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**The Impact of Job Stress on Women Employees' Job  
Performance in the United Arab Emirates**

*Sajitha Chandran<sup>1</sup>*

*<sup>1</sup>SBS Swiss Business School, Research Scholar*

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*SBS Swiss Business School*

*Flughafenstrasse 3*

*8302 Kloten-Zurich*

*Switzerland*

*Call us: +41 44 880 00 88*

*General inquiries: [editor@sbs.edu](mailto:editor@sbs.edu)*

*Working Paper Series Inquiries: [editor@sbs.edu](mailto:editor@sbs.edu)*

## **Abstract**

Stress affects people in varying degrees, depending on various factors, including age, marital status, and other socio-personal factors (Rubin et al., 2021). Women in general experience more stress compared to men and tend to show more obvious manifestations of stress; however, women are also better at coping with stress. The current study aims to analyze the impact of job stress on the job performance of women employees in the UAE. The findings of this study provide actionable insights for organizations in the UAE and beyond. They emphasize the importance of addressing workplace stress to enhance employee performance, particularly among female employees. These implications extend to human resources practices, organizational policies, and leadership development, creating a more inclusive, productive, and stress-resilient workplace. The researcher recommends verifying the impact of job stress on the performance of women employees, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

**Keywords:** *Organizational factors, Work-related factors, Personal factors, Coping Strategy, Work Performance*

## **Introduction**

The phenomenon of occupational stress arises from the gap between an individual's skills and the expectations of a workload, which ultimately leads to strain on the individual's mental and emotional state (Alvarez Torres & Schiuma, 2024; Yuan et al., 2022). Typically, this strain imbalance leads to lower productivity, reduced job performance, increased absenteeism, and higher healthcare expenditures, ultimately hurting organizational productivity (Badi et al., 2023; Rubin et al., 2021). Stress, as stated by Cao et al. (2021), applies both mental and physical pressure to an individual, which drastically affects an employee's overall well-being and

performance. These issues, including diminished quality standards and inefficiency alongside increased employee turnover, are experienced by organizations worldwide (Hijazi et al., 2022; Zheng et al, 2023).

Stress affects people in varying degrees, depending on various factors, including age, marital status, and other socio-personal factors (Rubin et al., 2021). Women in general experience more stress compared to men and tend to show more obvious manifestations of stress; however, women are also better at coping with stress (Nakamura et al., 2022; Sharma & Srivastava, 2022). To give an example, it is primarily women who are more prone to emotional strain due to the conflicting societal and familial roles they perform, but they can cope as well due to myriad factors, hormones, and social norms (Graves et al., 2021).

In the UAE context, the focus given to the phenomenon of mental well-being alongside employee engagement has intensified over recent years. A 2022 Gallup survey found that 38% of UAE employees experienced burnout, which was attributed to inadequate managerial support and unreasonable deadlines (Hammami et al., 2023). Additionally, a 2023 McKinsey survey indicated that mental health issues were a concern for two-thirds of employees in the GCC. Workplace stress remains a persistent concern, including in the UAE, despite the government's efforts through the National Program for Happiness and Well-being. Gulzar et al. (2022) note that 61% of UAE employees reported being actively disengaged from their work, further underscoring the need for targeted workplace interventions.

There is a limited body of literature focusing on stress and coping among female staff in the UAE, which remains largely unexplored (Badi et al., 2023). Workplace support is frequently insufficient due to cultural and systemic constraints, particularly for women.

Furthermore, stress in the workplace can increase when there is a lack of support from organizational managers and peers (World Health Organization, 2023). While moderate levels of stress may lead to improved performance, referred to as eustress, high levels of stress

ultimately lead to dysfunction and burnout (Jayakumar & Varma, 2020; Bienertova-Vasku et al., 2020).

Women have made significant progress in the UAE's public and private sectors. World Bank data indicate that women comprised 18.05% of the workforce in 2022, with 66% employed in the public sector and 11% in private organizations (Puri, 2022). The socio-cultural norms continue to impact women's stress levels and career advancement, despite existing laws and international accolades for gender equality, such as the UAE being the highest-ranked Arab country in the UNDP's Gender Equality Index (The National, 2024) and marking progress for gender equality (Badi et al., 2023; Osman et al., 2023).

Social roles, work responsibilities, and underrepresentation in specific fields uniquely challenge women's stress levels. These factors, alongside the dynamic pace of change in the UAE, underscore the need for targeted mental health and performance support initiatives for these women.

## **Overview of Stress**

Stress is regarded as a psychological and physical strain that occurs when coping resources are perceived to be insufficient to meet demands (Sharma & Srivastava, 2022; Lai et al., 2022). The World Health Organization (2023) describes stress as an automatic bodily response that, when not adequately managed, poses a serious threat to health. Novelty, unpredictability, and a perceived lack of control trigger stress more readily (Lai et al., 2022). Stress is defined as an emotional, psychological, or physical response to stressors that exceed an individual's coping threshold (Zonp et al., 2022). When this happens within a workplace, it is referred to as occupational stress (Shen & Slater, 2021). This encompasses both physiological and psychological reactions to work activities that challenge the individual beyond their available resources (Girma et al., 2021; Goel & Verma, 2021).

## **Occupational Stress and Its Implications**

Employee stress results from pressure at work when the expectations placed on a worker exceed their coping resources (Badi et al., 2023). It can also arise from a lack of autonomy, mismatched skill sets relative to job roles, or relevant constraints on organizational resources (Lai et al., 2022). Individual and political measures are needed to reduce occupational stress (Kefelew et al., 2023). Some of the causative stressors include excessive work, inadequate power and control, job insecurity, and poor social relations (Pandita et al., 2023).

Both organizations and individuals bear the burden of inadequate mental and physical health, as well as job satisfaction and engagement, which impact workforce productivity (Nakamura et al., 2022). The consequences of workplace stressors include elevated risk of chronic stress, cardiovascular diseases, anxiety, and depression, which in turn lead to increased turnover and absenteeism (Roberts et al., 2021). Prolonged workplace stress from social support systems reduces performance, as highlighted in studies by Sharma and Srivastava (2019) and Nakamura et al. (2022).

## **Types of Stress and Stressors**

The forms of stress differ in their origins and effects. For example, acute stress is the most prevalent type, arising from immediate strain (Uddin et al., 2020). It can usually be maintained in moderation, but if worsened symptoms occur, they could become harmful (Yalcin-Siedentopf et al., 2021). This may be triggered by an overwhelming event, and may develop into acute stress disorder, which shares features with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) but differs in duration, lasting less than a month (Zarooni et al., 2023; Zonp et al., 2022).

As a result of recurrence, episodic acute stress leads individuals to remain in a temporally chaotic state, which is dominated by an energetic blend of anxiety and irritability

(Tong et al., 2022). Sultana et al. (2023) and Shen and Slater (2021) explain the factors as constant and persistent around chronic stress, which is long-lived due to harsh conditions, like toxic relationships, trauma, or financial hardships. On the other hand, it poses a significant risk to health, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, and a reduced lifespan (Sharma & Srivastava, 2022).

Stress is a physiological response to stressors defined as internal or external triggers (Saddik et al., 2021). These are, for instance, stress-provoking noises or sudden stimuli that increase cortisol production (Randolph, 1984; Patel et al., 2021; Matthews et al., 2022). Lifestyle stressors include self-neglecting actions, such as poor eating habits, lack of exercise, or substance use (Linnik & Sepp, 2023; Kumar & Sheeba, 2023; Lai et al., 2022).

Organizational stressors arise from job dissatisfaction, unfair treatment, or hostile work environments, leading to emotional and behavioral stress (Kefelew et al., 2023). Stress arising from economic insecurity is referred to as financial stress, which is more prevalent among lower-income families (Kar et al., 2020; Jayakumar & Varma, 2020). Individuals in such circumstances tend to tolerate unpleasant working conditions due to a lack of alternatives.

Intrapersonal conflicts with colleagues, being ostracized, or receiving negative feedback from managers create social stress (Inoue et al., 2014; Hijazi et al., 2022; Hammami et al., 2023). Stress related to social circles, such as clubs or family, tends to be more emotionally charged and mentally exhausting if left unresolved.

Stress can be either positive (eustress) or negative (distress). Eustress enhances one's performance, participation in challenges, and acquisition of new skills (Gulzar et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2022). It promotes productivity and confidence, especially when a person regards pressure as an opportunity (Gulzar et al., 2022). Distress, on the other hand, overwhelms a person, leading to lower focus, increased anxiety, and impaired ability to function (Bienertova-

Vasku et al., 2020). Chronic distress can have serious health consequences, such as cardiovascular disease and insomnia.

Emotional distress can be challenging to prove or convey, especially when others do not take it seriously (Azale et al., 2018). Severe, workplace-related emotional distress may have legal ramifications (Alshowkan et al., 2023). Viewing stress as multidimensional helps prevent oversimplifying it as a purely negative phenomenon, thus encouraging more effective coping and support strategies (Gulzar et al., 2022; Bienertova-Vasku et al., 2020).

### **Women and Workplace Stress**

As noted in existing literature, women must manage a home alongside professional tasks, which makes them more vulnerable to stress (Alshowkan et al., 2023; Yalcin-Siedentopf et al., 2021). The strain of managing organizational roles coupled with shifting industry paradigms increases workload pressure (Azale et al., 2018; Badi et al., 2023). Stress occurs when demanding work conditions are placed on an employee that exceed their capacity to cope, particularly in environments that lack support or are poorly managed (Chen et al., 2022; Costa et al., 2021; World Health Organization, 2023). The results of stress include decreased productivity and poor health, as well as increased absenteeism and organizational turnover, all of which are more pronounced among women (Costa et al., 2021).

The balance between personal life and career significantly shapes women's job satisfaction and progression (Farber et al., 2023). The lack of balance between work and life in the UAE is one of the most important obstacles to career progression for women (Jabeen et al., 2018). Graves et al. (2021) noted that women often bear primary responsibility for managing families or caregivers, making it critical for employers to remove barriers. Other researchers have identified factors such as a fast-paced economy, long working hours, and a lack of family support systems as contributing to role conflict and stress (Hao et al., 2022; Jayakumar &



Varma, 2020; Kefelew et al., 2023; Kumar & Sheeba, 2023). Such inter-role conflict from personal responsibilities and work affects commitment and satisfaction (Kar et al., 2020; Kooli, 2022). Diverse gender expectations and even life stages add to the work-life imbalance (Pandita et al., 2023). Even with the best-intentioned HR policies that support work-life balance, intra-familial demands often undermine attempts (Rañeses et al., 2022; Sheethal & Katyayani, 2021). Conflicts exacerbated by COVID-19 were further exacerbated by remote work (Ranji et al., 2021; Farber et al., 2023).

### **Coping Strategies**

Coping strategies help alleviate stress by employing behavioral and cognitive actions (Al Miskry et al., 2021). Stress emerges when there is a personal resource insufficiency regarding meeting the requirements (Al-Ruzzieh & Ayaad, 2021). Chronic stress affects both mental and physical health, and it requires adaptive coping methods (Götmann & Bechtoldt, 2021; Hao et al., 2022; Hijazi et al., 2022). People employ different strategies depending on the situation and the perceived level of control (Kooli, 2022; Linnik & Sepp, 2023). Social support also helps mitigate stress, enhancing overall health and well-being (Saddik et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021).

### **Theories Related to Stress**

#### ***Role Stress Theory***

Kahn et al. developed the Role Stress Theory in 1965, identifying role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload as the key stressors. Stress arises when individuals are faced with unclear roles, contradictory expectations, or excessive responsibilities (Kahn et al., 1964; Wen et al., 2020). For example, role ambiguity—failure to meet expectations associated with a position—has been linked to job dissatisfaction and burnout (Sultana et al., 2023; Shen & Slater, 2021). Likewise, role conflict happens when expectations from work and other areas of life do not align. This increases the chances of depression, anxiety, and burnout (Wu et al.,

2019; Shahani et al., 2020; Ranji et al., 2021). Coping mechanisms, such as problem-solving and social support, may mitigate these impacts (Ornek & Esin, 2020; Pandita et al., 2023).

Role overload, characterized by excessive work demands at one's job, also contributes to stress and burnout, particularly in specific populations, such as pregnant women (Wu et al., 2019; Nakamura et al., 2022). On the contrary, some studies claim that versatility in roles is beneficial, leading to increased self-esteem and life satisfaction, particularly when the workload is light (Anglin et al., 2022; Aloka et al., 2024; Al Miskry et al., 2021).

According to the theory, the effective alleviation of role strain and enhancement of satisfaction and performance at work require comprehensive strategies, potent and precise communication, well-defined job design, and adequate support mechanisms (Ciappei et al., 2023; Graves et al., 2021; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

### ***Person-Environment Fit (PE Fit) Theory***

This theory, developed by Jansen and Kristof-Brown in 2006, posits that stress arises from a discrepancy between a person's traits and their environment. There are two primary components: Person-Organization Fit (PO fit), which involves the alignment of values, and Person-Job Fit (PJ fit), which involves the alignment between skills and job demands (Caplan & Harrison, 1993; Pudjiarti & Hutomo, 2020). High fit increases satisfaction and positivity while low fit causes stress and churn (Armitage & Amar, 2021; Ahmad et al., 2023).

The stress component of PE fit theory posits that individuals experience stress when they perceive the demands from the environment to be significantly higher than their abilities (Ahmad et al., 2023). A gap contributes to burnout, depression, and anxiety (Armitage & Amar, 2021). Notably, perceived misfit is equally important, if not more so, than actual misfit in leading to stress (Ahmad et al., 2023). Theories critics raise have pointed out that there appears to be an absence of dynamics within the organization and its social context, which has led more recent models to incorporate group fit and interpersonal relationships into the workplace (Liu

et al., 2020). PE fit adapts as individual demands and abilities transform over time (Kooli, 2022).

### ***Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model***

The JD-R model, developed by Demerouti et al. (2001), provides a distinction between job demands, such as workload or time pressure, and job resources, including support and autonomy. Resources (e.g., support, autonomy) foster both engagement and resilience, while high demands decrease mental and physical energy (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014; Wu et al., 2019). The model aims to address some shortcomings of JD-C (Karasek, 1979) and ERI (Siegrist, 1996) by proposing a flexible structure that can be applied to any job within any industry. In high-demand occupations such as construction or project management, this model explains burnout resulting from high resource demands and low resource availability (Chen et al., 2022; Aloka et al., 2024). Increasing job resources is one of the most effective strategies for managing burnout and enhancing work commitment (Mazzetti et al., 2021; Farber et al., 2023). Critiques in this case remain due to an overly generic application and an underdeveloped explanation of recursive logic (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

### ***Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) Model***

The focus of the Siegrist ERI model (Effort-Reward Inequity) is on the disparity between effort and reward (which can be salary, recognition, or even promotional prospects). Perceived inequity contributes to sustained stress, which in turn leads to poor health (Al Dwek et al., 2022). The model also adds a risk factor of concern, overcommitment, which is an intrinsic coping strategy that aggravates stress (Siegrist, 1996).

The model has been validated for cardiovascular risk and absenteeism (Avanzi et al., 2020; Airaksinen et al., 2018); however, the focus is on the moderating variable of overcommitment, which has not yet been fully explored. Its causal links require more attention in empirical research (Shahani et al., 2020).

### ***Occupational Stress Model***

The occupational stress model highlights five sources of stress in the workplace: job-intrinsic factors (such as workload), role in the organization (likewise, ambiguity), career advancement (for example, job insecurity), relationships (for instance, conflicts), and organizational climate (such as bureaucracy) (Cooper & Marshall, 1976). While this model is older, its enduring relevance in occupational health research has been documented in the literature (Finstad et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2023).

### ***Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (TMSC)***

Developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1993), this model brings out the importance of cognitive appraisal and coping mechanisms. It distinguishes between primary appraisal (a threat that is perceived) and secondary appraisal (the available resources), which is subsequently followed by coping actions, which can be either problem-focused or emotion-based. Coping outcomes depend on the reduction of distress the strategies achieve (Pandita et al., 2023; Lazarus, 1993).

Even though the theory is influential, TMSC has seldom been utilized in a holistic approach in workplace research due to the subjectivity and complexity of the model (Randolph, 1984; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Regardless, it has significant value concerning stress adaptation, particularly regarding the challenges and coping strategies employed by women in high-stress situations.

### **Relationship of Stress and Work Performance**

According to Azale et al. (2018), stress occurs when an individual's demands exceed their ability to cope with them. Different industries have expressed concerns about how stress negatively impacts employee and organizational productivity (Bienertova-Vasku et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2022). Workplace stress leads to a decline in an individual's health and

participation, and it increases burnout (Dabou et al., 2022; Girma et al., 2021). Interpersonal relationships between leaders and employees can positively impact the social climate, improving performance and enhancing engagement (Costa et al., 2021).

Several studies have identified role conflict, workload, and inadequate compensation as the most significant stressors, alongside low performance resulting from stress (Girma et al., 2021; Hijazi et al., 2022). However, the relationship between performance and the other factors is complicated. Götmann and Bechtoldt (2021) outline four possibilities: a negative linear relationship, a positive eustress relationship, a U-shaped curve (inverted U), or no relationship at all. Moderate levels of stress can enhance performance, but higher levels lead to impaired focus, motivational fatigue, and reduced decision-making abilities (Kar et al., 2020; Linnik & Sepp, 2023; Nakamura et al., 2022). When stress levels exceed a certain threshold, symptoms such as burnout, absenteeism, or resignation become more prevalent (Pandita et al., 2023).

Eustress enhances performance by activating problem-solving and effort mechanisms (Lai et al., 2022). However, as pressure escalates beyond a certain threshold, performance drastically diminishes due to the onset of distress (Matthews et al., 2022; Rubin et al., 2021). Both in-role and extra-role performances are negatively impacted due to heightened stress (Anglin et al., 2022; Alshowkan et al., 2023).

Most scholars provide support for the negative linear model of stress performance relationship (Cao et al., 2021; Dabou et al., 2022), with some backing the inverted-U framework (Hanek & Garcia, 2022). Stress, particularly in the presence of role ambiguity and overload, becomes a significant impediment to productivity (Al Dwek et al., 2022; Al-Ruzzieh & Ayaad, 2021). This pattern is noted in finance and education sector-specific research (Cao et al., 2021; Costa et al., 2021; Azale et al., 2018).

The impact of stress on performance depends on how manageable the stressor is perceived to be. Challenge stress, such as a workload, may improve performance, whereas a

hindrance stress, like a policy change, diminishes it (Al Miskry et al., 2021). Another factor that relates to poor performance is Technostress, which is still developing as a concept (Ornek & Esin, 2020; Chen et al., 2022).

Satisfaction and intent to leave also influence performance (Al-Ruzzieh & Ayaad, 2021). Job stress arising from insecurity, role ambiguity, and lack of resources adversely affects both self-evaluated and supervisor-evaluated performance (Abdelrahman & Ismail, 2022). In addition to work, personal stressors such as family separation and ineffective coping strategies further exacerbate the already diminished job outcomes (Farber et al., 2023; Gulzar et al., 2022). Women tend not to disclose stress because they fear negative career consequences (Hao et al., 2022).

Absenteeism due to stress leads to workflow interruptions, negatively impacting both customer satisfaction and profitability (Kefelew et al., 2023; Kumar & Sheeba, 2023). Other conflicts arise when the remaining staff increase to face additional workloads (Linnik & Sepp, 2023; Ornek & Esin, 2020). Within these obstacles, controllable stress can be advantageous. Stress that provokes motivation and role performance can enhance productivity (Sharma & Srivastava, 2022; Sultana et al., 2023). To reduce damage, organizations must manage employee perception by treating them as valued assets and implementing effective stress management systems (Worke et al., 2021).

## **Conclusion**

As Abdelrahman and Ismail observed (2022), the limited availability of literature on work-related stress and its impact on female employees in the UAE is concerning. Most studies are limited in their breadth, focusing primarily on healthcare and finance, while hospitality, education, and sales remain vastly underrepresented (Al Dwek et al., 2022). Additionally, numerous studies focus on the theoretical aspects of the subject, often lacking practical

relevance, as directed by practitioners (Alvarez Torres & Schiuma, 2024). Although some researchers study stress-coping strategies at the individual level (Graves et al., 2021; Kar et al., 2020), they often overlook organizational approaches.

According to Mosly (2023), leadership models need to be tailored for the UAE's heterogeneous workforce, demonstrating an understanding of managerial characteristics. The ethnically diverse workforce underscores the importance of understanding stress-coping mechanisms and adaptable leadership styles (Gallup Inc., 2022). This can help improve employee commitment and job satisfaction in various industries (Chen et al., 2022). Culturally and professionally motivated stress facing female employees in all sectors requires the development of management training aimed at stress and performance improvement.

A key focus of this study is to evaluate the impact of job stress on the job performance of women employees in the UAE, considering the cultural bias that expects women to prioritize family over career. Although there has been an increase in the number of women participating in the workforce, social expectations still expect women to juggle their responsibilities at home alongside their professional obligations (Al-Ruzzieh & Ayaad, 2021). Alteneiji (2023) adds that these responsibilities, including health, leisure, and social activities, compound the imbalance between work and other life activities. Many women trying to advance their careers often need to make personal sacrifices, usually involving social and familial commitments.

Two significant gaps can be identified at this point: (1) the issue of stress and women employees is analyzed within an industry and societal context, but there is no focus on them as a specific unit of study, and (2) there seems to be no focus on the organizational and structural factors of stress from a local perspective in the UAE. There appears to be a lack of documentation regarding specific stressors in the private sector, such as performance expectations, work-life balance, and stress.

In blended culture nations such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, social commitments alongside cultural practices heavily influence the amount of stress individuals face, differing from Western individualistic paradigms. In Saudi Arabia, employees feel stress when their communal obligations interfere with their work responsibilities (Al-Harthi et al., 2022). In the UAE, women face the double burden of fulfilling traditional family responsibilities while also pursuing employment (Dewan Consultants, 2024). Noting stress differences within this context is important; however, stress reputed to have greater social influences is underrepresented in the literature because Emirati women are often silenced (Alteneiji, 2023).

While some, such as Khan et al. (2023), have sought to study Qatar's economic stressors, such as volatile oil prices, comparably little attention has been paid to this line of research in the UAE. Expatriate Omanis were studied by Al-Lamki (2023) who identified cultural and work-related stress posed employment uncertainty but did not compare them to nationals, which is essential in the UAE.

This research aims to shed light on the underrepresented region of the UAE, specifically in relation to human resources and leadership policies and practices. It appears that specific models predicting job satisfaction and performance, particularly in the construction industry, are valid. These conclusions provide an evidence-based approach to stress management, enhancing productivity by reducing stress.

The findings of this study provide actionable insights for organizations in the UAE and beyond. They emphasize the importance of addressing workplace stress to enhance employee performance, particularly among female employees. These implications extend to human resources practices, organizational policies, and leadership development, creating a more inclusive, productive, and stress-resilient workplace. The researcher recommends verifying the impact of job stress on the performance of women employees, both quantitatively and qualitatively.



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