

## Organizational Role Stress: Perceptions of Women Agricultural Assistants from Kerala

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### ABSTRACT

*Stresses disrupt the physical or psychological functioning of individuals. Occupational Stress occurs in a reaction to events or situations in the work environment. Different studies have classified occupational stress in terms of different aspects such as physical environment, role stressors, organizational structure, job characteristics and professional relationships. Organizational Role Stress (ORS) is defined as the stress resulting from the occupation of an organizational role and performing or not being able to perform therein (Pareek.1983). The present study has been undertaken to understand the perceived organizational role stress by the women agricultural assistants from Kerala State Department of Agriculture. Expost- facto research design was followed in the study. A sample comprising of 120 women agricultural assistants were selected through multistage random sampling. Organizational role stress was measured using a Likert-type scale, which consisted of two broad groups of stressors namely family role stressor and work role stressors. The scale was pre-tested during pilot study and Cronbach's alpha found to be 0.95 which was significant. The study found that except role erosion stressor, all other role stressors were at moderate or high level. Further, non-parametric two-way analysis showed that there was a highly significant difference between different stressors. Stress due to role overload followed by inter-role distance was the major problem with mean ranks 9.783 and 7.871 respectively.*

**Key words:** Organizational role stress; Occupational stress; Extension personnel;

**S**tress is an inevitable thing resulting from changing socio-economic and technological situations. Stress resulting from the occupation of an organizational role and performing or not being able to perform therein is known as Organizational Role Stress (ORS) (Pareek.1983). Sauter, Lim and Murphy (1996) defined occupational stress as the harmful physical and emotional responses that arise when the demands of a job do not match the worker's abilities, resources or needs. Thus stress has been linked to a number of aspects of working life. Different studies have classified occupational stress in terms of physical environment, role stressors, organizational structure, job characteristics, professional relationships, career development and work-versus-family conflict (Burke,

1993). Studies conducted by Burke (1988), Defrank and Ivancevich (1998), Sparks and Cooper (1999), Nelson and Burke (2000) and Johnson et al, (2005) has found that work overload, lack of power, role ambiguity and role conflict can lead to stress. Macklin et al., (2006) found that there was a significant difference in the stress levels between genders, i.e. female employees are subject to greater stress than males.

Stresses disrupt the physical or psychological functioning of individuals. Occupational Stress occurs in a reaction to events or situations in the work environment. Every individual undergo role stress while performing their roles irrespective of the organization to which they belong. This stress may differ in degree

depending on both personal and environmental factors. Hence, in the present study an attempt has been made to study the organizational role stress perceived by the women agricultural officers in Kerala. The study aims to understand the various roles stressors affecting the women agricultural assistants.

## METHODOLOGY

For the present study, the research design followed was *Ex-post-facto*. According to *Kerlinger (1964)* “*an ex-post-facto research is a systematic empirical enquiry in which the researcher does not have direct control over the variables because their manifestations have already occurred or because they are inherently manipulable*”. Preliminary survey was conducted and the secondary data were analyzed to select the state for the present study. Considering the data and the availability of sufficient sample, the state of Kerala was purposively selected for the study. Multistage random sampling technique was adopted for the study. During first stage, districts were selected and in second stage, respondents were selected. The primary data was collected through survey method using structured and semi-structured interview schedules and focused group discussion.

Organizational role stress in this study is operationalized as anything about an organizational role that produces an adverse consequence situation which will force a person to deviate from normal functioning due to the change in their psychological and physiological condition. In this study, it was measured through Organizational Role Stress Scale developed by *Udai Pareek (1983)* which consists ten role stressors namely Inter-Role Distance (IRD), Self-Role Distance (SRD), Role Isolation (RI), Role Ambiguity (RA), Role Expectation Conflict (REC), Resource Inadequacy (RI), Personal Inadequacy (PI), Role Stagnation (RS), Role Erosion (RE) and Role Overload (RO). ORS is a five-point scale (0-4), containing 5 items for each role stressor and a total of 50 items. Thus the total scores on each role stressor range from 0 to 20.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Organizational role stress was measured through Organizational Role Stress Scale developed by *Udai*

*Pareek (1983)*. The scale consisted of ten role stressors which reflect two broad categories of stressors namely family role stressor and work role stressors. To get the total scores for each role stress the ratings given by each respondent were totalled horizontally for each of the 5 items. These scores were then categorized into three levels of role stressors namely low, median and high. Based on median and quartile deviations, the standard norms suggested for low, median and high levels of the ten role stressors by *Khanna (1985)* was used for this study. These norms were used for analyzing the data on each respondent's score on all the ten role stressors.

**Table 1. Norms by Khanna (1985) for classifying different role stressors**

| Stressors                       | Low | Moderate | High |
|---------------------------------|-----|----------|------|
| Inter Role Distance (IRD)       | 2   | 5        | 8    |
| Self Role Distance (SRD)        | 3   | 5        | 9    |
| Role Isolation (RI)             | 3   | 6        | 9    |
| Role Ambiguity (RA)             | 1   | 3        | 7    |
| Role Expectation Conflict (REC) | 2   | 4        | 7    |
| Resource Inadequacy (RI)        | 2   | 5        | 8    |
| Personal Inadequacy (PI)        | 2   | 4        | 8    |
| Role Stagnation (RS)            | 2   | 5        | 8    |
| Role Erosion (RE)               | 7   | 9        | 12   |
| Role Overload (RO)              | 1   | 3        | 6    |

Levels of different role stressors for women agricultural assistants showed that inter-role distance, role overload, role ambiguity and role expectation conflict were high. Similar findings were given by studies conducted by *Malik and Sabharwal (1999)*. Similarly, *Anshu et al., (2013)* found in their study that inter-role distance as the most prominent role stressors among the employees. Inter-role distance arises due to the conflict between departmental and other roles while the role overload results from the large variations between the expected output and the actual output. High level of role ambiguity indicates that the women agricultural assistants were not clear about the various expectations that people have from their role which may be due to the lack of feedback to them. High role expectation conflict describes that there is a conflicting demands made on the agricultural assistants' role by different persons in their department.

It was found from the study that role stagnation,

role isolation, personal inadequacy, self-role distance and resource inadequacy were at moderate level. It shows that the women agricultural assistants feel that there are few opportunities for learning and growth in their present role, lack of linkages between their own roles with other roles in the department and they feel that they are not prepared to undertake their role effectively as well as needed resources are not available for effective role performance. Only role erosion stressor was found to be low which means they don't have a feeling that some important functions which they would like to perform are being performed by some other person this was in contradiction to the study conducted by *Anshu et al.*, (2013) where they found that role erosion as one of the most prominent role stressor among the type of role stressors present in the employees. *Sasidhar et al.*, (2008) found that the livestock extension professionals in Andhra Pradesh were experiencing four types of role conflicts and they identified the factors of role conflict as work motivation, physical facilities, persistence disposition and job experience.

**Table 2. Level of role stressors for women agricultural assistants (n<sub>2</sub>=120)**

| Category                        | Level of Stress |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Family Role Stressor</i>     |                 |
| Inter-Role Distance (IRD)       | High            |
| <i>Work Role Stressors</i>      |                 |
| Role Stagnation (RS)            | Moderate        |
| Role Expectation Conflict (REC) | High            |
| Role Erosion (RE)               | Low             |
| Role Overload (RO)              | High            |
| Role Isolation                  | Moderate        |
| Personal Inadequacy (PI)        | Moderate        |
| Self-Role Distance (SRD)        | Moderate        |
| Role Ambiguity (RA)             | High            |
| Resource Inadequacy (RIn)       | Moderate        |

**Table 3. Friedman test statistics for organizational role stress among women agricultural assistants**

| Category                | Values               |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Chi – square (Observed) | 563.284**            |
| Chi-square (Critical)   | 16.919               |
| df                      | 9,                   |
|                         | <i>p value</i> <0.01 |

\*\*Significantly different at 1 per cent level of probability

Further, non-parametric two-way analysis using Friedman test was applied to understand whether there is any significant difference between different role

stressors among women agricultural assistants. Friedman test (Table 3) showed that there was highly significant difference between different role stressors for women agricultural assistants with,  $\chi^2(9) = 563.284$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

Stress due to role overload followed by inter-role distance was the major problem with mean ranks of 9.783 and 6.871 respectively which is in line with the results of the study conducted by *Narayanan et al.*, (2013) and *Anshida et al.*, (2017). It was also found that perception on resource inadequacy, self-role distance and role ambiguity stressors were not severe with lowest mean ranks of 3.100, 3.238 and 3.292.

**Table 4. Major role stressors among women agricultural assistants based on mean ranks of Friedman test**

| Different Role Stressors        | MR    | Groups |
|---------------------------------|-------|--------|
| Resource Inadequacy (RIn)       | 3.100 | A      |
| Self-Role Distance (SRD)        | 3.238 | A      |
| Role Ambiguity (RA)             | 3.292 | A      |
| Personal Inadequacy (PI)        | 4.713 | B      |
| Role Isolation (RI)             | 5.183 | B C    |
| Role Erosion (RE)               | 5.771 | B C D  |
| Role Stagnation (RS)            | 6.254 | C D    |
| Role Expectation Conflict (REC) | 6.796 | D      |
| Inter-Role Distance (IRD)       | 6.871 | D      |
| Role Overload (RO)              | 9.783 | E      |

MR=Mean ranks with same letter indicates not significantly different

## CONCLUSION

Occupational stress is a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning (*Beehr and Newman, 1978*). *Spielberger (1980)* reported that stress is not always dysfunctional in nature and if positive, can prove one of the most important factors in improving productivity within an organization. In the present study except role erosion stressor, all other stressors were at high or median level. Further analysis with Friedman test for different role stressors of women agricultural assistants indicated stress due to role overload as the major stressor which means they feel that there are too many expectations from others especially clientele/farmers in their role. Inter-role distance was the second major stressor which implies they find a conflict between their departmental role as extension personnel in the respective organization and non-organizational roles as familial role.

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