

# Can Stressed Employees Perform Organizational Citizenship Behavior?

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**Abstract**—Organizational citizenship behavior is beneficial for organizations to sustain long-term profitability. As such, organizations today constantly expect the employees engage in organizational citizenship behavior. However, the demonstration of organizational citizenship behavior is truly depends on the willingness of the employees. Meanwhile, employees have no formal obligation to perform organizational citizenship behavior. Surprisingly, there is a dearth of studies to investigate whether stressed employees can still contribute to the positive behaviors in the organization. Hence, this study used 474 bank officers to investigate the negative relationship between stress and organizational citizenship behavior. The findings of this study confirmed the hypothesized relationship between emotional stress and organizational citizenship behavior.

**Index Terms**—organizational citizenship behavior, positive behavior, stress, stress symptoms, bank, Malaysia

## I. INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive environment, organizations are constantly needed to find way to maximize employee's competencies, skills and attitudes [1] with the expectation of employees can go the extra-miles and perform beyond the formal job requirements to sustain long-term organizational profitability. The demonstration of these behaviors is referred as organizational citizenship behavior. Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) is a spontaneous behavior [2] where it includes all positive behaviors [3] in the organization such as helping colleague on their job duties when they are not able to finish the work, volunteering to train newcomers, staying late at office to follow up on-hand tasks and projects and willing to take up extra job activities. The exhibition of OCB is found to enhance organizational performance and effectiveness directly [4] or indirectly through in-role performance [5].

OCB helps to strengthen and lubricate the social network relationship [6] by establishing and maintaining strong interpersonal relationships with both internal and external customers. Employees who exhibit OCB in the organization could engender a smooth communication and subsequently induce a conducive, cooperative and interdependence working environment. Such environment elicits the feeling of happiness and harmony and thus enables employees working with a positive mood [7]. The

exhibition of OCB from employees to external customers, for instance, going the extra mile to understand customer's needs rather than just selling the products, taking initiative to attract customer's attentions, or placing priority on customer's concerns will pleased the customers and increase their satisfaction and hence retain their loyalty towards the organization. Subsequently the interpersonal relationship between employee and co-workers as well as customers will get stronger and closer [8].

In addition, OCB helps to reduce withdrawal behaviors and absenteeism among employees in organization [9]. High turnover and absenteeism rate in an organization is harmful because when employees quit or are absent from their work without adequate notice, daily work activities are affected and it will cause organizational functionality to weaken. However, this problem could be minimized by cultivating OCB in the organization. Employees who engage in OCB are likely to have high level of organizational commitment and the commitment to organization creates a feeling of obligation towards the organization, hence less tendency to show withdrawal behaviors.

In view of the functionality of OCB, it is highly beneficial to organizations that are able to cultivate OCB in the working environment. Nevertheless, the exhibition of OCB truly depends on the willingness of the individual employee [10]. Employee has a choice whether or not to perform OCB. Even if he/she is not willing to contribute the extra efforts, he/she will not be punished or discriminated against by the organization, but the organization may suffer from the impact of low work productivity, dissatisfaction from customer, less competitive advantage, and low organizational performance [11]-[13]. Hence, the cultivation of OCB in organization is crucial to improve the organizational efficiency, effectiveness and functioning.

However, in today's workplace, employees are often found themselves exposed to the demands and challenges working environment and caused them suffered from stress. Stress is a worldwide epidemic that requires immediate attention. The American Institute of Stress [14] has found that workplace stress, e.g. the relationship with bosses and co-workers or work-overload was become the top cause of stress in the workplace. The American Psychological Association [15] reported that about six out of ten workers viewed their job is stressful. In another

survey by The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [16] stated that about 40% of workers reported their job is extremely stressful and another 26% of workers admitted that they are very often burned out or stressed by their work.

Despite the worldwide facts and statistics, academic researchers have also examined the issue of stress. Neelamegam and Asrafi [17] conducted a research to study the issue of stress and they found that about 45% of workers acknowledged that stress is a major problem in their work. There is no room for Malaysia to escape from this issue. Malaysian Psychiatric Association [18] reported that about six out of ten people have suffered from stress. Whereas studies conducted in Malaysia found that about 50% of private sectors employees [19] and 43% of government officers are experienced high level of stress and claimed their job is very stressful.

Generally stress is referred to the feelings of worry, tense, nervousness, anxiety, depression and loss of control in normal daily life. Specially, stress is a physiological or psychological adaptive response to the interaction of external events such as environment and people [21] when a person finds that demands from the external events are exceeding his/her ability to cope. Stress has wide ranging effects on emotions, moods and behaviors. When under stressful conditions, physical, psychological, emotional, and behavioral symptoms of stress will emerge [21].

The effects of stress can results in poor quality of works, low commitment, high turnover, decline in organizational productivity, performance and effectiveness [19], [22]-[23]. Stress has not only affect to organizations but also to individual employees especially related to health problem, commitment and satisfaction [24]-[25]. When employees suffered from high level of stress, they will certainly not happy working with the current environment and thus have high intention to leave the organization. Consequently, they will have less commitment and not going to contribute their best level to the organization. Stressed employees will refrain to engage in OCB too as they have to devote more and more resources to cope with the stressor.

In addition, stress is harmful to job performance and organizational effectiveness. Few studies [26]-[27] indicated that stress is found to have an inverse relationship with job performance. This indicated that when employees suffer from high levels of stress, performance is significantly reduced. Employees who experience stress will not only decrease job performance, but also reduce their willingness to perform extra-role behaviors which is OCB [28]. Stressed employees may choose not to engage in OCB because they fear that the resources loss such as time and energy is greater than the resources gain such as good appraisal and performance. This is in line with the concept of Conservation of Resource theory [29]. Furthermore, stressed employees are tend to display negative attitudes toward their job and organization because of their work satisfaction is reduced [30]-[31].

Previous studies have linked stress with organizational performance and found that employees who are stressed have significantly lower job performance. However, other aspects of organizational performance, such as OCB is worthy for investigation. Surprisingly, the empirical studies that examined the effects of stress on employee's OCB are exiguous [28], [32]. This is because most of the previous studies are focused on the extreme level of stress i.e. burnout [33] but not stress. Burnout is prolonged response towards the stressor [21] and is more severe than the occurrence of the stress whereas stress is short-term endurance of demanding situation. The neglect of examining the effect of stress on OCB is unfortunate because stress, if not managed immediately, the prolonged effects of stress will cause employees to experience burnout, which could have more serious consequences to the organization. Thus, it is interesting to know whether an employee who is suffered from stress will still be a good citizen in the organization by exhibiting OCB. Therefore, this study sought to examine the relationship between stress and OCB among the employees of commercial banks in Malaysia. Additionally, this study also aims to compare stress level of various stress symptoms namely physical stress, psychological stress, emotional stress and behavioral stress among bank employees.

## II. METHODS

### A. Respondents

Banking industry is suitable for such study because it is a finance-related industry and the core functions of bank are related to money transaction. Employees are more vulnerable to the adverse effect of stress since the nature of job require them constantly dealing with money transactions. Bank employees need to pay full attention and be very caution to each transaction in order to assure accuracy. This type of working conditions can lead employees to stress. Also, banking industry in Malaysia is operating in a competitive environment. Consequently, employees are exposed to high and long lasting levels of stress when working in such environment [34].

The respondents were drawn from nine commercial banks in Malaysia. All full-time bank employees, ranging from messengers to clerical staff, executives and managers, were involved in the study. Questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was administered in dual languages, i.e. English and Bahasa Melayu, the national language of Malaysia, in order to give a better understanding of the items in the questionnaire. The procedure of translating was complied with Brislin [35]. The questionnaires were collected two weeks after distribution. A total of 474 usable questionnaires were returned, which gave a response rate of 59.3%.

### B. Instrument Design

OCB were adapted from Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter [36]. A total of 20 items was used to examine the five dimensions of OCB, i.e. altruism, courtesy, sportsmanship, conscientiousness and civic

virtue and each dimension was measured by four items. The item was measured by using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) with uniform descriptive anchors. Altruism refers to the extent employees are willing to render voluntary behaviours and is measured by items such as “I help others who have heavy workloads”, “I willingly give my time to help others with work-related problems”, etc. Courtesy refers to the willingness of individual in preventing problem from occurring such as “I take steps to prevent problems with other workers”, “I inform my leader before taking any important actions”, etc. Sportsmanship refers to ability to tolerate inconvenient situations without complaining. Negative worded questions were used to measure sportsmanship such as “I consume a lot of time complaining about trivial matters”, “I always focus on what’s wrong with my situation, rather than with positive side of it”, etc. These negative questions were then reverse coded for analysis purposes in order to align with other positive worded statements. Conscientiousness refers to the willingness of the individual in carrying out the responsibilities and duties beyond minimum level like “I do not take extra breaks”, “I am always punctual at work”, etc. Lastly civic virtue is the discretionary behavior to participate and protect organizational image e.g. “I keep abreast of changes in the bank”, “I attend functions that are not required, but help the bank’s image”, etc.

The measurement for stress was adapted from several surveys, i.e. Health and safety stress questionnaire [37], Layne [38], Pejtersen and Kristensen [39], and UCU model stress questionnaire [40] to evaluate the various symptoms of stress namely physical stress, psychological stress, emotional stress and behavioral stress. Each stress symptom was measured using five items. For example, physical stress was measured by the items like headaches/migraine, trouble sleeping, backache, etc. Psychological symptoms of stress were measured by items such as problem concentrating, feel very tense, become short tempered, etc. Emotional stress were measured by items such as depression, anxiety, quarrel with others, and etc. Finally the behavioral symptoms of stress were measured by absent from work, complain about little thing, getting behind work schedule, and etc. All the 20 items of various symptoms of stress were measured based on the frequency of occurrence over the past three month periods at the workplace. Respondents were rated how often they experienced and suffered from stress on a four-point rating scale ranging from 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, and 4 = always.

### III. RESULTS

#### A. Background Information of Respondents

Some basic background information of the respondents has been obtained such as gender, ethnicity, job position, years of service in the bank, and the nature of the job condition. The number of female respondents was very high. Out of 474 respondents, 290 were females and comprise of 61.2% of our sample. There were only

184 male respondents in our study and comprise of 38.8%. It shows that majority of the positions are held by female in the banking sector in Malaysia. Majority of respondents were 31-40 years old i.e. 203 respondents which comprises 42.8% of our sample. About 38.4% of respondents were below 30 years old and 18.8% were above 40 years old. This implies that banking sector is very attractive for mature group of people who which to sustain their career in long term.

The respondents were comprised of three ethnicity groups namely Malays (41.6%), Chinese (54.9%) and Indians (3.6%). Only 6 respondents were graduated at Master level, 91 respondents were at Degree level and the remaining respondents were graduated at Diploma level or at high school level. The largest group of respondents is bank officer/executive which comprises of 34.6%, followed by teller (21.1%), clerk (19.8%), senior executive (16.5%), customer service representative (7.4%), and the remaining 0.6% is the bank messengers. They had average 9 years of working experience with the bank and 93% of them are required interact with customers in a daily basis. Table I presents the summary table for the background information of bank employees.

TABLE I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF BANK EMPLOYEES

	N	%
Gender		
Male	184	38.8
Female	290	61.2
Age		
Below 20 years	5	1.1
21 - 30 years	177	37.3
31 - 40 years	203	42.8
41 - 50 years	81	17.1
51 years and above	8	1.7
Race		
Malay	197	41.6
Chinese	260	54.9
Indian	17	3.6
Education Level		
High School	236	49.8
Diploma	141	29.7
Degree	91	19.2
Master	6	1.3
Designation		
Senior Executive	78	16.5
Officer/Executive	164	34.6
Customer Service	35	7.4
Teller	100	21.1
Clerk	94	19.8
Messenger	3	0.6

#### B. Comparison of Stress Level for Various Stress Symptoms

Descriptive statistics were used to compare the level of various stress experienced by the bank employees. First, the responses of four stress symptoms were segregated into two categories, i.e. high level and low level, separately. The rating of responses on 1 = never and 2 = sometimes were categorized as low level of stress whereas the rating of 3 = often and 4 = always were categorized as high level of stress. After two groups of high and low stress has been derived, the data were then

analyzed by using frequency analysis. The results showed that employees are eventually experienced high stress on psychological symptoms and emotional symptoms. More than a half of bank employees were suffered from high psychological stress such as feeling tension, exhausted and became short tempered at the workplace which comprise of 53% of our sample. Half of the bank employees are suffered from high emotional stress like anxiety and depression and comprise of 50.2% of our sample. 45% of bank employees claimed that they are suffered from the high level of physical stress such as headache, backache and trouble sleeping and 22% of bank employees experienced change in appetite, make mistakes at work and frequently absent from work which are symptoms of high behavioral stress. Table I presents the various stress symptoms that experienced by the employees based on the level of stress, i.e. low stress and high stress.

TABLE II. STRESS LEVEL FOR VARIOUS STRESS SYMPTOMS

Stress symptoms	Low Level		High Level	
	N	%	N	%
Physical Stress	261	55.1	213	44.9
Psychological Stress	222	46.8	252	53.2
Emotional Stress	236	49.8	238	50.2
Behavioral Stress	371	78.3	103	21.7

### C. Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was performed to test the relationship between various stress symptoms, i.e. physical stress, psychological stress, emotional stress and behavioral stress on OCB. The result presented in Table II indicate a significant relationship,  $R = 0.05$ ,  $R^2 = 0.06$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = 0.05$ ,  $F(4, 451) = 7.17$ ,  $p < .0001$ . The F test indicates that the regression model was significant and the relationship between stress and OCB was linear. The results showed that only physical stress ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $t = 2.50$ ,  $p = .013$ ) was positively related to OCB while emotional stress ( $\beta = -0.29$ ,  $t = -4.61$ ,  $p = .0001$ ) was negatively related to OCB. However psychological stress and behavioral stress were found to be not significantly related to OCB. Table II presents the regression analysis of various stress symptoms on OCB.

TABLE III. MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF STRESS ON ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR

Stress symptoms	OCB
Physical Stress	0.18*
Psychological Stress	0.11
Emotional Stress	-0.29**
Behavioral Stress	-0.06
$R^2$	0.06
* $p < 0.05$ , ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)	

## IV. DISCUSSIONS

More than a half of the bank employees felt very tense, anxiety, depression, difficult in memorizing and concentrating, and exhausted after a day's work. This indicated that bank employees are likely to suffer from psychological stress and emotional stress. Psychological and emotional stress is affecting the cognitive stage of an individual which are not be easily detectable and observable whereas physical and behavioral stress are more easier to observe from the physical facial expression and attitudes. This finding is consistent with the study of Sankpal, Negi, and Vashishtha [41] which they found that bank employees are prone to experience stress. Bank employees required constant interact and communicate with customers, such as engage in face-to-face communication, attend to customer's requirement, respond to customer's enquiry and fulfill customer's expectations. These responsibilities required huge amount of time and energy. Consequently, employees will feel threat of loss in their resources to confront with threat and challenges such as customer demands and task requirement, hence stress will emerge. This is consistent with conservation of resources theory [29].

Our study hypothesized that stress negatively influence OCB. The relationship between stress and OCB was examined by looking at several symptoms of stress. The findings indicate that physical stress was significantly related to OCB and this relationship was positive. This indicates that the higher the physical stress an employee experiences, the higher the OCB performed. This result was quite unexpected. Although it is expected that stress is negatively influence OCB, but at certain point, having little amount of stress is helpful in increasing motivation and performance. It is possible that the physical stress encountered by employees functions at the optimal level of stress, so called eustress, which is the positive side of stress [42] and this little amount of stress call up resources to respond to given challenges. Hence, employees are encouraged and motivated to perform at an even higher level of performance and work extra hard in order to achieve goals.

A significant and negative relationship was found between emotional stresses and OCB. This indicated that those employees who suffered from high level of emotional stress are less likely to perform OCB. Employees who experience a high level of emotional stress may be exhausted and drained of their emotional resources. The exhausted employees will feel too tired to invest time and effort in their work [43]. Thus it could be argued that employees with high emotional stress are more likely to withdraw their spontaneous behaviors. In other words, employees suffering from high anxiety, high depression and other forms of emotional condition may be less courteous and unlikely to tolerate minor inconveniences. Hence, emotional stress and OCB is negatively related. This is consistent with the study who found stress impeded OCB [44].

Although behavior stress do not found significant relationship with OCB, but it was showed a negative relationship with OCB. This finding suggests that

employees who are suffering from a high level of behavioral stress may be experiencing work-related problems such as being absent from work, getting behind work schedule, and frequently making mistakes in work. Consequently, the overwhelming behavioral stress erodes their motivation to work and their sense of competence. As a result, this may influence their OCB. However, with the absence of confirmatory data, such as absenteeism and performing data, this reason remains speculative.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Practical Implications

In this study, emotional stress has a relatively strong negative relationship with stress which implies that emotional stress emerged as a barrier for employees to engage in OCB. Emotional stress happens when employees evaluate that a given situation is difficult or impossible to deal with and it is associated with the feeling of anxiety, depression, helplessness and hopelessness. Therefore, it is crucial for bank managers or leaders to aware and controls the emotional stress of employees at the initial stage. This is because if bank managers or leaders failed to manage employees' stress at the initial stage, it will become dangerous and unhealthy when stress becomes intensive and prolonged. The management of bank can establish some effective stress-prevention programmes. The key ideas of such programmes are (i) to educate employees and leaders with the stress information, impact and consequences of stress, so they can alert on the emerging of stress, (ii) to introduce technique of reducing stress and provide tips in managing stress, so those who suffered from stress will find a ways to handle their own stress. In addition, banks can also promote some health programmes, which consist of fitness activities, lifestyle counselling or injury prevention programmes in order to help employees cope with stress.

### B. Limitations

The cross-sectional nature of the data where all data were collected at only one point in time can prohibit the establishment of causal relations among the variables. The cross-sectional design limits the ability of this study to make a causal claim regarding the relationship between stress and OCB. A causal inference is impossible to make from the short time period inasmuch as a longitudinal design is better in testing the causality of the variables. Therefore, a longitudinal research is needed to ascertain the causal extent of the hypothesized relationship.

In addition, this study was conducted within a single industry, i.e. the banking industry. Such specific context would limit the generalizability of the results. Future study needs to extend the research to non-financial organizations to investigate the impact of stress to OCB. Moreover, the inability of the researcher to personally approach to individual employee limits the generalizability of the results. Although the bank policy is not to allow outsiders or researchers to collect information or data directly from their employees, if

future researchers are able to approach the employees directly, it may help to extend the generalizability of the results.

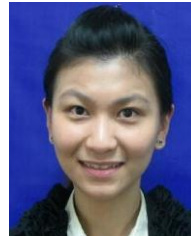
### C. Conclusion

As a conclusion, a high level of stress is viewed as dysfunctional to all positive workplace behavior such as OCB. Employees who are suffered from high level of stress may be less likely to contribute and perform OCB. Hence, if bank managers or leaders able to notify the emerging of employees stress at the initial stage, and implement the suggested stress-prevention programmes, employees stress can be mitigated. This in turn will makes the employees feel the care and concern from the bank managers or leaders, and as a reciprocate of the appreciation, they are more likely to contribute in OCB.

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