

# **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND EMPLOYEES PERFORMANCE IN KENYA PRISON SERVICE: A SURVEY OF GK PRISONS IN MERU COUNTY OF KENYA**

**Patrick Mwangi Muigai**

Masters Student, Kenya Methodist University, Kenya

**Abel Moguche**

Kenya Methodist University, Kenya

**Mutea Fredrick**

Kenya Methodist University, Kenya

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Kenyan Government acknowledges that over the years there has been poor performance in the public sector, especially in the management of public resources which has hindered the realization of sustainable economic growth. The government reiterates in the Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS) some of the factors that adversely affect the performance of the public sector. Work-place stress has received a great deal of attention in social psychological research. Significant research findings have documented that prolonged stress has negative effects on individual health as well as on employee attitudes towards the organization. Employees work in a unique environment, subjecting themselves to potentially traumatic events in conditions that impact their emotional and physical well-being. Several measures of employee performance were analyzed which included environmental conditions, organizational demands, personal background and individual differences. Today Kenya Prison is a department in the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government with a total of 110 prisons, 2 Borstal Institutions and 1 Youth Correctional Training Center. The study was

carried out in the prisons department in Meru County of Kenya. Meru County has got 6 Prisons; Chuka, Kangeta, Maara, Marimanti, Meru and Uruku Prisons. All the top-level management (I.P, C.I.P, SP and SSP), middle level management (CPL, SGT and S/SGT) and lower level management (PC) employees of these prisons were used as the respondents where a total of 480 employees were involved in the study. Using stratified random sampling technique, the study selected a total of 115 respondents comprising of members of staff from the three levels Senior Officers, NCOs and Junior Officers where each of the 3 levels was treated as a stratum (group) from where the respondents were selected using simple random method from each of the 3 stratum. Data was collected through use of questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics. Multiple linear regression aided by SPSS (Version 20) was used to link the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The data was presented in frequency distribution tables, graphs and charts.

**Key Words:** *occupational stress, employees performance, Kenya Prison Service, GK prisons, Meru County, Kenya*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Potts and Stretch (2013), Employee performance is defined as whether a person executes their job duties and responsibilities well. Many companies assess their employee's performance on an annual or quarterly basis to delineate certain parts requiring improvement. Performance is considered critical to organizational success. According to (Campbell, 2012) he describes job performance as an individual level variable or something done solo. The definition differentiates it from more encompassing constructs such as organization performance or social performance,

which are high-level variables. Singular performance is of high relevance for establishments, and individual alike and researchers agree that performance has to be considered as a multidimensional concept. The most basic level one can distinguish between a process aspect and an outcome aspect of performance (Borman, Motowidlo, Campbell & Roe, 2013). Moreover, performance must be distinguished from the effectiveness and productivity (Campbell, 2012). Effectiveness refers to the evaluations of the results of performance while productivity is the ratio of efficiency to the cost of attaining the outcome.

In the Western industrialized civilizations, job stress is a rising problem for employees especially in the United States, because of its financial impact (Murphy & Sauter, 2014). The effects of workplace stress can include but not limited to; high rate of absenteeism, increased medical costs, a rise in accidents and decline in productivity among other factors. Research and theories in regards to stress are considered to have been developed and tested in the United states (Jamal & Xie, 2013). However, another related problem for countries that are undergoing massive economic and social changes is occupational stress. Therefore it is equally important to reproduce stress research in Chinese societies so as to investigate the generalizability of the western theories.

Research has it that executives in Hong Kong have high levels of stress than their counterparts in the United Kingdom (Siu, Cooper & Donald, 2013). If the billion-dollar cost of managerial stress that has been estimated for countries such as the UK and the US (Cartwright & Cooper, 2014) is similarly high amidst the employees in Hong Kong, then it will create a substantial loss of resources. Due to these factors, it is imperative to examine the stress factors in the larger Asian community. The industrial sector in Hong Kong has undergone massive structural shifts over the years, and the economy has become more service-oriented due to the contraction of the industry sector. Official statistics indicate that at the end of 1999 employment in the service industry amounted to 1.926.078 job establishments which account for around 85.5% total employment.

In 1997 there was a hastened change in the economic changes in hong kong and these has become a leading factor in organizational changes. This has made it necessary to study the effects of stress on employees job performance. A systematic examination of the job performance of employee hong kong will be precious in productivity. (Jex, 2012), argued that the research into the connection between stress and performance in the job has been neglected in the occupational stress prose. He also advocated for the arbitrators of the stress performance relationship. Therefore this study aims at exploring the direct and controlling effects of Chinese work values and regulatory obligations to replicate the relationship in a Chinese setting so that the results can be generalized.

In South Africa, the health system comprises of public and private health sectors. Pillay (2012), found out that around 82% of the South Africans depends on the free healthcare services, and amounts to 40% of the entire health spending. On the other hand, the private sector accounts for

around 60% of the expenditure and provides services for 18% of the population who have private insurance. This implies that the area of public health is underfunded and yet overused. As this is the case, there are reports of negligence and poor patient care, lack of resources and to a large degree the lack of medicine. At times patient gets turned away for lack of health officials to attend to them or lack thereof of other resources. Work-related stress and exhaustion are but among the factors that bedevil the health sector in South Africa, predominantly the free sector. Nurses professional stress and weariness typically result in numerous health-related glitches that have unswerving adverse organizational concerns such as malingering, performance insufficiencies, increase in staff throughput among others (Bhaga, 2012). Notwithstanding the tactic used to counteract work-related stress, what remains apparent is that the management should endeavor to put in place comprehensive stress management for nurses to prevent work-related stress and make it a priority so as to manage stress and improve work output.

Masango (2013), in his study “The influence of institutional reforms on employee job satisfaction of Kenya Prison Service” he found that prison officers had a heavy workload which caused the officers to be demoralized. The same survey revealed that the staff shortage caused the prison staff to feel insecure should a prisoners’ riot occur. The terms of service of prison officers were noted to be poor, as the annual leave days were few considering the heavy workload the officers had to contend with. Promotions in the prison service were reported to be rare and delayed for long periods. The study also revealed that there was also poor quality supervision of offenders by prison officers who were demoralized. Working at the low level is an inherently stressful profession with long working hours, heavy workloads, difficult employees and different strains. The physical and consciousness demands of workers at the low level make them more susceptible to extraordinary levels of tension. The effects of stress are demonstrated in increased lateness to work, low productivity and increased sick leaves (KPS, 2011). Despite the extremely adverse effects of occupational stress on the human body and job performance, many organizations, with Kenya prisons not being an exception has not considered putting in place tangible methods to discourse these stress-related conditions that tend to affect productivity in a negative way. Furthermore, there has not been a conscious establishment of a linkage between occupational stress and its adverse effect on productivity. According to Karimi (2012), who studied factors that are critical to the performance of uniformed officers in Kenya found out the efficient fulfillment of uniformed civil servants in Kenya planning and establishment of activity time and scheduling is critical in determining the overall performance of uniformed employees. Mbugua (2014), carried out a study on the essential success factors in the performance of uniformed officers of Nairobi in Kenya.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Many researchers hold on to the notion that workplace stress has an impact on the work performance either directly or indirectly. Work-related stress inadvertently consequences low organizational performance (Folkman & Lazarus, 2012). Job stress even though it is considered

to be of tiny impact at the workplace, it may have dire consequences i.e misuse of resources, low productivity and poor standard of services and goods. Workplace stress has also received lots of attention in social psychological research (Cooper, 2013). There has been a 60% increase in people looking to transfer from their current stations due to what they term as workplace stress with their colleagues, supervisors, work environment, individual needs and management in general; this has been a challenge to performance of the organization (KPS, 2013). Therefore, additional stressors in the workplace, for instance, the recent incidences which have occurred in some stations where the officers are turning to their colleagues in a situation where one officer shot two of his colleagues in Embu Prison and also in Uruku Prison where an officer turned against his wife probably due to related stressors of work (KPS, 2017). This has significantly influenced the wellbeing of representatives prompting to expand episodes of stress-related infirmities. The overall effect has been due to low morale of employees (KPS, 2013). The study, therefore, sought to investigate the relationship between occupational stress and staff's job performance in Kenya Prison Service (A survey of G.K Prisons in Meru County).

## **GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

The study sought to investigate the connection between occupational stress and employees job performance in Kenya Prison Service. A survey of G.K prisons in Meru County of Kenya.

## **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

1. To determine the relationship between environmental conditions and employee performance in Kenya Prison Service.
2. To find out the relationship between organizational demands and employee performance in Kenya Prison Service.
3. To establish the relationship between personal background and employee performance in Kenya Prison Service.
4. To explore the association between individual differences and employee performance in Kenya Prison Service.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Mugenda and Mugenda, (2012), Theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study. It also introduces and describes the theory that explains why the research problem under study exists. This study was grounded on three principles, that is, systems theory, Psychological Stress-The Lazarus Theory, Equity theory, The Person-Environment Fit Theory.

## **Systems Theory**

Systems theory is referred to as the interdisciplinary study of systems in general; This is aimed at clarifying ideologies that can be applied to all types' of systems at all nesting levels in all fields of research (Hammonds, 2013). Systems theory has had an enormous impact on controlling science and understanding administration. A system is considered a unified part of an entire collection aimed at achieving a collective goal. If you tamper with a part of the system, say you remove one part, then the system as a whole has been tampered with. A pile of concrete is not a system because you can scope some concrete and remain with concrete. But if you remove a carburetor from a functioning car, then you no longer have a functioning car. Systems are designed to have outputs and outcomes, and they share responses among each of the four features of the coordinations (Hammonds, 2013).

Systems theory may seem quite basic. Years of administration preparation and rehearses in the workplace have not followed this approach. It's only lately, with remarkable variations confronting authorities and how they conduct their day to day operations, have educationalists and administrators come to meet this new way of looking at things. This interpretation has brought about a remarkable change (or paradigm shift) in the way administration training approached organizations (Stephen, 2014). The consequence of systems theory in supervision is that writers, consultants, educators, are facilitating administrators to view the group from a wider perspective. Systems theory has come with a different dimension for managers to interpret patterns in the workplace and in particular, the relationship between co-workers (Concha, 2013).

It gives an organization a wider perception in incorporating personal backgrounds with the systems within the organization in the sense that personal problems, economic problems and family problems are aligned in the systems in the organization for the benefit of the organization as well as achieving the organizational goals. Employees should work together as a team irrespective of their age, status, lifestyles, financial status and their family's origins because they are all prison officers and their work is security of prisoners.

## **Psychological Stress -The Lazarus Theory**

Lazarus defines anxiety as an experience when an individual recognizes that what he or she needs exceeds the available resources or the social resources, he or she can mobilize. Often it is referred to as the transactional model of stress and managing. A person response or an event does not define stress, rather the person's view of the psychological situation is the main factor. According to Lazarus, the impact that worry has on an individual is founded more on that the individuals feeling of danger, helplessness, and aptitude to survive than on the worrying event itself. He further describes emotional stress as a particular relationship that exists between an individual that is evaluated as time-consuming and uses up his or her resources, therefore, endangering his or her well-being. According to his theory, when a person is faced with a

situation, they only think of two things often referred to as the primary appraisal and secondary appraisal.

Matthieu (2013), describe emotional stress as an explicit connection between the individual and the surrounding as judged by the person as exhausting or exceeding his resources and a danger to his or her well-being. Therefore the author, undertake that rational judgment plays a crucial role in the stress process. Assessment methods refer to an individual's categorization and evaluation of an encounter on this person's well-being. Precisely, the primary and secondary assessment can be differentiated. By primary assessment, encounters are categorized as irrelevant, being positive or stressful. Stress appraisals comprise harm/loss, threat, and challenge. By secondary appraisals, individuals evaluate what can be done in the face of the stressful encounter; they tax their coping options. By primary and secondary assessments, people start their coping processes which can arouse reassessment processes.

To reach an agreeable and better understanding of the stress process and how it develops over time, Lazarus (2012), suggested putting more emphasis on an intra-individual analysis of the stress phenomenon, for example by learning and observing the same individuals in different situations over time. A few studies followed such an approach (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, De Longis & Gruen, (2012), however, it is important to note that majority of experimental studies did not adopt such a process view, but instead treated reactions to stress and individuals thereof as stable. Moreover, it has been probed whether a focus on individual processes offers much to the understanding of workplace stress (Brief, 2010). Vital apparatuses in Carver and Scheier's archetypal are an input function, a reference value, a comparator, and an output function. The input function refers to perceptions of one's state or of situational features in the environment. The reference value comprises the individual's desires, values, or goals. The comparator compares the input function with the reference value. The output function refers to behavior which is activated when a discrepancy between the function of entry and the reference value is detected.

The Lazarus theory assists the Kenya Prison service in dealing with stress of employees in the process of delivery their service. This is in essence that there are so many stressors in any work environment where the employee intermingle with each other as well as the work environment. It brings about assessment methods which refer to an individual's categorization and evaluation of an encounter on the person's well-being. Precisely, the primary and secondary assessment can be differentiated in this context.

### **Equity Theory**

The Equity Theory, in a work context, is that people make comparisons between themselves and others regarding what they invest in their work, (Inputs) and what comes out of it (outputs), (Concha, 2013). As the expectancy theory this theory is also based on people's perceptions, in this case of the inputs and the outputs involved, thus the subject of equity - equality is realized.

Cooper (2011), argues that evaluation of research recommends that when individuals recognize an unbalanced elucidation for themselves, they then can be anticipated to make either of the following decisions. They can adjust their responses (not applying much effort), alter their perceived outcomes (study shows that people who are paid by piece rate can increase their pay by producing higher quantity of units even when their quality is viewed as low).

According to Cooper, Liukkonen and Cartwright, (2014), gives in a nutshell, equity theory is the suggestion that rewards do not only appease people which are considered the central point of expectancy theory but also are satisfied by similar nature of awards. Organization should put into account the need to reward outstanding performance. This is critical for prison department in their efforts to produce better results. Prison department together with the ministry of interior and coordination should ensure that proper policies that spell out what employees expect in return for outstanding performance are formulated and implemented.

### **The Person-Environment Fit Theory (P.E. FIT)**

This theory by Holland (2015), proposes a measure of how well personality factors (attitudes, values, interests, knowledge, skills and circumstances) match the demands of the person's working environment. The greater the mismatch, the greater the job stress generated. The theory identifies different fits, each measured in terms of comparable properties of the person and environment. There is fit or needs and values of the individual with the environmental supplies and opportunities also, the fit between environmental demands and the abilities of the individual to meet these requirements. Any mismatch will result in work stress on the individual.

This is important for prison department as they seek to improve management performance on employee in an effort to improve service delivery. The person-environmental fit theory helps in controlling the strategic efforts more specifically by setting negotiated targets, creating an enabling environment for their realization and those who achieve the targets outstandingly. This is the essence of employee performance.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The study adopted a descriptive design which is concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual, or of groups. This design therefore is concerned with specific narration of facts and characteristics concerned with individuals, groups or situations. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2012), descriptive research design determines and reports the way things are. The advantage of the descriptive design is that it allows one to be flexible in data collection and also enables the researcher to collect a rich data from a variety of respondents. It is also appropriate because respondents were not manipulated.



## **Target Population**

This study was carried out in Kenya Prisons Service within Meru County targeting a total of 480 prison officers from 6 Prisons, namely Chuka, Kangeta, Maara, Marimanti, Meru, and Uruku Prisons within Meru County of Kenya, where the officers were categorized into 3 levels (Junior, Non-commissioned officers, and Senior Officers), and thus the study was carried out in a place where all levels of employees were represented. In choosing the members who participated, the researcher focused on the management and heads of sections. This was because they were the major players in the day-to-day operations of these correction facilities hence they were key players within the organization.

## **Sampling Technique and Sample Size**

The study adopted a stratified random sampling. Sampling is the procedure a researcher uses to gather people, places or things to study. It is a process of selecting a number of individuals or objects from a population such that the selected group contains elements representative of the characteristics found in the entire group (Orodho, 2012). Using stratified random sampling technique the study selected a total of 480 respondents comprising of members of staff from the three levels Senior Officers, NCO's and Junior Officers where each of the 3 levels were treated as a stratum (group) from where the respondents were selected using simple random method from each of the 3 stratum. According to Kothari (2010), indicates that when 20% or more of the members, of a target population is considered appropriate to give a representation thus, the study used 24% to select the sample population from each distributor and therefore totaling to a sample size of 115 respondents. This sampling technique is an appropriate because it ensured that all ranks of prisons officers in Meru County of Kenya. All officers that were sampled had an equal chance of being included in the samples that yielded the data which were generalized within minimal margin of error and determined statistically, (Borg, 2012) & (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012).

## **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

The researcher used questionnaires as an instrument of data collection. Each item in the questionnaire was developed to address a specific objective or hypothesis of the study, Mugenda & Mugenda (2012). The questionnaire had both open ended and closed ended questions. The sample respondents and the kind of analysis were used. The questions were straight forward and logical. The questionnaire contained simple straight forward directions for the respondents so that respondents would not face any difficulty in answering the questions. The respondents were expected to read and understand the questions with the help of the researcher and write down the response in the space provided on the questionnaire itself. The method was advantageous due to low costs, freedom from bias of the interviewer, adequacy of time which enabled them to give well thought out answers, convenience in reaching respondents and that large sample were made use of and the results were more dependable and reliable. The researcher adopted drop and pick

method where the questionnaires were given to the respondents and collected immediately. This helped to ensure that respondents were reached without any external influences.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

Data analysis is the whole process which starts immediately after data collection and ends when processed results are interpreted. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics. Kothari (2010) defines descriptive statistics as the development of certain indices from the raw data. Linear regression aided by SPSS (Version 20) was used to link the relationship between the independent variables (environmental condition, organizational demand, personal background and individual differences) and the dependent variable (employee performance). This helped to indicate strength and direction of the relationship between the variables. The general form of multiple linear regression is;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4$$

Where: Y = (employee performance);  $\beta_0$ : The regression constant i.e.  $Y = \beta_0$  when  $X_1, X_2, X_3, X_k = 0$ ;  $\beta_1$ : Coefficient of environmental condition (independent variable  $X_1$ );  $\beta_2$ : Coefficient of organizational demand (independent variable  $X_2$ );  $\beta_3$ : Coefficient of personal background (independent variable  $X_3$ );  $\beta_4$ : Coefficient of individual differences (independent variable  $X_4$ )

For all statistical tests, the alpha (significance) level was set at 0.05. Analysed data was presented in the form of frequencies and percentages.

### **RESEARCH RESULTS**

The study set out to determine whether the following variables affected employee performance: environmental conditions, organizational demands, personal background and individual differences. The study formed four hypotheses based on these objectives tested using t-test. To determine the partial effect of each variable, the study performed multiple linear regression with the aid of SPSS (version 20). The output thereof included the t-test, which formed the basis of testing the study's hypotheses.

Table 1 shows the results from the multiple linear regression and the results include standardised and unstandardized coefficient, t-statistics, and p-values. P-value of less than the significant value was the only condition for rejecting the null hypothesis of a particular variable. Table 2 summarises the conclusions made based on the latter criteria.

**Table 1: Regression Coefficients**

| Model                    | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t      | p-value | 95.0% Confidence Interval for B |             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|--------|---------|---------------------------------|-------------|
|                          | B                           | Std. Error |                                |        |         | Lower Bound                     | Upper Bound |
| (Constant)               | 19.031                      | 4.333      |                                | 4.392  | 0.000   | 10.440                          | 27.621      |
| Environmental Conditions | -0.234                      | 0.109      | -0.233                         | -2.138 | 0.035   | -0.451                          | -0.017      |
| Organizational Demands   | -0.306                      | 0.163      | -0.217                         | -1.877 | 0.063   | -0.629                          | 0.017       |
| Personal Background      | 0.030                       | 0.165      | 0.021                          | 0.180  | 0.857   | -0.297                          | 0.356       |
| Individual Differences   | 0.253                       | 0.117      | 0.239                          | 2.156  | 0.033   | 0.020                           | 0.486       |

**Table 2: Hypotheses Conclusions**

| Null Hypothesis  | P-Value | Decision                    |
|--|---------|-----------------------------|
| $H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between Environmental Conditions and Employee Performance | 0.035   | $H_0$ rejected              |
| $H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between organizational demand and employee performance    | 0.063   | $H_0$ failed to be rejected |
| $H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between personal background and employee performance      | 0.857   | $H_0$ failed to be rejected |
| $H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between individual differences and employee performance   | 0.033   | $H_0$ rejected              |

Only two variables had their null hypotheses rejected with their p-values being 0.035 and 0.033 for environmental conditions and individual differences respectively. This implies that politics, economy and technology significantly affect the performance of employees in Kenya Prison Service albeit negatively while holding other factors constant. Individual differences such as social support, self-efficacy and job experience had significant positive influence on employee performance while holding other factors constant. Organisational demands had negative influence on the performance of employees albeit insignificantly. However, it had a p-value of 0.063 that was near 0.05. Therefore, it is arguably a significant variable. Personal background had a p-value of 0.857, which was more than 0.05; hence, it had a positive but insignificant variable.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The research study found that environmental conditions and individual differences have a significant relationship with employee job performance while personal differences and organizational demands have no significant relationship with employee job performance.

The multiple linear regression models show the significantly strong relationship between set of 2 independent variables namely environmental conditions and individual differences with dependent variable that is employee job performance while personal differences and organizational demand have no relationship with dependent variable that is employee job performance. However, environmental condition was found to be the most significant independent variable having strong relationship with the dependent variable of employee job performance. Overall, the results revealed that environmental conditions, organizational demands, personal background and individual differences and dependent variable employee job performance were positively correlated.

Findings of the study also demonstrate that there is positive relationship between independent variables (I.Vs) and dependent variable (D.V). Employers may be able to improve their job performance by increasing the volume of teamwork, communication, decision and work habit to raise the performance level of the individual, but to succeed in this they also need to pay attention to the quantity and type of teamwork offered. Teamwork activity within the organization is very much beneficial and their effects are directly on employee job performance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In all sectors, government policies which support employee job performance inside the organization should be adapted. In this way overall organizational performance and effectiveness can be enhanced. It is important to develop such an atmosphere where employees are well satisfied with their jobs and cooperate with each other. In this way employees will be in position to utilize their full potential in their jobs. The research study strongly suggests that environmental conditions and individual differences activities must exist in the organizational environment.

The organization and management in particular should motivate employees by tracking their targets and recognizing the milestones achieved. Feedback should be emphasize, new ideas and initiative recognized while involving them in decision making. The Kenya Prison Service should fully embrace teamwork in all sections of the organization.

Kenya Prisons should adopt high performance work systems which foster the development of human resource in the form of firm-specific skills so as to create a performance advantage for organizations.

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