

Occupational Stress among Anganawadi Workers in Kerala State, India: Implications in Psychiatric Social Work

BT Aswathy¹, Renjith R. Pillai²

¹MSW Trainee, ²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Social Work, Central University of Kerala, India

ABSTRACT

Background: Stress related to one's job is referred as occupational stress. It occurs due to unexpected responsibilities and pressure on the person. The Anganawadi workers under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme are the grass root level workers in India. They are expected to do all the holistic activities related to Anganawadi children, adolescent girls and breast feeding mothers. Apart from that they are assigned to do surveys, election work, polio irradiation program and so on. All these additional activities apart from their routine work can lead to extreme stress among Anganawadi workers. The present study was conducted among the Anganawadi workers of Kasargod district in Kerala to unearth the level of occupational stress experienced by them. **Methodology:** A descriptive research design is used in the study. The universe of the study was Kanhangad additional area in Kasargod, Kerala. From the master list of Anganawadi workers working in the three panchayath under the block, namely Pallikkara, Pullur-Periye and Uduma, thirty (30) were randomly selected as respondents (sample). Anganawadi workers in service at least for the past one year and have given written consent were only included in the study. Data was collected from the respondents using (1) a socio-demographic profile and (2) Occupational Stress scale^[1]. Approval for the study was granted by the research committee of the Department of Social Work, Central University of Kerala and the data collection was completed in the month of November, 2016. **Results:** Data was analyzed to unearth the level of occupational stress among the respondents. It revealed that 83.3% Anganawadi workers were experiencing moderate level of stress and another 16.7% reported severe stress. Also, workers with lesser experience in service perceived higher occupational stress. **Conclusion:** Occupational stress is a reality among Anganawadi workers. Departmental intervention, implementation of stress management to harmonize the personal, professional and social life of the workers, booster training and handholding exercises, preparation of stress information materials and its dissemination among workers are suggested.


Key words: Occupation, stress, ICDS, anganawadi workers

INTRODUCTION

Work-related stress or occupational stress can be defined as a pattern of emotional, cognitive, behavioural

and physiological reactions to adverse and noxious aspects of work content, work organization and work environment^[2]. It emerges when a person is piled up with

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Address for the Correspondence : Dr. Renjith R. Pillai, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Central University of Kerala, Tejaswini Hills, Periye P.O., Kasargod (DT), Kerala - 671316, India. Email: renjithpsw@gmail.com

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unexpected responsibilities and that he or she has inadequate or no skills, required knowledge and ability to manage the same. Being in a comfortable work environment with cordial colleagues make one immune to occupational stress. Lack of such a scenario often worsens the situation of an individual overburdened with work.

ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) was launched in 1975, in accordance to the National Policy for Children in India. ICDS provides food, preschool education and primary healthcare to children less than 6 years of age and their mothers, adolescent girls and nursing mothers. These services are provided from Anganawadi centers established mainly in rural areas. An Anganawadi worker, the point person of such centers is a woman who is selected from within the local community. The responsibility of the Anganawadi workers includes health surveys, health checkup of the pregnant ladies and children, non-formal pre-school activities, health education, providing supplementary nutrition, providing family planning services, dealing with adolescent health and so on. These responsibilities require multi-tasking and may lead to tremendous stress among Anganawadi workers. Anganawadi workers are females and hence it needs to be looked within the documented research finding that women experience more occupational stress than men^[3].

In a study among grass root level workers at a PHC in Bagalkot, Karnataka 70.67% reported mental stress in the past one year. In terms of the severity 66.67% respondents reported severe stress and another 26.67% experienced moderate stress^[4]. In another study^[5] from Mangalore, India the authors have identified 12% respondents as being in stress due to work pressure. The study^[6] by Shobha and her colleagues reported distress among 6.92% and stress among 4.61% Anganawadi workers.

It is felt that occupational stress among Anganawadi workers are less documented and addressed. Such information is vital for improving quality of services rendered by them as it helps in improving the mental health of the workers thereby enhancing the performance and productivity of the workers. The aim of this study thus was to assess the level of stress among Anganawadi workers, its relation to years of work

experience and discuss the implications of the findings in psychiatric social work.

METHODOLOGY

The field work unit of the Social Work Department, Central University of Kerala works closely with the ICDS sector, Kasargod District under the Ministry of Social Justice, Government of Kerala. Trainee MSW students collaborating with individual centres for their field work have witnessed the multiple roles and the resultant stress endured by the Anganawadi workers. A need was thus felt to systematically document the same as a first step for properly understanding and suggesting possible interventions.

A quantitative research with a descriptive design was hence decided. Thirty (30) Anganawadi workers were randomly selected as sample from three village panchayats namely Pallikkara, Pullur-Periye and Ajanoor under Kanhangad additional area in Kasargod District with necessary permissions from the concerned officials. Data collection was done using the following tools (1) *self-developed demographic data sheet*: It had questions for eliciting the details of the participants such as age, sex, marital status, religion, caste, place of living, number of family members, educational status and work experience (2) *Occupational Stress Test*:^[1] It is a 20-item questionnaire for measuring the level of occupational stress with three response options for each item. A score of 1, 2 and 3 is given for the responses "never", "sometimes" and "often" respectively. A higher score denotes greater occupational stress among the participants.

The tools were translated into regional language (Malayalam from English) for better understanding. Translation and back translation was done with the help of experts well versed in both the languages. Research Committee of the Department of Social Work, Central University of Kerala approved the study. Consequent to the approval, a pilot test (sample size=3) was undertaken. Corrections were made in the tools based on the inputs of the pilot study.

During the main study, informed consent was taken from the respondents before the data collection. It was explained to the respondents that their participation in the study shall be voluntary and the exercise would not

fetch any monetary benefits for them. The study was completed in the month of November, 2016.

RESULTS

The data was analyzed using SPSS software at Central University of Kerala. The major findings of the study are prepared under the following subheadings: (1) the socio-demographic profile of the participants (2) the stress experienced by the Anganwadi workers and (3) occupational stress and years of experience of the Anganwadi workers.

Socio-demographic Profile

Thirty (30) married female Anganwadi workers participated in the present study. It was seen that 83.3% of the participants were Hindus, 13.3% were Christians and 3.3% were Muslims. A little less than half (40%) of the respondents belonged to other eligible community (OEC), 26.7% belonged to general community and a little less than one fourth respondents (23.3%) belonged to other backward community (OBC). The representation of scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) respondents were 3.3% and 6.7% respectively. The mean age of Anganawadi workers were 44 years (table-1) and mean years of education was 10.7 years. The mean number of members in the family of the respondents was 4.

Table 1

Socio-demographic profile of the Respondents

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Age (in years)	32	56	44.40	7.504
Number of Family Members	2	8	4.43	1.478
Years of Education	10	15	10.70	1.208
Work Experience (in years)	5	35	13.90	8.576

Stress among Anganwadi Workers

It was seen that 83.3% Anganawadi workers experienced moderate stress and another 16.7% experienced severe stress related to their occupation.

Occupational stress and years of experience of the Anganwadi workers

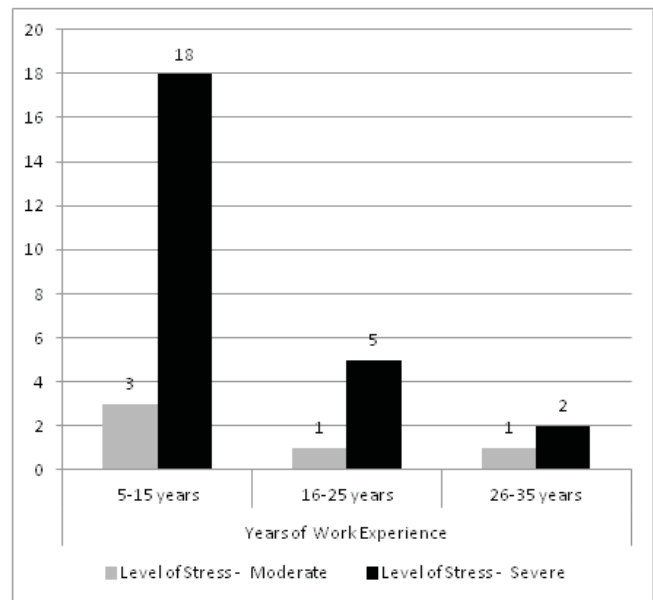
The minimum and maximum work experience in this study was 5 years and 35 years respectively; average

being 8.57 years (table-2). The occupational stress among Anganwadi workers in the age group 5-15 years were more than those who were in the age group 16-25 years and 26-35 years (figure-1).

Table 2

Level of stress among the participants

Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Level of stress	Moderate	25	83.3
	Severe	5	16.7
	Total	100	100



DISCUSSION

Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) is perhaps one of the world's largest programmes launched with the aim of all-inclusive growth of children. Anganwadi workers, the torch bearers of this programme are thus an indispensable women work force in the welfare sector of every state in India. However, multiple roles expected out of them often produce job stress at varied levels in most of them. This was found true in the present study where it was found that majority of respondents had moderate to severe occupational stress. Similar findings were reported by other researchers also [4,7]. The result calls for serious introspection among the higher authorities in the concerned department. There is felt need among the Anganwadi workers to teach them to harmonize stress

at the personal, professional, social and family life. Stress management programmes are thus necessary and should be undertaken for the Anganwadi workers. Community level workers like anganwadi workers will be able to identify the causes of stress and de-stress themselves through such training programmes^[8].

Researchers have the opinion that merely focusing on interventions with the individuals will be a futile exercise and organizational initiative should also be in place to address the burn out issues of the workers^[9]. Therefore the stress management programmes for grass root level functionaries such as Anganwadi workers generally should go at two levels (a) individual focused and (b) organization focused.

It was felt that this study could have been better if the various determinants of the occupational stress were also taken into account. A future study covering this aspect along with a need assessment among the anganwadi workers would be vital in developing a stress management module for them. Another aspect that also could be looked into can be the finding of the present study that Anganwadi workers with more work experience were having lesser stress among them. The approaches and coping strategies adopted by experienced Anganwadi workers in bringing down their stress level needs to be understood and disseminated.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The implications of the findings of the present study are given below: (a) There is no individual without stress. Stress is part of human life. Stress at a mild level (eustress) enhances the performance of an individual. However when the same goes beyond a certain tolerable level, it can become problematic, especially if one lacks the skills and knowledge to manage it (b) Community work in which an Anganwadi worker is engaged in is essentially stressful and exhausting. Recognizing the symptoms of stress, continued application of stress management techniques and addressing burn out issues keeps can keep a person in a balanced state (c) Stress Management programme for the Anganwadi workers

with periodical booster and handholding sessions can be undertaken by the schools of social work as well as mental health professionals/institutions (d) Sensitization and advocacy to the higher officials of the concerned Government Department for policy level decisions on occupational stress among Anganwadi workers and its management strategies is essential (e) There is a scope for developing manuals, pamphlets on stress management at workplace and its dissemination among Anganwadi workers.

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