WORK STRESS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WORKERS IN NINEVEH GOVERNORATE

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Abstract
The research was conducted in Nineveh Governorate and included all employees working in agricultural extension in the Directorate of Agriculture of Nineveh, and the research aims to identify the level of work pressures that affect workers in agricultural extension, identify the correlation between work pressures and each of the independent variables, identify the most important proposals that reduce the work pressures facing workers in agricultural extension. The research included (206) employees, including the sample of the initial test (pre-test) of (30) employees to extract stability, thus reaching the research community (176). A simple proportional random sample was selected by (50%) from the total population, so the final research sample is (88) employees. The data were collected through the questionnaire form, which consisted of two parts, the first of which included the independent variables of the respondents. The second part included a measurement to measure work pressure on workers in agricultural extension, which consisted of (22) items on the most important work pressures facing agricultural extension workers. The results showed that more than half of agricultural extension workers are exposed to work stress while working to a low degree. The variables (level of education, age, professional ambition) had a significant correlation with work pressures. Also, the proposal (increasing incentives and material and moral rewards) was a priority among the proposals proposed by the respondents.

1. Introduction

Agriculture is considered the main pillar of both the economic and social structure, as it is the main supplier of food and human clothing and is responsible for supplying many industries with their needs of raw materials, in addition to absorbing the agricultural sector a large proportion of the labor force (Shalabi et al., 2013). Agricultural development depends on two basic elements: the material element and the human element, as the material element includes all the means, tools and various requirements used in the production processes, while the human element is represented by workers in the agricultural sector. Agricultural development requires harmony and harmony between the human and material elements. This is done by providing the human element with the capabilities and skills necessary to use the best vocabulary of the material element in the production process, and the Agricultural Extension Service is responsible for providing the human element with these skills and capabilities (Reda, 2009).

The Agricultural Extension Authority bears the greatest burden in promoting the agricultural sector and achieving rural development, as it is responsible for developing the behavioral and productive capabilities of farmers by providing them with knowledge, skills and positive attitudes and convincing them to adopt modern technologies. This is because the agricultural extension system is considered one of the important organizations in the agricultural sector, as confirmed by Al-Shafei (2010). It is the structured exchange of information and targeted transfer of skills. Where the human potential in the agricultural extension apparatus is represented by agricultural extension workers or agricultural extensionists, on which the agricultural extension apparatus depends mainly, they are the actual implementers at the local level of extension programs, the basis of the extension communication process that takes place with the guides, the movers of the extension process, and the directed forces that are concerned with shaping and changing the

behavior of rural people living and producing (Al-Hamdani, 2013). Because they are more aware of the conditions of farmers, and those responsible for leading extension service at the rural level, and providing farmers with new agricultural information appropriate to their environmental, economic and social conditions, and depend on them to succeed in playing a vital role in bringing about agricultural development, as they represent the main pillar in the success of extension work and the base of the pyramid in it (Bahnasawi et al., 2006).

The agricultural advisor is a teacher, mentor and friend who lives among farmers, and expands their knowledge to improve their ideas, which increases their abilities and skills and develops his ability to work, and the failure of the agricultural extension guide to perform his extension tasks is a failure of the extension system as a whole, which may be due to many reasons, foremost of which are the pressures facing agricultural extension workers while practicing extension work (Hajras, 2004). This can negatively affect their level of performance as a natural result of exposure to work pressure, which may reflect negatively on their level of performance (Darwish et al., 2022). Stress is a state of tension that individuals suffer from as a result of being subjected to many restrictions that prevent them from achieving what they want. (Schermerhorn et al., 2011) Stress is defined as "a dynamic state in which an individual experiences the inability to be blind to the fulfillment of his desires and requests, and although this stress and anxiety is viewed in a negative light, there may be many positive gains from these pressures (Robbins & Judge, 2009).

Work stress is one of the challenges facing contemporary organizations in achieving their goals, and is defined as a set of environmental factors that negatively affect an individual's performance at work, preventing role ambiguity, role conflict, environmental working conditions, workload, and personal relationships at work (Israel, 2009). Aqili (2005) argues that work pressures are represented by the inability of individuals to meet their increasing and continuous business requirements, which prevents them from adapting to their work environment. Therefore, work stress is a state of psychological and physical imbalance that occurs to the individual as a result of his inability to achieve their goals (Darwish et al., 2022).This is because agricultural extension is one of the necessary devices to achieve rural development, which directs its operations and educational activities to the people of villages in general and farmers in particular in order to increase their agricultural production and then improve their living conditions to reach a better life, and the literature indicates that the productivity of agricultural organizations is affected by several and varied factors in the work environment, foremost of which are work pressures and human relations, which involve a set of foundations, including good treatment and mutual respect between the workers themselves and between them and their boss. Directness and the clarity of the goals that the organization seeks to achieve, the degree of freedom of employees and the degree of conflict of goals (Abdul-Jabbar, 2009). Since work pressures are inevitable in the lives of individuals and organizations, as there is no organization and no work without pressure, so is the case for the agricultural extension system as an organization, which has made work pressures cost governments and organizations heavy losses (El Gohary, 2021).

This study was conducted to identify the methods and practices of agricultural extension workers to manage work pressures, as well as their awareness of organizational strategies for managing work stress. This is because agricultural extension must have an effective organization capable of performing administrative behavior and correct extension planning in order to promote the agricultural reality and participate effectively in the development of rural communities (Al-Hamdani, 2013). This will only be achieved through positive dealing with work pressures, its causes and negative effects, and developing the awareness and awareness of agricultural extension workers of policies and strategies that would confront negative work pressures to reach the psychological and physical balance of agricultural extension workers, which in turn will reflect positively on improving the role and performance of agricultural extension workers.

1.1. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to identify the level of work pressures that affect workers in agricultural extension in Nineveh Governorate; to arrange the items of the work stress scale according to their relative importance by workers in agricultural extension; to identify the correlation relationship between work pressures and each of the following independent variables,

namely level of education, age, number of years of employment, professional ambition, and achievement motivation; and finally, to identify the most important proposals that reduce the work pressures facing workers in agricultural extension.

2. Method

The research was conducted in Nineveh Governorate and included all the employees working in extension to farmers in the Directorate of Agriculture of Nineveh and the number (206) employees, excluded them sample of the initial test (pre-test) of (30) employees to extract reliability, and thus the research community (176), and was selected random sample proportional simple by (50%) of the total community, and thus the final research sample (88) employees. For the purpose of collecting research data, the researcher followed several methods, including personal interviews, in which the researcher directs a set of questions to the examiners in order to collect information or data that helps him to solve the problems he studies. (Oxford Guide: 2010). The interview is a tool for gathering information that enables the researcher to answer research questions or test his hypotheses (Abbas, 2012). In addition to conducting field visits, the researcher made field visits to the Directorate of Agriculture for the purpose of collecting information and observing the administrative pressures that the respondents were suffering from.

After reviewing the scientific literature, research and extension bulletins related to work pressures and how to get rid of them or manage them, and consulting some professors specialized in the subject from the Department of Educational and Psychological Sciences at the College of Education / University of Mosul, a scale was built to measure the level of work pressures facing agricultural employees. After that, the questionnaire form was designed, which consisted of two parts, which is the first part, and included the independent variables of the respondents. (Age, level of education, Number of years of employment, professional ambition, achievement motivation). The second part included a measure to measure work pressure on workers in agricultural extension, which consisted of (22) items on the most important work pressures facing agricultural employees. After that, the form was presented to experts in the Department of Agricultural Extension at the College of Agriculture and Forestry at the University of Mosul for the purpose of achieving the face validity and content validity of the tool. Based on the experts' amendments, some items were amended. The initial test was conducted in July 2022 on a sample of (30) respondents, and the reliability was extracted by the half-fractionation method using the Pearson equation, then the result was corrected with the sperman equation, and the reliability coefficient was (0.91). The data was collected for the period from 1-9-2024 to 10-12-2024. After receiving the forms, the data was unpacked, classified and analyzed using the SPSS program.

2.1. Measurement of independent variables

Age: According to the number of years of the researcher's age at the time of data collection

Level of education: according to four levels, namely (preparatory agriculture, agricultural institute, college of agriculture, higher certificate), and the following symbols have been given (1-2-3-4) respectively.

Number of years of employment: according to the number of years of work spent by the researcher in his job.

Professional ambition: This variable was measured through (10) items, half positive and half negative, and has been developed a gradation that includes the following levels (agree, neutral, disagree) and allocated the following weights (1,2,3) respectively for the positive items and (3,2,1) for the negative paragraphs, and the total scores of these items indicate the degree of professional ambition of the respondent.

Achievement motivation: The achievement motivation variable was measured by a scale consisting of (10) items, and the researcher was asked to clarify his opinion on each of these items by choosing from among three answers agree, neutral and disagree. The answers were given weights of 3, 2 and 1, respectively, in the case of a positive direction, while the answers were given weights of 1, 2, and 3, respectively, in the event that the direction of the statement was negative.

The total scores obtained by the researcher from these items reflect the total degree of achievement motivation

2.2. Dependent variable measurement

A measure of work pressures facing agricultural extension workers. The dependent variable was measured by a scale consisting of (22) items, and the following alternatives were placed in front of it (have a large effect, have a medium effect, have a small effect, do not affect), and the following numerical values were allocated to them (4-3-2-1) respectively. Thus, the total score of work stress (22-88) is a numerical value.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Identify the level of work pressures that affect workers in agricultural extension in Nineveh Governorate.

The results showed that the work pressures of workers in agricultural extension ranged between (34-78), and when classified according to the level of their exposure to these pressures and as shown in Table (1), it was found that the number of respondents who were exposed to work pressure for the high category (64-78) respondents by (25%), and the number of respondents who were in the intermediate category (49-63) respondents by (22.73%), while the number of respondents who were in the low category (34-48) respondents by (52.27%).

Table 1. shows the distribution of respondents according to the work pressures affecting them.

Work stress categories	Frequency	%
Low (34 - 48)	46	52.27
Medium (49- 63)	20	22.73
High (64-78)	22	25
Total	88	100

This indicates that more than half of agricultural extension workers are exposed to work stress while working to a low degree. This may be due to the high level of management of agricultural extension workers in the research area of organizational strategies to manage work pressures, which necessitates the need to create the appropriate work climate to maintain this high level of work stress management, and to constantly emphasize the development of their abilities and skills in managing work pressures. This finding is consistent with his findings (El Gohary, 2021).

3.2. Arranging the paragraphs of the work stress scale according to their relative importance by workers in agricultural extension.

It is clear to us from Table 2 when arranging the work pressures that face and affect the performance of agricultural extension workers that the item (working hours are very long and cause me boredom) came in first place with a weighted arithmetic average of (2.97), and perhaps the reason for this is that the long working hours have many negatives, the most important of which is Performing tasks for a long time leads to a feeling of fatigue, stress, anxiety and depression, in addition to insomnia and difficulty sleeping, which drains your energy over time, and also leads to neglect of your social relations With family and friends, as well as not caring about yourself in terms of practicing recreational activities necessary to rejuvenate and recharge your energy. This finding is inconsistent with his findings (Jamal, 2019). While the item (there is no justice between me and my colleagues at work) came in second place with a weighted arithmetic average of (2.90), and perhaps the reason for this is the importance of this matter and the extent of its great impact on the job performance of individuals by creating an excellent work environment, and the application of the principles of justice increases employee satisfaction and reduces job turnover, which increases Productivity and creativity.

Table 2. Arranging the items of the work stress scale according to their relative importance

Sequence	Items	Weighted arithmetic mean	Sequence by importance
1	The working hours are very long and cause me boredom	2.97	1
2	I often suffer from mistakes in my work	2.59	7
3	The official working hours are not enough to finish the required work	1.99	17
4	The duties placed on me are greater than my powers	1.89	18
5	My duties at work are unclear	1.80	19
6	There is not enough information to complete the work required of me	2.05	16
7	There is no justice between me and my co-workers	2.90	2
8	I see that my job duties are too many	2.55	8
9	I feel stressed as a result of constant work pressure	2.33	12
10	I am ready to do additional tasks other than my main tasks	2.44	10
11	I feel unsatisfied with my job performance	2.41	11
12	Difficult financial pressures	2.49	9
13	There is a weakness in coordination between management and individuals	1.71	20
14	Incompetent or indifferent managers	1.46	22
15	Lack of involvement of employees in decision-making	2.12	15
16	Inability to communicate effectively between members of the organization	2.66	6
17	Job insecurity	2.84	3
18	Meaningless business goals	2.79	4
19	Lack of social and moral support	2.75	5
20	Colleagues with complex and difficult personalities	2.22	13
21	Many business meetings	1.54	21
22	The need to build a fair promotion system based on objective grounds	2.15	14

While the item (many business meetings) ranked before the last with a weighted arithmetic average of (1.54), perhaps due to the lack of meetings carried out by the administration or the lack of long periods of time that make individuals bored and bored. While the item (incompetent or indifferent managers) ranked last with a weighted arithmetic average of (1.46), and this may be due to the fact that most managers are competent and interested in the work entrusted to them from supervision, guidance, planning and evaluation, so it is not important for the respondents.

3.3. Identify the correlation relationship between work stress and each independent variable

3.3.1. Level of education

It is clear from Table 3 when dividing the respondents into categories according to the level of education that the percentage of respondents whose level of education is low (preparatory) was (11.36%), while the percentage of those whose education was average, and they are represented by the categories of graduates of the stage (institutes) and (colleges) (25%) and (34.09%) respectively, while the percentage of respondents whose level of education was high and they represent those who have (higher certificate) (29.54%). To find the correlation between work stress and education level, Spearman-Brown correlation coefficient was used, which amounted to (0.305), which is a significant value. This may be due to the importance of the educational level, as education is an effective way to enhance skills and knowledge. Where individuals receive quality education, they are better able to deal with various challenges e.g. develop critical thinking skills: education helps individuals analyze problems and make informed decisions, learn new skills: education can open new doors to career opportunities. Increasing social awareness: Education enhances individuals' understanding of social and economic issues, which ultimately reduces the stress and work problems facing respondents. This finding is consistent with his findings (Tahir Aljaf et al., 2014) and not with his findings (El Gohary, 2021).

3.3.2. Age

According to the age variable, the results of the study showed that the lowest age of the respondents is (26) years and the oldest age is (46) years and an arithmetic average of (19.49) and a standard deviation of (3.11) where the respondents were divided into three categories, and the highest percentage was within the group of young or young ages (26-32) and a percentage of (47.72%). Followed by the high age group (40–46) with a percentage of (27.27%). As for the middle age group (33-39), it ranked last with a percentage of (25.00%). As shown in Table 3. To find the

correlation between work stress and education level, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used, which amounted to (0.186), which is a significant value. This finding is consistent with his findings (Tahir Aljaf et al., 2014). This may be due to the fact that more than two-thirds of the respondents are young and middle-aged people. This may be due to the fact that young ages enjoy enthusiasm, activity and hard work that enables them to overcome most of the difficulties, problems and obstacles they face, including work pressures while performing the tasks entrusted to them.

Table 3. Identify the correlation between work stress and each of the independent variables

Variables	Fregency	%	R value	Rs value	Sig
Education level					
High school graduate	10	11.36			
Institute graduate	22	25.00			
College graduate	30	34.09	----------	0.305	**
Higher certificate	26	29.55			
Age					
(26-32) year	42	47.72			
(33-39) year	22	25.00	0.186	--------	*
(40-46) year	24	27.28			
Number of years of employment					
(10-19) year	48	54.54			
(20-29) year	20	22.73	0.076	--------	n.s
(30-39) year	20	22.73			
professional ambition					
Low (26-32)	16	18.20			
Medium (33-39)	25	28.40	-------	0.191	*
High (40-46)	47	53.40			
achievement motivation					
Low (10-15)	41	46.59			
Medium (16-21)	19	21.59	------	0.063	n.s
High (22-27)	28	31.82			

3.3.3. Number of years of employment

According to the variable number of years working in the job, the results of the study showed that the lowest number of years of work in agriculture for the respondents is (10) years and the largest number of years of work in agriculture is (39) years with an arithmetic average of (19.46) and a standard deviation of (5.21) where the respondents were divided into three categories, and the highest percentage was within the low category (10-19) and a percentage of (54.54%) while the medium and high categories reached (20-29) and (30-39) respectively with a percentage of (22.73%) for both categories. As shown in Table (3). To find the correlation between work stress and the number of years worked in the job, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used, which amounted to (0.076), which is a significant value. This indicates that more than half of the respondents served the job less compared to their peers, and this result is consistent with what he found (Tahir Aljaf et al., 2014). Perhaps the reason for this is that the lack of career period of the respondents made them inexperienced in facing problems and pressures that reflected on their performance of their work.

3.3.4. professional ambition

The results showed that the highest numerical value of the professional ambition variable is 28 and the lowest value is 11, and when distributing the respondents according to the categories of professional ambition, it was found that the percentage of respondents who fall into the high category (23-28) reached (53.40%), while the percentage of respondents in the medium category (17-22) (28.40%), while the percentage of the low category (11-16) reached (18.20%). To find the correlation between work stress and career ambition, the Spearman-Brown correlation coefficient was used, which amounted to (0.191), which is a significant value this agree with (Kadhum & Hameed, 2023). Perhaps the reason for this is that the professional ambition of the respondents was high, which led to an increase in their motivation and activity, which enabled them to overcome all the obstacles and pressures they face while carrying out the work entrusted to them.

3.3.5. Achievement motivation

The results showed that the highest numerical value of achievement motivation is 27 and the lowest value is 10, and when distributing the respondents according to the categories of achievement motivation, it was found that the percentage of respondents who fall into the low category (10-15) reached (31.82%), while the percentage of respondents in the intermediate category (16-21) (21.59%), while the percentage of the high category (22-27) reached (31.82%). To find the correlation between work stress and achievement motivation, the Spearman-Brown correlation coefficient was used, which amounted to (0.063), which is a non-significant value. This may be due to the fact that the motivation of achievement was low among the respondents, which made the respondents not interested in the problems and pressures they face, which reflected on their job performance and work.

3.4. Identify the most important proposals that reduce the work pressures facing workers in agricultural extension

It is clear from Table 4, which shows the most important proposals that have been proposed by the respondents, which will reduce the work pressures they face if applied, where the paragraph (increasing incentives and material and moral rewards) ranked first among the proposals, perhaps due to its importance in increasing job satisfaction and improving the level of job performance of individuals because it stems from the employee's appreciation of his efforts as well as to satisfy their internal desires.

Table 4. The most important proposals that reduce the work pressures facing workers in agricultural extension

Sequence	Items	Frequency
1	Increasing material and moral incentives and rewards	44
2	Providing justice and equality among employees	39
3	Improving the relationship between superiors and subordinates	34
4	Involving employees in decision-making	29
5	Provide adequate information about job tasks	20
6	Specialization in tasks accomplished and lack of comprehensiveness	15
7	Increase mutual trust between individuals and their superiors	11
8	Holding training courses on work stress management	8

While the proposal (the establishment of training courses on work stress management) came in last place, perhaps due to the lack of importance of this proposal due to the establishment of training courses or workshops on finding successful ways to manage work pressure, or perhaps because work stress management is one of the axioms that most employees know about, so its importance was low for the respondents.

4. Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that more than half of agricultural extension workers are exposed to work pressure during their work to a low degree. Furthermore, the younger the respondents, the more they manage work pressures because they are more active, enthusiastic, and impulsive than the respondents with large ages. In addition, the use of new methods at work increases the desire for renewal among the respondents, and thus this is reflected in increasing their ability to manage and confront work pressures. Finally, the variables (level of education, age, professional ambition) had a significant correlation with work pressures. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended to pay attention to training courses to manage work stress for agricultural employees in the fields of extension work, in cooperation between the agricultural departments and the extension center in Nineveh. In addition, efforts should be directed toward developing and improving the implementation of agricultural employees by providing them with all the up-to-date information and research results they need to improve their performance.

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