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Differences in Work and Family Stress Experienced by Managers and Hourly Employees in the Hotel Industry

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ABSTRACT

During economic downturns, hospitality industry employees are often asked to do more with less, and this situation creates stress among employees. Employee stress is becoming a significant issue in the hospitality industry, and it is costly for employers and employees alike. Stress results in overall declines in employee productivity, job performance, and customer service, and also results in increases in hostility, withdrawal, and costly turnover and health care costs. Although addressing and reducing stress in the hospitality industry is both a noble goal and is capable of resulting in expense reductions for employers, the nature and quantity of hospitality employee stress is not fully understood. Research regarding stress in the hospitality industry is an understudied topic. This study aims to identify the most common work stressors of a sample of 164 managerial and hourly workers who were each interviewed for eight consecutive days, and were employed at 65 different hotels across the United States. Further, this study examines whether there are differences in the types and frequency of work and family stressors between managers and non-managers, and also for men/women, parents/non-parents, married/single, and based on the quantity of working hours.

INTRODUCTION

Stress at work is a ubiquitous and multifaceted phenomenon (Lazarus, 1993) that is costly for organizations because it contributes to expensive voluntary turnover (Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984). Work stress can be a particular problem in customer-oriented fields because employees often experience conflicting demands of the company, supervisors, and customers, and these conflicts create dissonance for employees (Ruyter, Wetzels, & Feinberg, 2001).

Investigation into the nature and dimensions of work stress among employees is the first step in the management of this aspect of work (Cooper & Payne, 1988). Although there exists general agreement that addressing and reducing stress in the hospitality industry is not only a noble goal, but is capable of resulting in expense reductions for employers (Krone, Tabacchi, & Farber, 1989), the nature and quantity of hospitality employee stress is not fully understood. Research regarding stress in the hospitality industry remains an understudied topic with rich potential for positively affecting peoples' lives. Only by understanding the specific triggers of stress can workers be helped to effectively alleviate stress. This paper presents the results of recent research conducted in the U.S. hotel industry aiming to uncover the types and frequency of work- and family-related stressors of hotel managers and hourly employees.

LITERATURE REVIEW *International CHRIE Conference-Refereed Track, Event 30 [2009]*

Research has shown a negative correlation between job stress and quality customer service delivery, that is, less stressed employees provide better customer service than more stressed ones (Varca, 1999), and customer service employees reporting chronic stress exhibit particularly poor performance (Beehr, Jex, Stacy, & Murray, 2000). In general, work-related stress has been shown to result in declines in the quality of employee job performance (Lepine, Podakoff, & Lepine, 2005), increases in exhaustion, decreases in employee ability to learn (Lepine, Lepine, & Jackson, 2004), depression, hostility (Motowidlo, Packard, & Manning, 1986), and withdrawal (Gupta & Beehr, 1979). Specifically, recent research has found the work-related stressors of work-family conflict, role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, job insecurity, environmental uncertainty, and situational constraints to be negatively correlated with job performance (Gilboa, Shirom, Fried, & Cooper, 2008).

Within the hospitality industry, work stress has been regarded as one of the most important issues facing managers because, among other things, it affects the performance of all levels of employees, including both managers and hourly employees (Ross, 1995). Recent research has found that employee stress in the hospitality industry is important because it can result in workers becoming exhausted and cynical (Kim, 2008) which can have negative effects on service delivery. Stress within the hospitality industry has been correlated with employee physiological symptoms, including headaches, fatigue, indigestion, ulcers, blood pressure, heart attacks, and strokes (Krone, Tabacchi, & Farber, 1989), and thus can result in decreased productivity and increased health care costs for the hospitality employer.

Previous research has shown that work stress not only results in increased blood pressure at work, but also that physiological reactions continue after employees have left work, and potentially health-impairing responses to jobs carry over to home settings and pose a high long-term risk of health impairment (Fox, Dwyer, & Ganster, 1993). Besides the cost to employers' health care expenditures, the societal cost is an issue.

PRESENT STUDY

The present study aims to identify and explore what are the most common work stressors among employees at numerous hotels located throughout the United States, and the extent to which these stressors occur. Further, this study also develops and tests five hypotheses examining whether there are significant differences in the types and frequency of work and family stressors between managers/non-managers, men/women, parents/non-parents, married/unmarried, and depending on work hours.

Hypotheses Development

Previous research has shown there to be a higher negative correlation between stress and job performance among managers than non-managers (Gilboa, Shirom, Fried, & Cooper, 2008). Previous research regarding stress in the hospitality industry has not empirically analyzed the types of stress experienced by hospitality managers. Further, while previous research has analyzed differences in stress among managers and non-managers (Gilboa, Shirom, Fried, & Cooper, 2008), research in the hospitality industry has not yet focused on exploring such important issues. Therefore, we make the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Hotel managers will report a higher frequency of daily work stressors than hourly employees.

Other research has reported gender differences in stressful experiences, with women generally experiencing greater daily stress than men (Almeida & Kessler, 1998). Previous research regarding stress in the hospitality industry has not empirically analyzed the level of stress experienced by men versus women. Thus, we present the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Women, regardless of position, will report greater daily work and home stressors, than men.

Given that parents have more care responsibilities at home, we expected that parents will report more daily home-related stressors, on average, than non-parents. In addition, because home-related stress can carry over to, and can become work-related stress (Almeida & Kessler, 1998), we believe it is reasonable to expect parents to have higher levels of work stress, as well. Previous research regarding stress in the hospitality industry has not empirically analyzed the levels of stress experienced by parents versus non-parents. Therefore, we make the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Parents, regardless of position, will report greater daily work and home stressors, than non-parents.

Previous research has suggested that married employees tend to experience different types and levels of stress than unmarried employees (Kessler, 1979; Thoits, 1987). We expect that in addressing issues related to their spouse, married employees will experience more stress in their home lives than will single employees. However, previous research regarding stress in the hospitality industry has not empirically analyzed the levels of stress experienced by married versus single employees. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Married employees will report greater daily home stressors than non-married employees.

Previous research has found significant positive correlations between negative physiological and psychological health symptoms and hours spent working (Sparks, Cooper, Fried & Shirom, 1997). The hotel industry is a 24/7 business, and research in the hospitality industry has found positive correlations between work hours and emotional exhaustion (Krone, Tabacchi & Farber, 1989). Longer hours on the job likely mean more opportunities for stressors to arise. However, previous research regarding stress in the hospitality industry has not empirically analyzed the levels of work stress experienced by employees based on work hours. Therefore, we present the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Employees working more hours will report greater daily work stressors than employees working fewer hours.

METHOD

Participants and Procedures

This study is part of the Hotel Work & Well Being Project, funded by grants from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development. The Hotel Work & Well Being Project aims to explore issues related to work and family, including stress, at numerous levels in the hotel industry through interviews with corporate executives, general managers, department managers, and hourly employees. Participants were recruited from 65 full-service hotels across the United States by personal visits with the general managers, followed by on-site recruiting of other employees and then telephone interviews for eight consecutive days. Full-service hotels were the subject of this study because

the investigators desired to focus on hotel properties in which numerous managers and hourly workers were employed. The sample represents all U.S. regions and several different hotel location types, including city (47.7%), suburb (15.2%), airport (15.2%), and resort (21.9%). Most major hotel companies, including Marriott, Hilton, Hyatt, InterContinental, Starwood, Kimpton, Fairmont, and Wyndham were included in this study, including both franchised and corporate-managed units.

The data presented here are from hotel managers ($N = 98$) and hourly employees ($N = 66$) who completed a baseline survey followed by ‘daily diary’ telephone interviews for eight consecutive days. Though it was challenging to recruit and retain subjects for eight consecutive days, subjects were interviewed over that time period based on precedent established in previous daily diary research (Almeida, Wethington & Kessler, 2002) and to maximize likelihood of interviewing subjects on both work and non-work days. Subjects received \$50 gift cards in return for their participation. A slight majority (53%) of managers was men and 58 percent were parents. Seventy-eight percent of managers were married. Eighty percent of hourly employees were women and slightly more than half (55%) of the hourly employees were married. A criterion for participation among the hourly employees was that they were parents of at least one child between the ages of 10 and 17 because stress was expected to be particularly acute for such employees. Table 1 displays background characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. *Background characteristics of hotel managers (N = 98) and hourly employees (N = 66)*

	Hotel Managers			Hourly Employees		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Age (years)	38.01	9.70	23 – 61	40.32	7.40	24 - 55
Education (years)	14.99	1.58	12 – 18	12.98	1.52	11 - 16
Annual Income	\$60,230	\$23,444	\$24,000 – 140,000	\$26,194	\$9,806	\$1,525 – 45,000
Hotel worked per week	57.12	10.50	32 - 100	35.69	12.09	8 - 54
Years in hotel industry	13.28	8.85	0.58 – 35.00	9.88	7.58	1 - 33
Years in position	3.64	4.27	0 – 20.00	4.94	4.81	.08 – 20.58

There were significant differences between the two groups of employees. Hotel managers had significantly more education ($t(158) = 7.97, p < .01$), higher incomes ($t(136) = 12.28, p < .01$), worked significantly more hours per week ($t(159) = 11.93, p < .01$), and have been in the hotel industry longer ($t(159) = 2.56, p < .05$), on average, than hourly employees.

Measures

Daily work and home stressors were measured using the Daily Inventory of Stressful Events (DISE; Almeida, Wethington, & Kessler, 2002). During daily telephone calls for eight consecutive days, interviewers asked a series of stem questions (if subjects reported stressors, follow-up questions related to the nature of the stress) about whether the hotel worker had

experienced work and home stressors during the previous 24 hours. Work stressors included work arguments, work tensions, employee or co-worker related stressors, stressors involving hotel guests, and general work overloads (e.g., elevator malfunctioning). The question for home stressors was as follows: "Since this time yesterday, did anything happen at home that most people would consider stressful?" For each stressor experienced by subjects, interviewers probed regarding the content, the focus of who was involved, perceived threat (e.g., disappointment, loss), severity, and appraisal (i.e., areas of life that were at risk because of the stressor). Stressors were coded as 0 = *no stressor* and 1 = *stressor*. The mean across the eight days was calculated for each stressor; the value represented the percent of days each type of stressor was experienced.

Job type was coded as 0 for managers and 1 for hourly employees. *Parental status* was coded as 0 for non-parents and 1 for parents. *Gender* was coded as 0 for women and 1 for men. *Marital status* was coded 0 for single and 1 for married.

RESULTS

The first goal of the present study was to describe the type and frequency of daily work and family stressors experienced by hotel managers and hourly employees. Table 2 provides this information.

Table 2. *Type and frequency of daily work and family stressors experienced by hotel managers (N = 96) and hourly employees (N = 66)*

	<i>Hotel</i>		<i>Hourly</i>		Significant Difference
	<i>Managers</i>		<i>Employees</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Work arguments	.13	.18	.07	.14	*
Work tensions	.23	.23	.11	.14	*
Employee/coworker stressors	.14	.19	.04	.09	*
Hotel guest stressors	.09	.14	.03	.07	*
Work overloads	.20	.24	.08	.15	*
Home stressors	.12	.20	.06	.13	*

The frequency of stressors was calculated by averaging affirmative responses (i.e., yes the stressor occurred) across the eight days each subject was interviewed. The most frequent type of stressor experienced by hotel managers was work tensions, such as trying to avoid an argument; managers reported experiencing tensions at work on 23 percent of the days. The second most frequent work stressor for managers was work overloads, such as equipment breaking down, which occurred on 20 percent of the days. The other work stressors occurred on 9 to 14 percent of the days. Home stressors occurred on only 12 percent of the days among

Like hotel managers, the two most frequent stressors experienced by hourly employees were work tensions and work overloads, which they had on 11 and 8 percent of the days, respectively. Work arguments hotel guest stressors, employee/coworker stressors, and home stressors occurred on only three to seven percent of the days.

The second goal of the study was to determine whether frequency of daily stressors experienced differed by job type, gender, parental status, marital status, and work hours. Independent group t-tests were computed to investigate whether there were significant differences between the various groups. As shown in Table 2, hotel managers reported that they had the all types of stressors significantly more frequently across an eight-day period than hourly employees, specifically: work arguments ($t(159) = 2.34, p < .05$), work tensions ($t(159) = 3.94, p < .01$), employee/coworker stressors ($t(147) = 4.30, p < .01$), hotel guest stressors ($t(149) = 3.61, p < .01$), work overloads ($t(159) = 3.72, p < .01$), and home stressors ($t(162) = 2.21, p < .05$). Because managers had significantly higher levels of education and worked significantly more hours per week, we also tested Hypothesis 1 by controlling for education and work hours and ran regression models. Even with these covariates in the models, managers reported significantly more work tensions, employee/coworker stressors, guest stressors, and work overloads than hourly employees. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

There were no significant differences by gender. In terms of parental status, there were no significant differences based on whether or not hotel managers had children (note that 58% were parents, and 42% were non-parents). Recall that all hourly workers were parents in this sample so parental status differences could not be tested among hourly employees. Therefore, Hypotheses 2 and 3 were not supported.

Married employees reported more home stressors than unmarried employees, $t(156) = 3.17, p < .05$. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Finally, to test Hypothesis 5 regarding whether hotel employees who worked longer hours experienced more stressors across the eight days, we conducted regression analyses. Indeed, employees who worked longer hours on average reported significantly more work employee/coworker stressors ($B = .01, p < .05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

DISCUSSION

As a group, hotel employees are stressed-out, and interestingly, employees reported much more work-related than home-related stress. Although working with guests may at times be challenging and difficult, arguments and tensions among fellow employees turned out to be more prevalent than tensions and stressors related to guests.

The stress situation appears to be particularly acute for hotel managers. Managers may experience more work stress because of their generally higher levels of responsibility. Hotel managers in this study worked an average of 57 hours per week versus an average of 36 hours per week for non-managers, a statistically significant difference. The greater number of hours worked by managers versus hourly employees may contribute, along with their level of responsibility, to managers' level of work stress.

The greater number of hours per week worked by managers may contribute to their greater level of home stress compared to hourly employees. A greater number of hours spent at work may correlate with a lesser number of hours spent at home. Having less time to handle one's home life may not correlate with having fewer issues and problems to address at home, but may correlate with feelings of stress due to squeezing the resolution of problems into a limited time period. Having less time away from work may also correlate with having less down time and/or having less time to attend events related to one's children and family, and this situation could cause stress.

A surprising result was that we found no significant differences based on gender or parent status. Although this result does not necessarily indicate that no such differences exist in the hotel industry, this study was not able to detect such differences, and therefore, it cannot confirm previous research which found women to have greater stress than men.

On the other hand, we found married employees to experience significantly greater home stress than unmarried employees, as expected. This finding may suggest that unmarried employees in the hospitality industry may lead relatively simpler lives outside of work than do married employees. It may be that unmarried hotel employees benefit from close personal relationships at work without significant burdens of negative aspects of intimate relationships at home. Also, married employees need to coordinate their work schedules with their spouse when their spouse is employed, and married employees may have difficulty in coordinating other responsibilities with their spouse even when their spouse is not employed. This situation can be stressful.

We found that employees spending more time at work also had more negative, stressful events at work. Interestingly, spending more time at work was related to more negative stressful experiences with employees and coworkers, and this situation held true for both managers and hourly employees. This finding suggests that hotel managers and hourly employees working longer hours are not necessarily more likely than those working shorter hours to handle work arguments, tensions or overloads, or to handle more guest problems.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In conclusion, this study presents information regarding the most common stressors among hotel employees. Specifically, work-related arguments and tensions, coworker stressors, work overloads, and other employee/work-related stresses are prevalent issues in the U.S. hotel industry, based on our sample. Guest-related stressors appear to occur to less of an extent than employee/work-related stressors. Home-related stressors are also issues for hotel employees, but to a lesser greater degree than work-related stressors. Further, this study suggests that differences do exist between managers and hourly hotel employees regarding the types and quantity of stress in their lives. Specifically, managers are significantly more likely than hourly employees to report stressors of all types, and these stressors are not only related to both employees and guests at work, but to their home lives, as well.

Although the results of this study have not established a concrete link between stress and organizational cost in the form of turnover, health care expenditures, and poor delivery of guest

service, it is important for hotel organization leaders to recognize that such links have been made in previous research. Further, the results of this study suggest that stress problems appear to be most significant among hotel managers – employees who are particularly expensive to recruit, orient, and train. On the other hand, it is entirely plausible that not all stress results in negative outcomes. Some level of stressful experience may provide positive effects such as motivation or education, an area worthy of future investigation.

As with any research, the results of this study should be interpreted with qualifications. First, this study only includes employee self-reports regarding stress. Direct observation was not feasible, and furthermore, direct observation is prone to researcher bias. In addition, to recruit a sufficient number of employees from each hotel, employees of limited-service hotels were not included in this study. As limited-service hotels may have different requirements, challenges and culture for employees than full-service hotels, the results of this study may not be generalizable to the limited service segment. Lastly, the subject study is limited to the United States, though it includes all regions of the U.S. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, future research regarding stress should include non-American culture and then compare the results in different cultural settings.

Though we did not find significant differences in the level of stress experienced by parents versus non-parents, it does not mean that differences would not be found in a larger sample. Due to the experimental design involving interviewing subjects for eight consecutive days, recruiting and retaining subjects for this study was challenging, particularly considering the very busy lives of our subjects. Specifically, the sample was limited to 98 managers, 58 percent of whom were parents, in addition to 66 hourly employees, all of whom were parents (the hourly employee portion of the study was funded by *National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development*, necessitating all subjects be parents). Therefore, the differences in levels of stress of parents and non-parents could only be examined for 98 managers. Future research should investigate differences in stress levels among parents and non-parents using a larger sample which could provide greater statistical power and such work should include hourly employees.

To improve the productivity, performance, and health of hotel employees at all levels, it is imperative that researchers continue to investigate the types and severity of stressors to have specific targets for prevention and intervention. Future research can build on the present study by assessing the appraisal of the various types of stressors as well as determining whether single types of stressors or combinations of stressors have the most detrimental work and health implications.

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