stress as an unpleasant emotional state, resulting from prolonged, increasing, or even new pressures, which are perceived as significantly greater than the individual's coping resources. In organisational behaviour literature, employee stress has attracted considerable attention, as it appears to impact upon a person's overall performance, both in terms of productivity and delivery of services (McShane& Von Glinow, 2005).

The study found that there is significant difference found among stress caused by job nature itself across different hierarchical position. The reason may be attributed to missing like of position and accompanying function or responsibility. The study reveals significant difference in salary payment or low paid salary as stress causing factor. It shows that low paid salary is significantly higher in class III and II in comparison to class I level which may be the reflection of ample alternative income generation sources in high level position.

Previous study also found that the many job condition factors proposed as sources of stress at work, role stress has been widely recognized as an antecedent of occupational stress (e.g. Cooper & Marshall, 1976).In any organizations, Occupational stress has been noted as a hazardous for employees. Evidence has been indicated that occupational stress is related to psychological and physical well-being, job satisfaction, absenteeism, turnover rate and intent to quit (Ganster&Schaubroeck, 1991; Sullivan &Bhagat, 1992). One of the most damaging effects of work stress is its impact on the economy. Cooper and Cartwright (1996) estimated that overall 360 million working days are lost in the UK annually through sickness; out of which about half are stress related. Therefore it is important to identify the potential occupational stressors, and to find variables which have beneficial consequences for both employees and organisations.

The present study surprisingly presented that personal health problem of lower level officer (class III) is significantly higher than the higher level officers (class I). The study warns serious response bias may have accounted this misleading inference however, this may also signal negative change of perceptive health well-being to powerlessness. The study documents strong evidence of feeling of powerlessness among junior level officer in comparison to senior level officer. In other words, feeling of problems decreases among civil servant as they climb positional level. Chiu and Kosinski (1995) argued that stress is influenced by cultural and social variables such as values, attitudes, and perception. One important attitudinal variable as such is organisational commitment. Sommer, Bae, and Luthans (1996) contended that organisational commitment is one of the important variables in the study of employee behaviour since it is inversely related to employee tardiness and absence (e.g. Cohen, 1993); moreover, highly committed employees have higher productivity and are willing to assume responsibility (Chow, 1990).

Organizational commitment becomes stronger when employee will be optimistic for their better carriers. The present study indicated that there is higher uncertainty regarding promotion opportunities in level II and III whereas less uncertainty exists for class I officers. This finding is in line with existing government policies and practices that favour class I officer for promotional certainty in comparison to lower level officers. The finding also indicates that poor career development seems to affect lower level officer (class III and II) more than class I officer. This is in line with previous finding of uncertainty promotion being high to the lower level officer.The study also

found that organization work culture in civil service is perceived negatively by the lower level officers (class II and III) in comparison to higher level officer (class I). From leader follower perspective the finding is in line with existing practices where higher level leadership consider themselves right even when followers perceive them the wrong direction of leadership.

Moreover, organisational commitment has also been found to be a stress moderator (e.g. Begley &Cazjka, 1993). The mechanism might be that, due to their positive attitudes, committed employees are less distressed by occupational stressors and therefore they perceive less stress.By and large almost all work stress research and theories were developed and empirically tested in Western industrialized countries (Jamal, 1999; Xie, 1996). It is therefore important to replicate job stress research in Nepalese societies in order to test the generalisability of Western organisational theories. Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector and Kelloway (2000) found that negative affectivity played an important role in determining the influence of job stress on the physical health of employees. Additionally, in their review of the literature, Hurrell and colleagues (1998) discuss how negative affectivity mediates the effects of stress on physical health among teachers.

The study finding revealed that there is no difference among different level of officers on the perception of social recognition. The reason may be society has given due importance (till this time value seems to be positive towards government job) government service irrespective of their position.This study documents significant positive association between job achievement and hierarchical position. Limited delegated authority, poor exposure and resources can be attributed to low achievement among lower level officer (class II and III).The study also explored thathigher level of political interference in job by lower level officer (class III). The reason may lower level officer would be unable to resist different kinds of pressure in their workplace whereas higher level officer (II and I) pass the accountability either to lower side or to the higher side.The study found that role ambiguity and conflict is higher for lower level officer (III). The reason may be attributed to the mismatch of role assignment to job requirement. The study shows that lower level officers perceiving high non participatory style of leadership in their workplace whereas high level officer perceive the other way.

The study shows that the achievement orientation across different hierarchical position to be non significant. The study found that poor time management has significant effect on stress to the lower level officer (III) which may be due to high role ambiguity, role conflict and higher of powerlessness.

V. CONCLUSION

Stress is the mental construction caused by various environmental and individual factors. Stress results the mental as well as physical health problem. Government officers are suffered by work stress. There are various factors are identify as the causative factors; low paid salary, peer relationship problem, personal health problem, Feeling of powerlessness, Uncertain promotion opportunities, Poor career development plan, Feeling of social status/recognition, Low achievement in job, Organizational negative work culture, .Poor environmental support, Group and political interference in job, Role ambiguity and conflict, Non-participatory leadership style, Poor achievement and Poor time management. There was significant difference found between the total stress causing factors and response of total government officers within and between the groups. The future research can be done to identify the best way to manage the stress and reduce the mental and health problem.

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