DISTRESS AND JOB PERFORMANCE OF INDUSTRIAL WORKERS
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SUMMARY

The present study aims at the investigation of the relationship between distress and job performance of industrial workers. The sample consisted of 500 workers of public and private sectors. C.M.I Health Questionnaire and Performance Appraisal Scale (PAS) were used to measure the level of distress and quality of performance at job, respectively. Results showed that physical, mental and overall distress correlated significantly and negatively with workers' performance as appraised. Furthermore, levels of physical and mental distresses could forecast effectively the job performance of industrial workers.

The pioneer scientific attempt to probe into the mental health and distress of industrial workers was made by Kornhauser (1964). He studied the psychological condition of workers in modern mass production industries and attempted to assess and compare the mental health of men at higher and lower skill levels, with special attention to the human effects of a routine production job.

Since then, many attempts have been made to study distress and mental health of industrial personnel (French & Kaplan, 1970; Sinha & Agrawal, 1971; Caplan, 1972; Cassel, 1976; Cobb, 1976; Copper & Marshal, 1976; Cobb & Kasl, 1977; Ferguson, 1978; Beehr & Newman, 1978; Caplan, 1979; House, 1979; Seivastava, 1983; Kirjonen, 1986).

A worker's performance at his task is closely related to his mental health. Job-satisfaction is an important dimension of mental health (Kornhauser, 1964; Rajanamachari & Bharti, 1972; Makinen, 1975; Gechman & Weiner, 1975; Coburn, 1975; Gunthey & Singh, 1982; Zedeck, 1983; Barnes, 1984; Sekaran, 1985). There is a big controversy on the causal relationship between performance and satisfaction. Some theorists believe that satisfaction generates performance (Fishers, 1980; Organ, 1977) and others report that performance influences satisfaction (Brayfield & Crockett, 1955; Locke, 1970), but both groups do agree that there is a deep relationship between the two. Studies by Kornhauser (1964), Netterbladt (1981) and Barnes (1984) indicate a positive relationship between job performance and the state of mental health. As discussed above, the relationship between mental health and job performance is very clear and well studied, but the relationship between job performance and distress (mental and physical) as such has hardly been reported from the Indian industrial setup. Therefore, it was considered worthwhile to verify the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant and negative relationship between job performance and level of distress of industrial workers.

Hypothesis 2: Physical and mental distress will have forecasting ability regarding the job performance of industrial workers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sample of this study consisted of 500 skilled workers, representing approximately 5% of the total population of 10,500 of skilled workers of industries. The sample was chosen by a simple random sampling method (Table 1). The 500 workers in the sample (skilled and permanent industrial workers) were found to be well-matched with reference to their age, income, religion, mother tongue, social status and place of residence to form one single group.

In the present study, the C.M.I. Health Questionnaire and the Performance Appraisal Scale (PAS) were administered to assess the level of distress and job performance of industrial workers. A scale was developed to assess the job performance of industrial workers. Morrisey (1972) suggests that appraisal should be tailor made rather than universal, and it should be a performance appraisal rather than an all purpose appraisal. Different sets of performance appraisal forms were collected from four public and three private sector industries. Amongst the various dimensions of job performance used by different organizations, nine dimensions were chosen according to the need of study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1: This hypothesis states that there will be a significant relationship between job performance and distress of industrial workers.

| S.No. | Sector | Size of sample (5% of the population) | Total (approx) Population |
|-------|--------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. | Public | 300 | 6000 |
| 2. | Private | 200 | 4500 |

In the present study, the C.M.I Health Questionnaire and the Performance Appraisal Scale (PAS) were administered to assess the level of distress and job performance of industrial workers. A scale was developed to assess the job performance of industrial workers. Morrisey (1972) suggests that appraisal should be tailor made rather than universal, and it should be a performance appraisal rather than an all purpose appraisal. Different sets of performance appraisal forms were collected from four public and three private sector industries. Amongst the various dimensions of job performance used by different organizations, nine dimensions were chosen according to the need of study.

TABLE 2

| Distress | Mean | S.D. | Correlation (r) |
|----------|------|------|-----------------|
| Total Distress | 21.61 | 14.19 | -0.15 |
| Physical Distress | 14.94 | 10.02 | -0.12 |
| Mental Distress | 7.57 | 5.92 | -0.16 |

p < 0.005.

The results given in Table 2 indicate that all three distress variables, viz., total, physical and mental distress
are significantly and negatively correlated with worker's performance. This implies that the lesser the distress, higher is the job performance. The possible explanation is that a worker who is having less illness and distress must be in a state of well-being. Distress like mental worries, depression, feeling of insecurity, anxiety, etc. on the mental side, and hypertension, indigestion, weak cardiovascular system, weak musculoskeletal systems, high fatiguability, high frequency of illness on the physical side are bound to produce an adverse effect on the worker's concentration, devotion and attention to his job. Absence of these distresses will lead to better performance.

Other researchers have also found similar findings. Lazarus (1952), in his classical work on stress and coping, defined acute stress reactions as being composed of physiological, motor behavioral, cognitive, and emotional elements. The physiological level involves a multitude of changes governed by the autonomic nervous system. On the motor behavioral level, significant arousal seems to activate not only the appropriate muscles for a given task but also their antagonists, which ideally should be relaxed. The consequences are energy wasted in improper movements. On the cognitive level, too much arousal can lead to increased conscious attention to one's own progress of performance that may result in a performance decrement. Ganster (1986) found that work related stresses such as skill under-utilization and role conflict are associated with indices of mental and physical distresses.

Hypothesis 2: This hypothesis states that mental and physical distresses will be able to predict the job performance of industrial workers.

| Independent variable | Multiple R | R* | Standard BETA | F | Unstandardized error of weight Ratio regression | Standard deviation |
|---------------------|------------|----|---------------|---|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Mental distress     | .168       | .033 | .036          | 0.03 | -.078                                        | 6.64              |
| Physical distress   | .161       | .024 | .045 | 0.02 | -.085                                        | 9.25*             |

*p < 0.05

The physical and mental distress of workers correlated significantly and negatively to their job performance (Hypothesis 1). Hence, it is quite possible that a worker's weaknesses and illnesses on the physical and mental planes may show an adverse effect on his performance at work. By knowing the degree of his distress, a worker's job performance can be predicted, and the results of the present study indicate that distress variables have forecasting value regarding job performance.

Occupational stress causes poor job performance (Motowidlo et al., 1986) and studies have reported on the deleterious effects of a wide variety of stressors on speed and accuracy in tracking, signal detection and other kinds of performance (Lazarus et al., 1952; Wilkinson, 1969). Recent researchers have been guided in proportion about the adaptive demands of stress that drain mental and physical energy (Glass & Singer, 1972). In Cohen's model (1979), stressors create conditions of information overload because they force people to pay special attention. This results in fatigue and saps the energy needed for performance.

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