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The Influence of Workplace Stress and Psychological Safety on the Well-Being of Filipino Employees

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ABSTRACT

Psychological safety and workplace stress are critical organizational behaviors in understanding workplace dynamics and employee well-being. This cross-sectional study investigates the relationship between workplace stress and psychological safety of randomly selected tenured Filipino employees (n=145), revealing significant implications for organizational health and employee well-being. The results indicate a moderate level of workplace stress, with the majority of respondents experiencing daily stress, while psychological safety has an average level, indicative of a conducive work environment but with areas for improvement. A significant negative correlation was revealed ($r = -0.242$, $p = 0.003$), signifying that higher perceived stress levels are associated with lower psychological safety. This relationship emphasizes the importance of a psychologically safe workplace, where employees can openly express concerns and seek help, thereby mitigating stress-related issues. Recommendations include implementing targeted interventions to enhance psychological safety, alongside stress management programs that promote mental health resources and coping strategies. Additionally, organizations should encourage open discussions about mental health to combat stigma and create an inclusive workplace culture. Regular assessments of employee well-being can further inform organizational strategies to improve workplace conditions. Overall, this research highlights the critical need for organizations in the Philippines to prioritize psychological safety as a means to enhance employee engagement and to improve overall performance and well-being within the workforce.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a complex bodily response that involves physiological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. This response arises when an individual perceives that external pressures or demands exceed their personal ability to cope effectively. Workplace stress, in particular, is a significant concern for researchers, employees, and employers alike. This is due to its wide-ranging implications on individual well-being, productivity, and overall organizational outcomes. The existing literature on this topic explores the nature of work-related stress, highlighting its various causal factors and consequences.

Workplace stress is increasingly recognized as a critical issue that affects individuals across various industries and countries. Research indicates that work-related stressors are more frequently reported than those associated with other life roles, highlighting the pervasive nature of this phenomenon (Lottrup *et al.*, 2012). This ongoing challenge is significantly influenced by rising industrial demands, complex workplace dynamics, and the need for organizations to prioritize employee well-being. Nowadays, workplaces become more fast-paced and competitive which make it crucial for employers to implement strategies that foster a supportive and healthy work environment and ultimately benefit both the organization and its employees.

A recent study by De Jager (2024) revealed alarming

statistics regarding workplace stress in the United States, with approximately 43% of workers reporting feelings of tension or stress during their workdays. Additionally, 15% described their workplaces as toxic, while 44% of younger workers indicated they had left their jobs due to burnout. Notably, 59% of employees under 35 reported experiencing work-related stress, with women being affected the most. In the Philippines, these trends are also evident. According to a Deloitte study, 70% of Generation Z and 63% of millennials report experiencing burnout due to excessive workload demands which is seen significantly higher than the global averages of 45% for burnout (Mind You, 2022). Further, a Gallup survey found that 50% of Filipino workers experience stress throughout the day, making it the highest rate in Southeast Asia (Royandoyan, 2022). These surveys highlighted that Filipino employees frequently deal with negative feelings in their daily work lives.

Additionally, 15% described their workplaces as toxic, while 44% of younger workers indicated they had left their jobs due to burnout. Notably, 59% of employees under 35 reported experiencing work-related stress, with women being affected the most. In the Philippines, these trends are also evident. According to a Deloitte study, 70% of Generation Z and 63% of millennials report experiencing burnout due to excessive workload demands, which is significantly higher than the global averages of 45% for burnout (Mind You, 2022). Furthermore, a Gallup survey

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found that 50% of Filipino workers experience stress throughout the day, making it the highest rate in Southeast Asia (Royandoyan, 2022). These statistics highlight the significant challenges Filipino employees face in their daily work lives, including grappling with negative emotions and feeling overwhelmed by the demands of their jobs. The high prevalence of burnout and stress among younger workers in the Philippines is particularly concerning, along with its long-term impact on their well-being, productivity, and overall career trajectories. Addressing these issues through workplace policies, mental health support, and a culture of psychological safety add to the growing demand for organizations in the Philippines to support the well-being and engagement of their workforce.

There are several causal factors of work-related stress. Organizational factors can be traced from the unrealistic demands of management, poor communication, and lack of support (Bhui *et al.*, 2016). Aside from psychosocial factors, evidence showed that the physical work environment or the workspace also plays a crucial role in employee stress levels. Poor working conditions such as noise, inadequate lighting, and discomfort can exacerbate workplace stress (Sander *et al.*, 2019; Vischer, 2007).

Often highlighted by most studies, there are individual characteristics that also influence how employees experience stress in the workplace. A study on employee affective well-being showed neuroticism level negatively predicted job-related well-being while extraversion level positively influenced it (Rahimi *et al.*, 2021). Thus, individuals with low emotional stability have high chances to experience stress. In addition, how employees cope with stress significantly influences their experience of workplace stress. Employees who rely on emotion-focused strategies tend to experience higher levels of stress (Spaan *et al.*, 2024). Training employees in effective coping mechanisms is seen as crucial to mitigate the detrimental effects of workplace stress both on a personal and organizational level.

Workplace stress is intricately linked to various health outcomes, significantly impacting both physical and mental well-being. Chronic exposure to stress can lead to both physical and mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and cardiovascular problems (Cho, 2023). In the Philippines, recent studies reveal alarming trends regarding mental health and workplace stress of Filipino employees. A recent report indicated that 47% of Filipino workers reported experiencing anxiety symptoms due to work-related stress, while 46% experienced burnout (Desiderio, 2023).

These implications could extend beyond individual health. Organizations likely face higher trend of absenteeism, reduced job satisfaction, and higher turnover rates as a result of employee stress (Lin *et al.*, 2024; Saleh & Shahidan, 2023; Leontaridi & Ward-Warmedinger, 2002; Salama *et al.*, 2022). These outcomes of workplace stress have significant economic consequences. Organizations are continually confronted to balance productivity while

ensuring employee well-being and safety. Relatively, Filipino workers experience significantly higher work-related mental health issues than the global average, indicating a critical need for organizations to address the challenge proactively (Inquirer, 2024). High rates of workplace stress among Filipino employees contribute to increased absenteeism and turnover rates with 58% reported that their colleagues resigned due to work pressure, indicating a higher statistic than the global average (Mind You, 2022).

Psychological safety is a crucial consideration in the context of industrial-organizational behavior, as it fosters a work environment that promotes employee well-being. The concept was first introduced by Amy Edmondson in the 1990s, referring to the shared belief among team or organizational members that it is safe to take interpersonal risks (Frazier *et al.*, 2016). As a cognitive state, psychological safety allows employees to feel secure in expressing their ideas, concerns, and engaging in the learning process without fear of negative consequences. According to the study by Sapra and Kumar (2020), psychological safety relates to personal feelings of freedom from anxiety and the ability to address one's own needs, reflected in a work environment characterized by trust and openness. Researchers have identified various factors that contribute to the development of psychological safety, including both individual and team-level factors. Meanwhile, a study by Newman *et al.* (2017) found that personality traits, prior experiences, perceived peer and supervisor support, and the quality of interpersonal relationships among team members highly influence an employee's sense of psychological safety. The cultivation of psychological safety is essential for organizations, as it can lead to improved employee engagement, creativity, and overall organizational performance. When employees feel safe to take risks, express their ideas, and address their concerns, they are more likely to be proactive, innovative, and committed to their work, ultimately benefiting the organization as a whole.

Psychological safety is widely recognized as a crucial precursor to positive organizational outcomes (Edmondson & Bransby, 2022). In the evolving work landscape, it plays a critical role in enabling employees to not only grow and learn, but also contribute and perform effectively within the organization. When psychological safety is present, employees are more likely to engage in constructive dialogue, provide honest feedback, and challenge the status quo, ultimately leading to better decision-making and superior organizational performance.

Although the study of psychological safety among employees in the Philippines is gaining attention, it remains relatively underexplored compared to other regions. However, with a small percentage of Filipino employees feeling comfortable discussing mental health issues with their supervisors, there appears to be a gap in psychological safety within many organizations. While the importance of this psychological construct for employee

well-being and organizational performance is increasingly recognized, comprehensive studies addressing this aspect in the Philippine context are still limited. The existing literature emphasizes the need for further investigation into how psychological safety can be effectively promoted in Filipino workplaces to enhance employee engagement and mitigate stress-related issues. Therefore, despite the emerging research on workplace stress and its implications for mental health in the Philippines, more extensive studies specifically addressing psychological safety are necessary to inform effective organizational practices and interventions.

Significance of the Study

Employee stress in the workplace is a complex issue with significant implications for individual overall health and organizational performance. This study aims to investigate the relationship and how workplace stress and psychological safety impacts the Filipino workforce. As a need assessment, an intervention will be further recommended to improve Filipino organizational resilience to effectively manage their perceived workplace stress and psychological safety.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research design is composed of key components that are carefully structured to ensure a comprehensive observation and analysis of the variables studied. The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between perceived workplace stress and psychological safety among a sample of Filipino employees. A total of 145 voluntary participants took part in the research. The demographic characteristics of the sample revealed a mean age of 41.4 years, with 77% of the respondents identifying as male and 23% as female. The researcher obtained permission from selected organizations in Bataan, Philippines. Respondents were selected through a random sampling method to ensure they were representative of the population being studied. Additionally, the researcher ensured that participants had been employed at their current workplace for at least one year, which was necessary to capture their experiences and perceptions of workplace stress and psychological safety over a period of time.

Research Instruments

The study employed two instruments to assess the selected respondents' perceived workplace stress and psychological safety. The first was the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), developed by Cohen *et al.* (1983), which measures the degree to which individuals perceive a given situation as stressful. The PSS reliability coefficient ranges from 0.70 to 0.80, and the scale is formatted as a five-point scale from "never" (response of 0) to "very often" (response of 4), with total scores categorized into low, moderate, and high stress levels. The second instrument was the psychological safety scale introduced by Edmonson (1999), which exhibited a computed

Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, indicating sound psychometric properties for research purposes. This scale is formatted as a five-point scale from "strongly disagree" (response of 1) to "strongly agree" (response of 5), allowing for the assessment of employees' perceptions of psychological safety within their workplace.

Data Collection

Respondents were provided an informed consent form to obtain their consent and ensure they fully understood the voluntary nature of their participation in the survey, as well as the minimal risks involved. The researcher coordinated with their respective human resources offices to facilitate the dissemination of the questionnaires. Respondents were carefully informed about the confidentiality of the information they provided and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Each respondent completed the forms within a span of twenty minutes.

Statistical Treatment

The researcher ran statistical data analysis using Jamovi application. Descriptive statistics was used to obtain the means and frequencies characterizing the demographic information, overall stress levels, and perceptions of psychological safety of the study respondents. Additionally, a parametric test with the use of Pearson product-moment correlation was employed in determining the relationship between overall stress and psychological safety. Furthermore, regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive value of overall stress on employees' psychological safety.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The workplace stress of the respondents showed a mean of 1.76 which translates to a moderate stress level. Based on the category, both perceived helplessness and lack of self-efficacy also showed moderate elevation. These reflect the significant challenges of Filipino workers relating to mental health, job satisfaction, and overall workplace conditions. Majority of Filipino employees experience a lot of stress on a daily basis, ranking as the highest in Southeast Asia (Mateo, 2022).

Meanwhile, results of psychological safety showed a mean of 3.90 which means on average they receive support and emotional safety in the workplace. A particular item about individual safety at work has the lowest mean response of 2.87 while an item asking about team learning has the highest mean of 4.23. These results reveal an important insight into the workplace experiences and challenges of the Filipino workforce. The variance of psychological safety relates to a survey result that 38% of Filipino workers rated their experience of workplace psychological safety as poor (Desiderio, 2023). This norm showed how workplaces have a discrepant environment to foster employee wellness and growth.

The correlation analysis between perceived stress

and psychological safety among employees reveals a statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.242$, $p = 0.003$), indicating that as perceived stress increases,

Table 1: Correlation between Workplace Stress and Psychological Safety

Correlation Matrix		
Variables	r	p-value
Overall Stress; Psychological Safety	-0.242*	0.003

Note. * $p < .01$

psychological safety tends to decrease. The negative correlation suggests that employees experiencing higher stress levels may feel less secure and supported in their work environment, aligning with theories such as the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which posits that perceived support enhances employees' ability to cope with stressors (Jindal *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, this result emphasizes the necessity for organizations to foster a psychologically safe environment, as highlighted in studies that demonstrate how supportive management practices can mitigate the adverse effects of stress. By prioritizing psychological safety, organizations can enhance employee engagement and reduce turnover intentions, ultimately leading to improved overall performance and well-being. The regression analysis conducted to further examine the relationship between perceived stress and psychological safety among employees reveals significant insights in the workplace dynamics. The model fit measures indicate

Table 2: Goodness of Fit of Variables

R	R ²
0.242	0.0584

a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.242 and the goodness of fit (R^2) resulted in 0.0584, which indicates that approximately 5.84% of the variance in psychological safety can be attributed to overall stress levels. This relationship aligns with existing literature that highlights the detrimental effects of stress on employee well-being and organizational outcomes.

The intercept indicates a baseline level of psychological safety at 49.79 in the absence of stress, which is statistically significant and considered as a true estimate ($p < .001$). A study by Meunier *et al.* (2022) found out the critical role of

Table 3: Regression Analysis Results

Model Coefficients - Psychological Safety				
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	49.790	2.307	21.58	< .001
Overall Stress	-0.385	0.129	-2.99	0.003

psychological safety as a buffer against adverse effects of perceived stress. Hence, absence of stressful encounters in the workplace will be beneficial for employees to function effectively and improve job performance, more so in alleviating negative mental health outcomes.

The estimate for overall stress (-0.385) signifies that each unit increase in stress correlates with a decrease in psychological safety, as supported by the correlation results. The effect of overall stress on psychological safety is statistically significant ($p = 0.003$) and supports the assumption that addressing employee stress is vital for fostering a psychologically safe workplace. This is consistent with a study that found out environments perceived as psychologically safe allow employees to express concerns without fear, thereby reducing stress and enhancing job satisfaction (Hebles *et al.*, 2022; Mecsek, 2023).

In general, this cross-sectional study can be utilized to inform interventions aimed at reducing stress levels and improve psychological well-being of individuals in different organizations.

Discussion

The main result of the study is the negative relationship between perceived workplace stress and psychological safety. The perception of psychological safety significantly impacts employee mental health in the Philippines and informs organizations to improve the work condition and inclusivity in terms of career growth and health. A survey indicated that 38% of Filipino employees feel uncomfortable discussing mental health issues with supervisors, primarily due to fears of judgment and discrimination. Many employees report discomfort in discussing mental health issues due to fears of judgment, resulting in a feeling that psychological safety is poorly implemented in their workplaces (Desiderio, 2023). This lack of psychological safety can have detrimental effects on employee well-being and productivity, as workers may be reluctant to voice concerns or seek help for mental health struggles. Fostering a culture of psychological safety, where employees feel safe to be vulnerable and speak openly about their mental health, is crucial for organizations to support their workforce and promote a positive and inclusive work environment.

A decrease of psychological safety in workplaces leaves employees feeling hesitant to seek psychological support. As a result, employees tend to inhibit open communication, leading to increased anxiety and burnout, with 47% and 46% of employees reporting these symptoms, respectively (Desiderio, 2023). A key element in fostering psychological safety in a workplace is interpersonal trust wherein mutual respect is given daily and enables employees to be comfortable being themselves (Jjsc, 2024). When properly promoted, high psychological safety results in better performance and lower interpersonal conflicts and reduces stress. Employees are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors that promote personal engagement at work, ultimately enhancing organizational culture and productivity. Studies also attest that psychological safety is a key element of employee performance which also sets a psychologically safe climate for self-expression and individual's contribution to group performance that enhances team processes (Kim *et al.*, 2020), alleviate burnout rates and enable an individual to better cope in

stressful situations (Kerrisey *et al.*, 2022).

Meanwhile, stress also resulted as a significant predictor in terms of psychological safety promotion. Stress often plays a critical role in mental health concerns and difficulties encountered in the workplace which results in serious health conditions. A study showed that 70.71% of Filipino workers reported experiencing burnout which is the highest among Southeast Asian countries surveyed (Aziz & Ong, 2024). In recent years, Filipino workers often report work-related mental health problems. Lack of awareness and little regard of the workplace's role in their mental health struggles aggravates this issue (CEDTyClea, 2024). In the workplace culture, employees often perceive management practices via effort-reward imbalance and role ambiguity. Hence, the sensitivity of employers and management in promoting wellbeing is also important for the mental health needs of the workplace. Implementing mental health training programs in accordance to the mental health law, providing safe spaces for employees to discuss their concerns and promoting open and non-judgmental dialogue about mental health within the workplace (Lally *et al.*, 2019) are necessary mechanisms to mitigate these concerns.

Recommendation

To manage workplace stress and enhance psychological safety, organizations should implement a holistic approach that prioritizes employee well-being. The first step is understanding psychological safety. Organizations are advised to create an environment where employees feel comfortable expressing their concerns without fear of negative repercussions. This can be achieved by establishing open communication channels, encouraging supportive management practices, and providing training programs that foster interpersonal trust among team members.

Additionally, organizations can implement a mechanism for stress management interventions tailored to the unique challenges of employees, such as offering resources for mental health support and promoting work-life balance. To combat the stigma surrounding mental health issues, it is crucial to encourage open discussions within the workplace, providing platforms for employees to share their experiences and challenges. This not only enhances psychological safety but also helps reduce feelings of isolation among workers. In addition, stress management interventions for both individual and organizational level is seen as effective in dealing with stress reduction (Holman *et al.*, 2018) through self-help mindfulness training of employees and job redesign as well as changing unhealthy organizational practices.

Furthermore, regular assessments of employee well-being through feedback mechanisms can help organizations identify areas for improvement and monitor progress over time. By proactively addressing workplace stressors, organizations can create a healthier work environment that boosts employee engagement, productivity, and overall job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The study contributes to an important link between perceived workplace stress and psychological safety that is critical for understanding employee well-being. The results emphasize the need for organizations to recognize the serious implications of workplace stress on psychological safety and employee overall health. By fostering an environment that prioritizes psychological safety and actively addressing sources of stress, organizations can enhance employee satisfaction, reduce attrition, and ultimately improve organizational performance. Creating a supportive workplace culture is not merely beneficial for employees; it is essential for achieving long-term organizational success.

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