



Workplace Stress and Mental Health Equity From a Political Economy Perspective

Girija C*

Research Scholar,
Mother Teresa Women's University,
Kodaikanal.

Dr. D. Ramani

Professor and Research Supervisor,
Department of Commerce,
Mother Teresa Women's University,
Kodaikanal.

Abstract: This research aims to examine the effects of managerial communication on organizational performance through the mediating role of employee job satisfaction in Ethiopian educational institutions, particularly in rural areas like West Guji. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather comprehensive data from 281 participants, including teaching staff and educational leaders. Findings reveal that managerial communication significantly influences employee job satisfaction, which in turn affects organizational performance. Quantitative data indicated a moderate level of satisfaction with communication practices, while qualitative insights highlighted issues such as one-directional communication and lack of employee involvement. The study concludes that effective communication is vital for enhancing employee satisfaction and organizational outcomes. The implications of this research suggest that educational institutions should prioritize developing comprehensive communication strategies that promote transparency and inclusivity, ultimately fostering a more engaged and productive workforce.

Keywords: *political economy; socialist movements; mental health equity; labor rights; structural violence; democratic workplaces*

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INTRODUCTION

Workplace stress has become a prevalent and urgent issue in the modern global economy, impacting individuals across many sectors, professions, and geographic locations. In recent decades, swift changes in the nature of work—prompted by globalization, technological progress, and neoliberal economic restructuring—have heightened employment demands, escalated job insecurity, and obscured the distinctions between professional and personal life (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Consequently, stress-related illnesses such as burnout, anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion have evolved from individual health issues to prevalent professional dangers with substantial societal and economic ramifications. Traditional methods of addressing workplace stress have predominantly characterized it as an

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Girija C, Research Scholar, Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal.
E-mail: girijacotp@gmail.com

individual psychological concern, highlighting personal coping strategies such as resilience, emotional intelligence, mindfulness practices, and stress management techniques. Although these viewpoints provide significant insights into individual-level solutions, they frequently neglect the structural and systemic factors that generate and perpetuate stressful working situations (International Labour Organization, 2021). Mainstream discourse, by concentrating primarily on individual adaptability, risks neglecting the wider political and economic issues that influence workplace conditions and exacerbate mental health disparities.

This study contests individualistic interpretations by contextualizing workplace stress within a broader political economy framework, positing that stress is not merely a human inability to cope but a socially constructed phenomenon inherent in the organization of labor under capitalist systems. The capitalist mode of production, especially in its neoliberal variant, emphasizes efficiency, productivity, and profit maximization, frequently at the detriment of worker welfare. Practices such as increased workloads, unstable employment contracts, performance monitoring, and the commercialization of time foster a work culture where stress is normalized and even esteemed as a symbol of productivity and achievement (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020). This study, utilizing Marxist theoretical principles, especially the notion of alienation, contends that workplace stress is profoundly connected to workers' estrangement from their labor, creative potential, and social relationships. When employees possess restricted authority over their work processes, have insufficient involvement in decision-making, and are regarded as mere tools of production rather than as human beings, psychological anguish becomes an unavoidable consequence. In this context, stress might be perceived as an expression of structural conflicts inherent in capitalism labor systems rather than as a discrete psychological state (Fraser, 2016).

The study concurrently examines alternate viewpoints presented by socialist ideology and labor movements, which frame mental health as a community and societal obligation rather than an individual encumbrance. Historically, socialist movements and labour unions have been instrumental in promoting enhanced working conditions, shorter working hours, social security, and access to public healthcare—initiatives that directly tackle the fundamental causes of workplace stress. These collaborative efforts underscore the significance of structural reforms and democratic engagement in fostering healthier and more equal work environments.

The primary aim of this research is to reconcile psychological and political-economic theories of workplace stress. It aims to address fundamental inquiries: To what degree is workplace stress a consequence of capitalist labour systems? In what ways do neoliberal policies exacerbate mental health disparities? In what ways may socialist-oriented frameworks provide feasible alternatives for advancing mental health fairness and enhancing worker well-being? This study enhances the knowledge of stress by synthesizing insights from political economy, labour studies, and mental health research, focusing on systemic change, collective action, and social justice rather than solely on individual coping mechanisms.

This paper contends that mitigating workplace stress necessitates a paradigm shift: transitioning from individualized treatments to structural interventions, from market-driven care models to publicly sponsored institutions, and from fragmented coping mechanisms to communal empowerment. This transformation is crucial for enhancing mental health outcomes and promoting overarching objectives of equity, respect, and sustainability in the workplace.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Political Economy and Occupational Stress

Political economy provides a structural examination of economic systems, revealing how the capitalist mode of production prioritizes profit over individuals. Neoliberal regimes facilitate the deterioration of labor rights, the rise of precarious employment, excessive workloads, and the commodification of time, resulting in stress becoming a normalized aspect of work (Harvey, 2007).

Marxist Concepts of Alienation

The concept of alienation proposed by Karl Marx continues to hold significance. Alienation from the output of labor, the labor process, others, and oneself leads to psychological dissonance and stress. Under capitalism, workers are alienated from their creative potential, resulting in persistent unhappiness and psychological discomfort (Marx, 1844)

Socialist Perspectives on Mental Health

Socialist perspectives emphasize that responsibility for mental health should be shared by society as a whole, with the state playing an active role in providing accessible services. Within this framework, mental health becomes a collective concern rather than an individual burden (Navarro, 2009).

WORKPLACE STRESS AS STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE. WITH THIS FRAMEWORK ESTABLISHED, ATTENTION NOW TURNS TO HOW ORGANIZATIONS AND POLICIES TRANSLATE THEORY INTO LIVED STRESSORS FOR WORKERS

Globalization and privatization have exacerbated workloads and diminished job security. The gig economy and 'hustle culture' glorify excessive labor, frequently compromising mental well-being. The compulsion to stay competitive intensifies sensations of loneliness, fatigue, and insufficiency.

Gendered and Class-Based Aspects of Stress

Stress disproportionately impacts marginalized employees. Women, particularly in care-giving sectors, and low-income workers encounter several stressors, such as salary disparities, home obligations, and insufficient access to mental health resources. (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015)

Workplace Monitoring and Erosion of Autonomy

Technological surveillance and performance metrics, such as KPIs and productivity trackers, reduce workers' autonomy and foster a sense of powerlessness, a key indicator of chronic stress.

THE FUNCTION OF SOCIALIST MOVEMENTS IN MITIGATING WORKPLACE STRESS. SHIFTING TO A CAUSAL ANALYSIS, THE FOLLOWING SECTION HIGHLIGHTS HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY RESPONSES BY SOCIALIST MOVEMENTS AND UNIONS TO WORKPLACE STRESS

Labor unions and socialist groups have traditionally advocated for shorter work hours, compensated leave, and safer working conditions, all of which are essential for alleviating stress. The 8-hour workday movement exemplifies a significant opposition to the pressures of excessive labor.

Mental Health as a Communal Asset

In nations with robust socialist traditions, like Cuba or the Nordic welfare states, mental health services are publicly financed and included in comprehensive social care systems. These methods embody the notion of decommodified care-health as a fundamental right rather than a commodity.

Case Study: Union Initiatives Regarding Mental Health

Recent initiatives, including the UK-based "Mental Health at Work Commitment," endorsed by trade unions, promote workplace mental health through legislative reform, training, and stigma reduction. Socialist parties in Spain and Chile have introduced laws to ensure state-funded workplace wellness initiatives.

ADVANCING A SOCIALIST PARADIGM FOR MENTAL HEALTH EQUITY. BUILDING ON EXAMPLES OF ADVOCACY AND REFORM, THIS SECTION ADVANCES A PRACTICAL SOCIALIST PARADIGM FOR MENTAL HEALTH EQUITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Cooperatives and democratically managed workplaces report lower burnout and absenteeism because workers can influence their work environments, thereby reducing stress.

Decommodification of Mental Health Services

Universal mental health care, characteristic of socialist-leaning economies, guarantees egalitarian access irrespective of income or job status. This alleviates the financial burden linked to pursuing therapy.

Focus on Community and Solidarity

A socialist framework fosters mutual aid, peer support networks, and worker solidarity-approaches that have been demonstrated to mitigate stress and enhance psychological resilience.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Capitalism, Inequality, and Mental Health: Enhanced Understanding

Recent studies further substantiate the connection between neoliberal capitalism, systemic inequality, and psychological discomfort. A neuroscience framework examines how capitalism's processes—inequality, alienation, social isolation, and deprivation—negatively impact psychological and neurological well-being. Inequality is intrinsic to capitalism and has consistently been linked to heightened anxiety and psychiatric disorders—driven as much by relative position as by actual lack.

Neoliberal ideology exacerbates this issue by promoting autonomy and consumption while disparaging welfare dependence. These mechanisms undermine community and solidarity, exacerbating loneliness, sadness, and self-blame in Europe. (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). A Marxist critique underscores that the mental health system frequently medicalizes misery, transforming structural and political frustrations into individualized, technical "disorders," so perpetuating capitalist power by masking wider societal origins.

Employment Trends: Mental Health and Increasing Class Solidarity

Forbes (2025) article identifies five rising workforce trends for 2025: increased awareness of mental health, disability justice, intergenerational dynamics, class solidarity, and labor organizing. Burnout is widespread, particularly impacting Gen Z, employees in smaller organizations, and non-managerial personnel. Companies must transition from cosmetic wellness initiatives to comprehensive mental health care. Young individuals, especially in England, are encountering mental health challenges at elevated rates—approximately one in four—and are roughly five times more likely to be unemployed owing to mental health concerns. Hostile and distrustful work cultures exacerbate this issue, while punitive measures such as diminished youth health support pose a risk of additional injury. There is an increasing demand for emotionally aware workplaces where "duvet days" and frank recognition of challenges are normalized (The Guardian, 2024).

Simultaneously, workplace burnout is escalating worldwide: in Australia and New Zealand, about 50% of employees report experiencing burnout, yet organizational responses are often superficial—referred to as "care washing"—rather than meaningful. Employees at TikTok are taking prolonged mental health breaks due to intense performance reviews and job insecurity, demonstrating how the volatility of capitalism immediately manifests as psychological pain (Business Insider, 2024).

STRUCTURAL RESPONSES: POLICY, ACTIVISM, AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM. REFLECTING ON PREVIOUS GLOBAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL TRENDS, THIS SECTION SPOTLIGHTS THREE NOTEWORTHY EXAMPLES OF SYSTEMIC ACTION AT VARIOUS LEVELS

The Odisha government in India is formulating a comprehensive mental health policy that includes establishing counseling centers, promoting early detection, organizing grassroots stigma-reduction initiatives, and enhancing psychiatric training. The program signifies a broader recognition of mental health as a public asset that requires institutional support (The Times of India, 2024).

Workplace Reform via Safety Climate Theory The Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) theory suggests that systemic improvement is achievable; it asserts that when leadership authentically prioritizes mental health over productivity, employee well-being enhances. The four pillars of PSC—management commitment, prioritization, communication, and participation—provide a systematic framework for enhancing organizational design.

International Policy Transition towards a Well-being Economy A global paradigm shift is underway: the "well-being economy" movement promotes measuring progress through health, fairness, and cultural metrics rather than GDP. Countries such as New Zealand, Scotland, Iceland, Finland, and Canada have already implemented this structure. In 2023, the WHO integrated it into its global health promotion agenda. This corresponds with socialist principles by prioritizing human needs above market considerations (World Health Organization, 2023).

Theoretical and Pedagogical Integration

Renowned scholarly efforts continue to integrate political economy into the pedagogy and investigation of mental health. A 2024 research employs workplace stress and well-being to present Marxist Political Economy to economics students, contending that systemic reform—rather than individual coping mechanisms—is essential for mitigating alienation and mental health issues in capitalist workplaces (Marx, 1844).

Social Movements and Institutional Resistance

An illustrative instance of socialist-aligned opposition occurred in Argentina, where more than 200 mental health professionals and advocates convened to protect the Laura Bonaparte Hospital in Buenos Aires from layoffs that would jeopardize critical psychiatric services. The protest demonstrates unified action advocating for mental health as a public asset rather than a fiscal indulgence.

Synthesis: Advancing a Socialist Paradigm for Mental Health Equity

Based on recent advancements, the way forward necessitates the integration of structural critique, institutional reform, and collective action.

Reconceptualize Mental Health

Oppose psycho-medical narratives that attribute distress to individual factors. Rather, adopt structural determinants of mental health as guiding frameworks—reflecting Marxist critiques and the WHO's well-being-oriented programs ([World Health Organization, 2022](#)).

Establish Reliable Institutional Support

Urge governments to implement inclusive public mental health frameworks, exemplified by Odisha's policy and the global well-being economic movement. This removes mental healthcare from the market, agreeing with socialist objectives.

COLLECTIVELY TRANSFORM WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Apply PSC concepts to reconfigure organizational climates. Disavow carewashing; instead, cultivate democratic, participatory frameworks in which employee psychological safety is paramount.

ENHANCE POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

The mobilizations of Argentine health workers and classroom pedagogies demonstrate that fostering political consciousness and solidarity can counteract the commodity of well-being.

FOSTER INTERGENERATIONAL UNITY

The resistance among young workers to emotionally aware workplaces indicates a generational shift towards collective caring rather than laissez-faire individualism.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative content analysis of the current literature, policy reports, labor union records, and case studies from nations with socialist policy frameworks (e.g., Norway, Cuba) and from worker cooperatives. The report features interviews with ten union leaders and mental health advocates from India, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

- **Structural Conditions as Principal Stressors:** Interviews indicated that stress primarily arises from systemic factors (work uncertainty, extended hours, lack of agency) rather than individual deficiencies.
- **Report on Unionized Workplaces Reduced Stress:** Case studies demonstrate that collective bargaining leads to diminished stress by ensuring improved working conditions.
- **Policy Deficiencies in Capitalist Nations:** Nations with market-oriented healthcare systems have greater disparities in mental health accessibility.
- **Alternative Frameworks:** Worker cooperatives in Kerala, India, and Mondragon, Spain, demonstrated significant effects on employee well-being

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Integrate mental health provisions into labor union agreements.

- Advocate for collaborative and democratic workplace frameworks.
- Promote universal, publicly financed mental health treatments.
- Advocate for policies that diminish working hours and enhance job security.
- Cultivate grassroots social movements that prioritize psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

Workplace stress is not only a personal issue—it is a political one. Addressing this issue necessitates more than mindfulness applications or productivity coaching; it demands confronting the systems that generate alienation and insecurity. Socialist philosophy and movements offer crucial insights and solutions by advancing labor rights, egalitarian health systems, and democratic workplaces. An innovative paradigm grounded in solidarity, justice, and care is crucial for effective stress management.

DISCUSSION

This study supports the idea that workplace stress is not solely an individual psychological issue but a phenomenon generated by structural factors inside larger political and economic institutions. From a political economy viewpoint, the findings underscore how neoliberal labor regimes, marked by job insecurity, increased workloads, and performance monitoring, substantially contribute to psychological discomfort among workers. Qualitative data from union leaders and case studies indicate that institutional variables, rather than individual coping inadequacies, are the principal causes of workplace stress. This corresponds to Marxist theories of alienation, in which workers suffer estrangement from their labor, leading to emotional fatigue and diminished well-being. The research indicates that collaborative measures, including labor unions, cooperative work models, and public welfare initiatives, can successfully alleviate stress. Countries and organizations that implement welfare-oriented or socialist frameworks typically exhibit superior mental health results as a result of diminished inequality and enhanced access to care. Moreover, the results indicate that modern workplace solutions often lack depth (“care washing”) and fail to address fundamental problems. The incorporation of Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) principles is a viable avenue for structural improvement by emphasizing employee well-being inside the business. This study enhances previous literature by connecting mental health research with political economy, highlighting that lasting stress reduction necessitates systemic reform rather than merely discrete psychological interventions.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study predominantly employs qualitative content analysis, potentially constraining generalisability. The sample size, consisting of interviews with ten people, is rather limited and may not encompass the complete range of experiences. The research partially depends on secondary data and case studies, thus introducing contextual bias. Cross-country comparisons are interpretative rather than statistically validated. Future study may integrate extensive quantitative analysis and longitudinal approaches to enhance empirical validity.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Enhances the comprehension of workplace stress by incorporating political economy and Marxist theory into psychological studies.

- Critiques prevailing individualistic paradigms of stress and coping.
- Advocates for organisations to implement structural reforms instead of surface wellness initiatives.
- Emphasises the significance of employee involvement and democratic governance. Advocates for the necessity of publicly financed mental health systems.
- Affirms the significance of labour legislation and unions in enhancing psychological well-being.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Perform quantitative analyses correlating political economic variables with mental health results.
- Examine stress patterns particular to various sectors (education, healthcare, gig economy).
- Analyze the impact of digital surveillance and AI-driven management on stress proliferation.
- Examine the linkages between gender and class with more profundity.
- Evaluate the efficacy of cooperative and democratic work environments in India, with a focus on Kerala.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participation in interviews was voluntary and based on informed consent.

Respondents were assured confidentiality and anonymity.

No personal or sensitive identifying information was disclosed.

The study adhered to standard academic ethical guidelines for social science research.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, analysis, and writing of the manuscript.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

The author(s) confirm that all participants provided informed consent for inclusion in the study and publication of anonymized data.

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