

EMPLOYEES' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND OCCUPATIONAL STRESS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mohamad Rizal¹ & *Dina Syakina²

^{1,2}Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Mercu Buana, Jakarta

*Correspondence email: dina.syakina@mercubuana.ac.id

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Abstract: This research aimed to determine the relationship between employees' emotional intelligence and occupational stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emotional intelligence is vital for an employee to manage emotions, make decisions, and manage stress at work. The sampling technique in this research was Non-Probability Sampling with the Accidental Sampling type. The research respondents consisted of 191 people with the criteria of employees who have worked for at least one year and were 21 years old and above. The scale used in this research was the emotional intelligence scale developed by Khalili (2011) based on *Goleman's refinement model of emotional intelligence* and the occupational stress scale developed by Shukla and Srivastra (2016), The New Job Stress Scale. The results showed a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress. Furthermore, it can be interpreted that the higher the emotional intelligence, the lower the occupational stress on employees. Conversely, the lower the emotional intelligence, the higher the occupational stress on employees.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Occupational Stress, Employees, Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Aamodt (2015) states that occupational stress is a psychological and physical reaction to an event or situation (*stressor*) that comes from the work environment. Shukla (2016) defines occupational stress as stress experienced by employees caused by a high workload in the organization. Based on the results of a survey from the PPM School of Management in 2020, it was found that 80% of employees experienced symptoms of stress during the coronavirus pandemic (*Covid-19*).

Research from Nasrullah (2020) showed that around 65.8% of health worker respondents in Indonesia experienced anxiety due to the Covid-19 pandemic, 3.3% experienced very severe anxiety, and 33.1% experienced mild anxiety. Meanwhile, 55% of those experienced stress due to the Covid-19 outbreak, 0.8% got very severe stress levels, and 34.5% felt mild stress. Furthermore, 23.5% of health employees experienced depression, 0.5% rates of severe depression, and 11.2% experienced mild depression.

The Covid-19 pandemic also caused increased occupational stress for employees (Ibrahim & Suhariadi, 2021). This statement was supported by Azhar and Iriani (2020), showing that occupational stress in the Civil Servant (ASN) was one of them. It was caused by employees who carried out a *work from home* (WFH) system during the Covid-19 pandemic, causing excessive work pressure and workload with adjustments to changes in the work system. There were 22 people (30.1%) in this research who experienced an extremely high level of stress and severe stress. The Central Bureau of Statistics (2020) stated that the business sectors most affected during the Covid-19 pandemic included accommodation-providing companies, food and beverage companies, transportation companies, warehousing logistics, construction, processing industries, and trade. Hamouche (2020) stated that during the Covid-19 pandemic, many stress-causing factors could arise, including the threat of transmission risk, safety perception, unclear information, quarantine, and working conditions, including workload and work systems. Syafrizal (2021) mentioned that factors that could cause mild stress to severe stress during the pandemic included changing the work model from *work from the office* (WFO) to *work from home* (WFH) as well as employees being laid off.

Several causes make occupational stress the main discussion in an organization or company. According to Prastika and Noor (2012), occupational stress can hinder employee performance from working optimally. However, it can also result in increased employee absenteeism and high turnover. The employee's self and occupational stress can affect the security and decrease the performance of other employees. Indeed, it will be a loss for the organization or company. Meanwhile, Sanjaya (2012) states that occupational stress experienced by employees can cause accidents, employee absenteeism, employee turnover, decreased

employee productivity, causing medical expenses, insurance claims, and settlement of legal problems to increase. Furthermore, Ibrahim, Amansyah, and Yahya (2016) mentioned that the work environment and poor working conditions trigger employees to get sick easily have stress, have difficulty concentrating, and decrease work productivity. Therefore, occupational stress on employees needs to be studied further to not cause sustainable losses for individuals and the environment.

The results of Goswami's research (2015) showed that there was one cause of the low work results of employees, both in quality and quantity. One of these causes was the feeling of depression experienced by employees in dealing with jobs with high demands and workloads, causing symptoms of employees experiencing occupational stress. Symptoms of occupational stress are characterized by irritable behavior, being apathetic, feeling lazy to go to work, often complaining and feeling anxious, to not having an appetite (Mahardika, 2019; Mangkunegara & Puspitasari, 2015). Sarafino (in Mahardika, 2019) mentions several factors that cause employees to experience stress at work, including too much work, working beyond capacity, an *unsupportive* environment, lack of intrapersonal relationships, and lack of recognition/reward from the leader or supervisor or work colleague.

The *National Safety Council* (2004) groups the most important cause of occupational stress in an employee into three categories, i.e., organizational, individual, and environmental categories. Organizational factors include lack of autonomy, inappropriate workload, job relocation, lack of training, unclear career paths, poor relationship with superiors, inadequate technology, and additional job descriptions without a salary increase. Individual factors are the conflict between career and family responsibilities, economic uncertainty, lack of rewards, work saturation, childcare, and conflicts with co-employees. Meanwhile, environmental factors include poor working conditions, sexual harassment, violence in the workplace, traffic congestion when going to and returning from work, and racial discrimination.

Occupational stress on employees more often occurs because of a mismatch between employee competencies and the provisions or burden of work (Pardede & Indrawati, 2020). This statement is in line with the results of a preliminary study conducted by interviewing six employees

from different companies. Interviews were conducted by asking several questions related to each employee's company's workload and job demands. The results of the preliminary study showed that five of six employees stated that they had heavy demands and workloads that were not following their respective abilities and admitted to experiencing symptoms of occupational stress, as stated by Mahardika (2019); Mangkunegara, and Puspitasari (2015), which were irritable at work or home, felt lazy to go to work, often complained about work or other things, often felt anxious when getting office assignments or when doing activities at work, and did not have an appetite.

The Covid-19 pandemic was also one of the factors that caused occupational stress. Muslim (2020) stated that the problem for employees in the service and production sector was that they must continue to work at the work location. Therefore, it raised anxiety about being infected with the Covid-19 virus. Furthermore, Muslim (2020) also explained that layoffs carried out by companies due to decreased employee effectiveness were also the reason for the emergence of occupational stress during this pandemic. Meanwhile, those who were still doing business experienced a decrease in productivity. These things were the reasons why occupational stress was essential to review during the Covid-19 pandemic (Muslim, 2020).

The research results by Rangki and Aifariki (2019) stated that occupational stress would be reduced if employees had high emotional intelligence. Goleman (2015) states that individuals with high emotional intelligence will affect their behavior to overcome their problems, including in the work environment. The presence of individuals' emotional intelligence will make them be able to motivate themselves, not easily frustrated, and, most importantly, control stress.

According to Goleman (2015), emotional intelligence is the ability of an individuals to understand the circumstances of other individuals. Goleman (2015) also adds that *emotional intelligence* has five main components, i.e., self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Self-awareness refers to recognizing one's strengths, emotions, values , and abilities. Meanwhile, self-regulation is an individual's ability to resist emotional desires. In other words, the individual will think about what risks will occur before acting.

Motivation is often associated with the driving force within the individual that is useful for focusing on the task at hand and continuing to achieve the desired goal. Empathy is a person's ability to understand the feelings, which will make them act according to their feelings and meet the needs of others. Social skills are a person's ability to develop and maintain good working relationships with others (Triana, Rahmi, & Putra, 2015).

Yohanes (in Sari & Oktariani, 2021) states that individuals with high emotional intelligence will be able to regulate emotions with intelligence, maintain emotional health, and learn how to express them through self-awareness, self-control, and self-motivation, empathy, and good social skills.

Juliantari, Sujana, and Novarini (2021) state that occupational stress and emotional intelligence are interrelated. It occurs because employees who have high emotional intelligence will have the ability to maintain positive emotions in themselves and motivate themselves to carry out their duties well. Therefore, the stress at work can be appropriately handled. Steven and Sahrah (2019) state that one of the factors that can affect occupational stress is emotional intelligence. Employees with low emotional intelligence and who do not have the confidence to face problems in the work environment will be more susceptible to occupational stress. Emotional intelligence is described as an employee's ability to manage emotions to avoid occupational stress (Steven & Sarah, 2019). It is what causes the importance of an employee to have emotional intelligence in him.

Prajuna, Febriani, and Hasan (2017) reveal that many individuals work long working hours and narrow task completion deadlines and become subject to pressure to benefit the company or organization. These are some of the factors that cause job stress. Stress is hazardous to health. The danger of stress is caused by physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by demanding pressures for a long time. This process gradually worsens over time (Prajuna, Febriani, & Hasan, 2017). Without good emotional intelligence, individuals will not be able to maximize their cognitive abilities properly. Emotional intelligence will help individuals determine behavior in overcoming problems in themselves,

including in work, and emotional intelligence will further maximize individual potential in achieving their goals (Steven & Sarah, 2019).

METHOD

The research method was a quantitative correlational method. The quantitative research method explains the problem or phenomenon, which is explained by collecting data in the form of numbers and then analyzing it using mathematical methods (Aliaga & Gunderson, 2000). The research approach was descriptive-quantitative. The descriptive method is a study that explains the truth using appropriate explanations and is used to make accurate interpretations of the properties of several group and individual phenomena. This method is also used to find answers to the problems that exist in each research variable (Nazir, 2011). This research used emotional intelligence as the independent variable and occupational stress as the dependent variable.

The sampling technique used in this research was Non-Probability Sampling with the Accidental Sampling type. Non-Probability Sampling is a non-random data collection technique that has fixed criteria whose selection is based on specific subjective criteria. Sugiyono (2016) defines Accidental Sampling as a sampling technique based on the element of chance and is considered suitable as a data source. The research population consisted of employees at least 21 years old and who worked for at least one year. Based on the minimum sample calculation, the correlation test using the G*Power software version 3.1 resulted in the required samples, at least 153 people.

The research instrument used to collect data in this research was a questionnaire. It was a measuring tool for occupational stress variables in this research, i.e., The New Job Stress Scale developed by Shukla and Srivastava (2016). There were five dimensions, i.e., Time Stress, Anxiety, Role Expectation Conflict, Co-Worker Support, and Work-Life Balance. Furthermore, the emotional intelligence measuring tool was the scale developed by Ashkan Khalili (2011) called Goleman's refinement model of emotional intelligence. This scale included four dimensions, i.e., Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management.

RESULTS

This research used data from respondents who filled out online questionnaires via Google Forms. Research respondents were employees at least 21 years old and have worked for at least one year. This questionnaire was distributed from December 4, 2021, to December 15, 2021. Respondents in this research consisted of 191 employees, dominated by 21 to 25 years old female employees who had one to five years of service and permanent employment status. The respondent's latest educational background was dominated by bachelor's degree (S1) graduates, and their monthly income was around one to five million rupiahs per month. The data in this research were processed using *SPSS 24.0 software for Windows*.

Table 1: Categorization of Data

Variable	Category		
	High	Moderate	Low
Occupational Stress	0 (0%)	129 (67.5%)	39 (20.4%)
Emotional Intelligence	20 (10.5%)	137 (71.7 %)	34 (17.8%)

The results in Table 1 showed that most of the respondents had an occupational stress level in the moderate category (67.5%) and had emotional intelligence in the moderate category (71.7%). Table 2 showed a significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and job stress ($r=-.40$, $p<0.01$). These results indicated that the lower the respondents' emotional intelligence level, the higher the level of stress that the respondent would feel. In addition, it was also found that employees who had contract employees and had lower incomes tend to have high levels of occupational stress.

Table 2: Correlation between Variables

Name	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Job stress	55.23	10.66	(.84) ¹							
2 Emotional intelligence	87.52	10.60	-.40**	(.89) ¹						
3 Age	1.52	0.89	-0.09	0.12	1					
4 Gender	1.65	0.48	0.01	-0.07	-.26**	1				
5 Length of work	1.21	0.42	-0.12	.18*	.65**	-.25**	1			
6 Occupational status	1.49	0.50	-.21**	.19**	.32**	-.33**	.32**	1		
7 Education	3.25	0.98	-0.08	0.11	.33**	-0.07	0.11	.19**	1	
8 Income	1.50	0.73	-.22**	.19**	.31**	-.22**	.37**	.31**	.38**	1

Description: N = 191; * p < .05, ** p < .01 ¹(measuring instrument reliability)

^a Gender = 1 (male); 2 (female);

^b Length of work = 1 (1-5 years); 2 (6-15 years); 3 (16-20 years old); 4 (>21 years);

^c Occupational status = 1 (contract); 2 (permanent);

^e Education = 1 (elementary school); 2 (junior high school); 3 (senior high school); 4 (3-year Diploma);

5(University);

^d Income = 1 (1-5 Million); 2 (5-10 Million); 3 (10 – 15 Million); 4 (>15 Million).

In addition, the ANOVA test and *t*-test were also conducted. It was found that emotional intelligence was significantly different between males and females ($p < .05$), length of work ($p < .05$), and income ($p < .05$). These results indicated that males had higher emotional intelligence than females. The longer they worked and the higher the income, the more emotional intelligence they would have. In addition, job stress had a significant difference in income ($p < .01$). These results indicated that the higher a person's income, the lower the perceived occupational stress.

Table 3: Variable Regression

Variable	B (se)	
	Stage 1	Stage 2
Intercept	64.040 (25.42)**	93.08 (15.77)**
Occupational Status	-3.26 (-2.07)*	-2.17 (-1.47)
Income	-2.63 (-2.42)*	-1.82 (-1.78)
Emotional Intelligence		-0.36 (0.049)**
R ²	0.07	0.19
ΔR ²		0.12**
F	7.34**	28.81**
df1, df2	2, 188	1,187

Description: * p<0.05; **p<0.01

Based on the results of hypothesis testing using simple linear regression analysis, it began by entering the control variable, which was significantly correlated with the dependent variable (occupational stress), which had previously been obtained in the bivariate correlation analysis. The control variables in this research consisted of work status and income. Furthermore, the second stage was done by entering the variable that became the independent variable (*emotional intelligence*).

Table 3 showed that the coefficient of determination was .19 (F=7.34). This result indicated that emotional intelligence could contribute 19 percent to occupational stress. The regression results also showed that emotional intelligence was significantly negatively related to

occupational stress ($B=-.36, p<.01$) (hypothesis accepted). This result indicated that the higher the emotional intelligence, the lower the occupational stress.

DISCUSSION

This research objective was to determine whether there was a relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress in employees during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results showed a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress, which meant that the higher the emotional intelligence, the lower the perceived occupational stress. It aligned with Baharuddin, Jufri, and Hamid's (2019) research, which showed a very significant relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress. Furthermore, in Enjelita's research, Darmayanti and Aziz (2020) found a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress. Goleman (2015) states that individuals with high emotional intelligence will affect their behavior to overcome their problems, including in the work environment. Emotional intelligence in individuals will allow individuals to motivate themselves, not be easily frustrated, and, most importantly, control stress.

There were no respondents who fell into the low category of emotional intelligence. It indicated that the level of emotional intelligence that existed in respondents tended to be high and medium. Goleman (2016) states that someone who has high emotional intelligence means having good emotional control, having self-awareness of himself and awareness of the surrounding environment, and having empathy and good social skills. Meanwhile, the occupational stress variable showed that the respondents in this research tended to have occupational stress in the moderate category, meaning that the respondents had a high workload but little time to complete it, little support from co-employees, had difficulty balancing responsibilities in work with other aspects of life, as well as feelings of anxiety. Wardani and Noviyani (2020), stated work load itself can affect work pressure, emotions, mental stress, and physical condition of a person.

Referring to the J-DR theory, workers need to balance job resources and job demands owned by workers, and reduce work pressure (Wardani,

Sekarini, Syaputra, Kartikawati, Dawanti, Mulia, & Malek, 2021; Wardani & Oktafiansyah, 2020). One way is in the form of proactive worker behavior which is the key to being able to balance the demands of work and work resources in their work (Wardani, Syaputra, Kartikawati, & Sekarini, 2021). One of them is job crafting, which is a way for workers to rearrange their work and change their views on the work that must be completed according to the abilities and needs of the individual itself (Wardani, Kartikawati, Syaputra, & Sekarini, 2021). In addition, to reduce the vulnerability of employees from adverse conditions, can make themselves depressed about the demands of work which requires good psychological capital (Wardani, Wulandari, Triasti, & Sombuling, 2020; Wardani & Amaliah, 2020).

However, occupational stress was found to be related to income and occupational status. The higher the income, the lower the perceived occupational stress. Higher income would reduce anxiety from an economic perspective and allow employees to balance the focus between work and personal life using their income. Besides, the employees with higher income would be more satisfied with what they could get than employees with less income. This result was supported by research from Astuti (2015), which also stated differences in levels of occupational stress with employee income. These results were also supported by research from Khoirunnisa, Effendi, Fauziah, and Srisantyorini (2021), which reported that occupational stress was related to employee income.

Furthermore, that occupational status had a relationship with occupational stress experienced by employees. Employees with contract status would have higher anxiety than permanent employees because when their performance decreases, the possibility of being dismissed would be more significant. Likewise, with monthly income, employees with higher incomes would have a higher opportunity to satisfy themselves with the results obtained compared to employees with lower incomes, conflicted in work, and personal life responsibilities would also be more minor if they had sufficient in terms of income.

Emotional intelligence was found to have differences based on gender, so it was concluded that there were differences in emotional intelligence between males and females. However, in this research, males had higher emotional intelligence than females. The results of this research

contradicted Goleman's statement (2016) that there was no difference in emotional intelligence between males and females.

Meanwhile, the difference between emotional intelligence variables with years of service and monthly income concluded that there were differences in emotional intelligence levels based on employees' years of service and monthly income. These results were supported by research from Rode et al. (2017), which stated a relationship between levels of emotional intelligence based on monthly income from employees. It could be said that someone who had a long working period would have higher emotional intelligence. After all, he had higher social awareness, could build good relationships with other employees, and had better self-control because his experience in the organization was sufficient. Likewise, with income, based on the research results, it was found that the higher the income, the higher the emotional intelligence that a person had. It could happen because someone with a high income would feel satisfied or proportional to the work, he did so that the possibility of having self-awareness and social would be higher (Howes, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress experienced by employees during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results showed that emotional intelligence had a significant negative relationship with occupational stress. The higher the emotional intelligence possessed by employees, the lower the perceived occupational stress. This research showed that employees were required to develop their emotional intelligence to minimize occupational stress. Goleman (2016) stated that emotional intelligence can be learned and transferable. Therefore, (1) employees are asked to be able to recognize feelings and develop themselves well; and (2) able to make self-management and good relationships with fellow co-employees by developing empathy. However, these must be supported by the organization, such as (1) providing opportunities for employees to be more creative with their work; and (2) providing shared facilities, e.g., family gatherings or employee gatherings. In addition, the organization must provide a space for discussion and reciprocity for employees so that employees feel heard by the organization. This research still had many shortcomings, such as the limitations of obtaining more respondents. Therefore, this research could not be generalized. Hopefully, further

research in the future can consider the type or field of work involved as a calculated variable.

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Contribution authors

Mohamad Rizal, S. Psi has contributed substantially to the conception and design, data acquisition, data analysis and interpretation. Dina Syakina, M.Si. has been involved in drafting or critically revising for important intellectual content, design, data acquisition, data analysis and interpretation, and given final approval of the version to be published.

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