

Exploring the Relationship between Work Pressure, Occupational Stress and Turnover Intention: A Case Study of Office Employees

Mai Le Ngoc¹, Huong Tran Dong¹, Long Vo Trung¹, Quang Nguyen Phuong²

1 FPT University, Vietnam

2 FPT Polytechnic, FPT University, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of work pressure on occupational stress and turnover intentions among office employees. Surveying 317 individuals in Vietnamese business settings using structural equation modeling (SEM), we identified significant correlations between work pressure factors - including workload, work time, working conditions, and the work environment - and both occupational stress and turnover intentions. An interesting revelation emerged: while working conditions affect job stress, they do not directly affect employees' inclination to leave their jobs. Practical recommendations are provided to help businesses mitigate work-related stress and reduce turnover intentions among office employees.

KEYWORDS

Work pressure; Occupational stress; Turnover intention; Office employee; Vietnam

1. Introduction

Research on how organizations can enhance employee retention is gaining traction. HR managers and researchers are particularly interested in this area. Studies on turnover intention reveal that it's a clear sign of employees actually quitting, which can significantly impact organizations, resulting in higher costs (Firth et al., 2004).

According to Selye (1956), each profession has its own unique stressors. Elisa (2007) also discovered that employees experience varying levels of pressure at work based on their roles and job phases. Issues like lack of accountability from supervisors, inadequate support from colleagues, tedious meetings, power struggles, and conflicts among coworkers, coupled with environmental factors like noise, temperature, workload, and work overload or underload, all contribute to individual work pressure (Gretchen, 2002). Devi and Sharma (2013) indicate that excessive work pressure can harm employees' physical and mental health, leading to stress and negative impacts on organizations, such as increased absenteeism, task delays, employee turnover, reduced revenue, and higher costs.

Meanwhile, research on work pressure, occupational stress, and turnover intention has garnered significant attention, as evidenced by studies by Muhamad et al. (2020), Salama et al. (2022), Hazeen and Umarani (2022), Mohamad et al (2023), Bhat et al. (2023), Baquero (2023), Raišiene et al. (2023), and Maharani and Tamara (2024). However, most studies treat work pressure as a unidimensional scale, and the relationship between work pressure, occupational stress, and turnover intention is not fully quantified in terms of both direct and indirect impacts.

In Vietnam, office employees often face demanding work conditions, with fixed schedules and limited time off, resulting in high work pressure. Therefore, This study focuses on quantitatively examining the clear relationship between work pressure, occupational stress, and turnover intention

among office employees in Vietnam. The aim is to provide a scientific basis to assist Vietnamese managers in implementing solutions to reduce work-related stress, diminish turnover intentions, enhance labor productivity, and maintain workforce stability. These efforts contribute to the sustainable business growth of the Vietnamese economy.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Work pressure

Work pressure arises when job demands exceed an employee's capability to cope with them. The reactions to work pressure are outcomes derived from this stress (Westman, 2005). It's a common challenge that every employee faces, and how they handle it varies depending on their personality and mindset.

Malek (2010) defines work pressure as a situation that causes discomfort when job demands outweigh an individual's abilities. It's a widespread phenomenon that manifests differently in various work situations and affects different workers.

Work pressure is a response to stressful situations or stimuli that influence an individual's psyche. It's a concept related to psychophysiology, showing reactions to any pressure that puts individuals in challenging situations, prompting them to either prepare for combat or give up. Graham (2000) argue that work pressure occurs due to factors like job overload, conflicting interests, time constraints, staff shortages, inadequate work equipment, and conflicts among colleagues.

Moreover, work pressure in the workplace is the specific relationship between an individual and their work environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It's also defined as a psychological state that occurs when there's a mismatch between a demand and an individual's belief in their ability to meet that demand. How individuals perceive and assess work situations can lead them to coping behaviors, which in turn generate responses to their perceptions of future situations, including whether those needs are compatible with their abilities (Cox et al., 2000).

2.2 Occupational stress

Occupational stress is the specific relationship between an individual and their work environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It's also defined as a psychological state that occurs when there's a mismatch between a demand and an individual's belief in their ability to meet that demand. How individuals perceive and assess work situations can lead them to coping behaviors, which in turn generate responses to their perceptions of future situations, including whether those needs are compatible with their abilities (Cox et al., 2000).

According to Vansell et al., (1981), Occupational stress arises when employees must carry out tasks that require independence and a certain level of authority to achieve optimal efficiency, but the organization does not delegate enough authority for them to complete the tasks. Luthans (1995) suggests that occupational stress is a chronic condition that negatively affects individual productivity and easily arises when job demands exceed employees' coping abilities. According to Bashir and Ramay (2010), Occupational stress originates from work overload, pressures from superiors and colleagues, and deadlines. Additionally, low salary, a stressful work environment, and poor relationships with colleagues can easily lead to stress among employees (French & Caplan, 1972; Bashir & Ramay, 2010; Badar, 2011).

2.3 Turnover intention

Turnover intention refers to an employee's inclination to leave their job, encompassing their readiness, ability, and plans to resign. While not an actual behavior, turnover intention sets the stage for subsequent actions. Investigating the factors influencing employees' intentions to quit helps companies anticipate and measure the transition from intention to action, enabling them to devise proactive strategies, allocate resources wisely, and mitigate any adverse effects on company operations (Price & Muller, 1981).

According to Chew (2004), turnover intention is the intention to leave the current work environment for another. It gauges whether an employee is contemplating leaving their current position. Unlike actual turnover, turnover intention is less clear-cut; it's a nascent thought, still in the realm of contemplation and not yet manifested in specific actions indicating an employee's departure. This ambiguity poses a challenge for managers in identifying employees' intentions to quit and implementing effective measures to curb turnover. However, turnover intention serves as an effective metric for assessing whether an employee plans to leave their current position (Mobley, 1982). Consequently, turnover intention is considered a clear indicator and an accurate predictor of employees' resignation decisions. By analyzing turnover intention, managers can gain insights and forecast actual turnover behavior, facilitating strategic workforce planning and organizational restructuring.

2.4 The relationship between work pressure and occupational stress

According to Wilkes et al. (1998), both workload and time constraints significantly influence employees' Occupational Stress in the workplace. Work pressure stemming from workload can be defined as the reluctance to perform tasks at work, accompanied by continuous feelings of physiological, psychological, and behavioral stress symptoms (Hendy et al., 2001). Specifically, time pressure is identified as a fundamental cause of stress when workload becomes excessive. Besides, Elisa (2007) emphasizes that employees feeling insecure in their work environment is a crucial factor contributing to increased Occupational Stress. The work environment plays a vital role in affecting employees' work pressure in their respective industries (Muhammad et al., 2011; Muhamad et al., 2020).

In many office settings, employees interact and engage with colleagues and superiors extensively. Therefore, the relationship with superiors and colleagues significantly impacts occupational stress. Employees require support and assistance from colleagues when needed and should feel comfortable collaborating with them (Jerald & Robert, 2003). Ultimately, colleagues and superiors should be trustworthy (Ivangevich et al., 1999).

Workplace relationships refer to interactions between individuals or between individuals and the organization, which persist and develop in the workplace. The quality of these relationships among individuals at work, as well as the lack of support from others in the workplace, can be sources of occupational stress (Sauter et al., 1992). It has been concluded that the absence or underdeveloped relationships between colleagues, superiors, and subordinates in the workplace are significant factors contributing to employees' occupational stress issues (Cox & Griffiths, 1995). Cox and Griffiths argue that individuals who are isolated at work and receive little support from colleagues, superiors, or friends are more prone to experiencing occupational stress compared to those who receive support from their peers.

Based on the above, the following hypotheses (H1-H4) are proposed:

H1: Workload pressure positively influences occupational stress among office employees.

H2: Worktime pressure positively influences occupational stress among office employees.

H3: Work environment pressure positively influences occupational stress among office employees.

H4: Working condition pressure positively influences occupational stress among office employees.

2.5 The relationship between work pressure and turnover intention

As work pressure escalates, it poses a threat to employees' mental well-being, consequently influencing their behavior. Research findings indicate that work pressure is a primary cause of attitude and behavioral outcomes such as organizational commitment, and turnover intention (Barsky et al., 2004). Firth et al. (2004), Muhamad et al. (2020) also concluded that turnover intention is largely influenced by feelings of stress and work pressure. Moore (2000) identified workload overload as the strongest factor leading to burnout among technology workers, subsequently resulting in higher turnover intentions. Therefore, the following hypotheses (H5-H8) are proposed:

H5: Workload pressure positively influences turnover intention among office employees.

H6: Worktime pressure positively influences turnover intention among office employees.

H7: Work environment pressure positively influences turnover intention among office employees.

H8: Working condition pressure positively influences turnover intention among office employees.

2.6 The relationship between occupational stress and turnover intention

When exploring the link between job stress, work overload, and the work environment with turnover intention, Qureshi et al. (2013), Raišienė et al. (2023) concluded that employees' intentions to quit stem from workplace stress, workload, and an unsupportive work environment.

Firth et al. (2004) similarly found that turnover intention is largely influenced by job dissatisfaction, lack of organizational commitment, and feelings of stress induced by work pressure. Job stress is a term used to describe the difficulty employees encounter while performing their tasks. It threatens the mental well-being of employees, subsequently affecting their behavior. When employees experience high levels of job stress, it leads to higher turnover intentions (Calisir et al., 2011; Maharani & Tamara, 2024). Graham et al. (2000), Salama et al. (2022) identified job stress among employees due to workload overload, conflicting interests, time constraints, staff shortages, inadequate work equipment, and conflicts among colleagues. Job stress threatens employees' mental well-being, thus impacting their behavior. Research findings suggest that job stress is a primary cause of attitude and behavioral outcomes such as organizational commitment, job dissatisfaction, and turnover intention (Barsky et al., 2004; Bhat et al., 2023). Therefore, when employees experience high levels of job stress, it leads to higher turnover intentions (Calisir et al., 2011; Hazeen & Umarani, 2022; Mohamad et al., 2023; Baquero, 2023). Hence, the following hypothesis (H9) is proposed:

H9: Occupational Stress positively influences turnover intention among office employees.

The research concepts and research hypotheses are presented in the conceptual framework as follows:

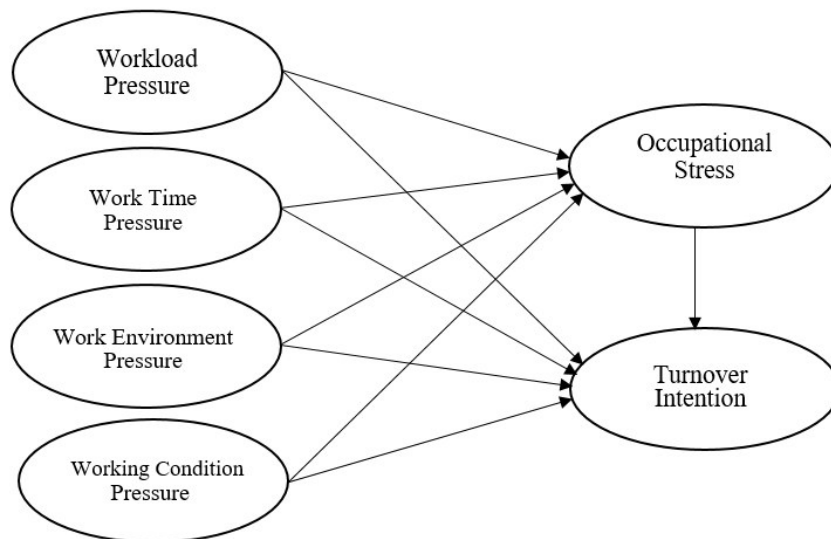


Figure 1 The conceptual framework

3. Research methods

The research was conducted in two phases: a preliminary study and a formal study. The qualitative preliminary study was conducted through double-handed discussions with 5 HR managers from various companies in Can Tho city, using a prepared framework and draft scale to adjust terminology and enhance measurement scales. Based on the outcomes of these discussions, the research team refined the terminology and developed a comprehensive scale for the components in the research model. The

quantitative preliminary study, employing direct interview techniques, was carried out through a pilot survey with a sample of 50 observations consisting of office employees working in companies in Can Tho city to validate the preliminary scales. The results of the preliminary quantitative study showed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all factor groups reached 0.7 or higher for each scale, indicating high reliability.

The formal study was conducted using quantitative methods and direct interview techniques with a sample size of 317 observations from companies in Can Tho city and Hau Giang province. The measurement scale for the research concepts in the model consisted of 31 observed variables used to measure 6 concepts. The content variables in the research model were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree. The workload pressure scale included 6 measured variables, the worktime pressure scale comprised 4 variables, the work environment scale consisted of 6 variables, the working condition scale comprised 4 variables, the occupational stress scale included 6 variables, and the turnover intention scale comprised 5 variables. The collected data were cleaned and analyzed using a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach to assess the scale's quality, model fit, and test the hypotheses of the relationships between independent and dependent variables in the research model.

4. Research results

4.1 Description of the study sample

According to Hair et al. (1998), the determination of the minimum sample size in exploratory factor analysis depends on two factors: (i) the minimum level and (ii) the number of variables included in the model analysis. Thus, the minimum sample size is set at 50, and in this study, with a model comprising 31 observed variables, the sample size ratio is 5/1. Therefore, a minimum sample size of 155 is required. Additionally, Kline (1988) suggests that having 10 to 20 observations per parameter to be estimated in the model will provide a sufficiently representative sample. On the other hand, Hoyle (1995) argues that to ensure reliability in model testing, between 100 to 200 observations are required.

The sample used in the study, after being cleaned through the Snowball sampling method, meets the conditions of the linear structural model. The characteristics of the research sample were classified by the authors into 4 groups, including gender, marital status, and work experience. Specific characteristics of the survey sample are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Descriptive statistical results

Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	174	54.9
Male	142	45.1
Marital Status		
Single	186	58.7
Married	131	41.3
Work Experience		
Under 1 year	43	13.6
1 – 3 years	128	40.3
3 – 6 years	89	28.1
Over 6 years	57	18.0
Total	317	100.0

The reliability of the measurement scale is the important criterion used to assess the suitability of the scale to reflect a factor under study. Two values, Cronbach's Alpha or outer loadings, are used to evaluate the reliability of the scale. However, factor loadings are often preferred over Cronbach's alpha due to certain limitations of the Cronbach's alpha index (Hair et al., 2017). Measurement items with factor loading coefficients less than 0.4 should be eliminated from the research model. Items with factor loading coefficients greater than 0.7 should be retained in the research model. For items with

factor loading coefficients between 0.4 and 0.7, elimination should only be considered if it increases the value of composite reliability or average variance extracted (Bagozzi et al., 1991). The results of the outer loadings for the observed variables are all greater than 0.7. With CR and Cronbach's alpha values for all factors exceeding 0.7, it can be concluded that the factors in the model achieve consistent internal reliability (Hair et al., 2017). It can be concluded that all observed variables converge when the AVE value exceeds 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017). The variance inflation factor (VIF) of the independent variables is all below 3, indicating that there is no multicollinearity issue present in the research model.

Table 2 Convergence and reliability of measurement scale

Factor	Code	Outer Loadings	CR	CA	AVE	VIF
Workload pressure	WLP	0.736 – 0.893	0.844	0.725	0.578	0.124 – 1.874
Worktime pressure	WTP	0.754 – 0.867	0.771	0.717	0.563	1.148 – 1.568
Work environment	WE	0.731 – 0.808	0.942	0.868	0.637	1.075 – 2.219
Working condition	WC	0.762 – 0.833	0.848	0.785	0.598	1.481 – 2.086
Occupational stress	OS	0.719 – 0.854	0.891	0.843	0.616	1.662 – 1.773
Turnover intention	TI	0.778 – 0.895	0.873	0.811	0.605	1.052 – 1.936

The HTMT ratio is one of the four criteria used to evaluate discriminant validity. All HTMT ratio values are less than 0.9, indicating that the observed variables are distinct (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 3 The Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations

	WLP	WTP	WE	WC	OS	TI
WLP						
WTP	3.573					
WE	0.364	4.845				
WC	0.157	0.927	3.715			
OS	1.598	1.882	2.194	3.851		
TI	0.631	1.753	1.219	1.606	2.946	

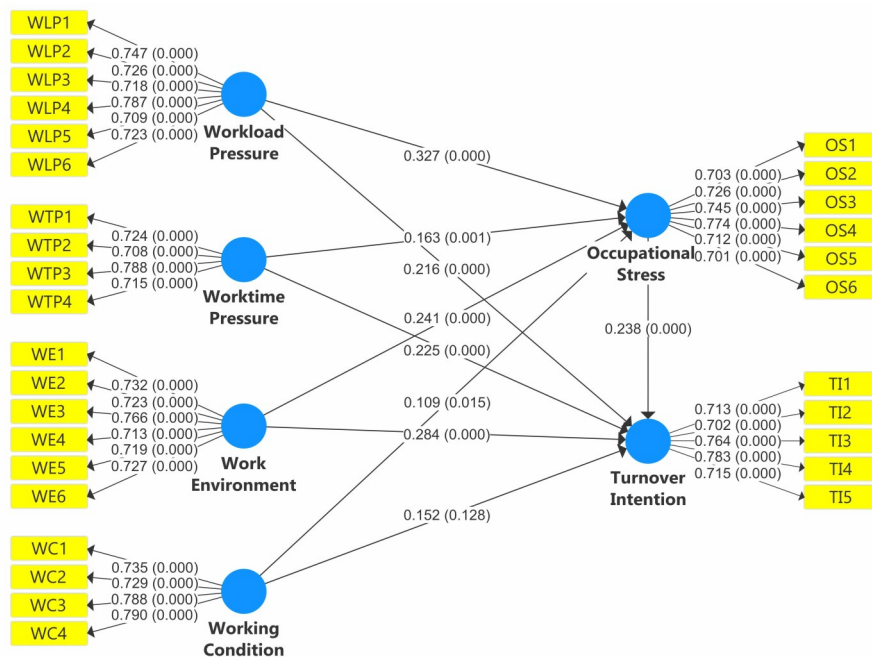


Figure 1 Research model results

Among the hypotheses from H1 to H9, only hypothesis H8 is statistically insignificant. This implies that Working Condition Pressure does not influence turnover intention among office employees. The remaining eight hypotheses are accepted since all their p-values are less than 5%. Furthermore, the R2 values range from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate better predictive accuracy in the model. In our research model, there are two dependent variables: (1) occupational stress; and (2) turnover intention, with R2 values of 52.3% and 56.9%, respectively. It's evident that dimensions within Work Pressure explain 52.3% of the variance in occupational stress, and both dimensions within Work Pressure and occupational stress together explain 56.9% of turnover intention. This suggests a relatively acceptable fit of the research model.

The analysis results indicate that the dimensions under Work Pressure, including Workload pressure, Worktime pressure, and Work environment, have a positive impact on both occupational stress and turnover intention. This research outcome aligns with similar models validated by Jerald and Robert (2003), Muhammad et al. (2011), and Muhamad et al. (2020). However, unlike previous studies, Working conditions only have a positive effect on occupational stress without a significant direct impact on turnover intention. This suggests that an inadequate Working condition, failing to meet job demands and provide comfort to employees, may lead to occupational stress and indirectly contribute to turnover intention. While Working condition may contribute to employees experiencing stress in their roles, it may not be the primary driver behind their decision to leave their jobs. Firstly, it's possible that while Working conditions play a role in shaping the day-to-day experiences of employees, turnover decisions are influenced by a broader range of factors. Turnover intention often stems from complex interactions between Workload pressure, Worktime pressure and Work environment. Therefore, the impact of Working conditions alone may not be substantial enough to drive employees to consider leaving their jobs. Secondly, the nature of turnover intention itself may vary depending on individual perceptions and circumstances. While poor Working conditions may contribute to feelings of stress, employees may weigh other factors more heavily when contemplating whether to stay or leave their current position. Other factors related to the organization and personal values may overshadow the influence of Working conditions on turnover intention. Additionally, the lack of a direct link between Working conditions and turnover intention may reflect the adaptability of employees in managing their work conditions. Despite facing challenges or discomfort in their Working conditions, employees may find ways to cope or mitigate the negative effects, thereby reducing the likelihood of them actively seeking to leave their jobs. Moreover, organizational support and intervention strategies can also moderate the relationship between Working conditions and turnover intention. For instance, initiatives aimed at improving communication, providing resources for stress management, or offering flexibility in work arrangements can mitigate the adverse effects of poor Working conditions on turnover intention.

Table 4 Results of testing relationships in the research model

Relationship	Hypothesis	Total Impact	Direct Impact	Indirect Impact	P value	Result
WLP → OS	H1	0.327	0.327	-	0.000	Accepted
WTP → OS	H2	0.163	0.163	-	0.001	Accepted
WE → OS	H3	0.241	0.241	-	0.000	Accepted
WC → OS	H4	0.109	0.109	-	0.015	Accepted
WLP → TI	H5	0.216	0.144	0.072	0.000	Accepted
WTP → TI	H6	0.225	0.106	0.119	0.000	Accepted
WE → TI	H7	0.284	0.156	0.128	0.000	Accepted
WC → TI	H8	0.152	0.047	0.105	0.128	Rejected
OS → TI	H9	0.238	0.238	-	0.000	Accepted

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the intricate relationship between work pressure, occupational stress, and turnover intention among office employees. The findings underscore the significant impact of work pressure dimensions, including workload, work time, and work environment, on both occupational stress and turnover intention, aligning with prior research. The new contribution of this study is that it shows working conditions affect occupational stress but don't directly influence whether employees want to leave their jobs.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to help control stress and enhance job outcomes for office employees as follows: Firstly, business administrators should allocate work to employees reasonably, considering the current workload each employee is responsible for. This involves allocating sufficient time to complete new tasks to avoid overloading employees, thereby reducing work pressure. Moreover, supporting employees with streamlined work processes for complex issues and minimizing unnecessary paperwork and reports is essential. Assigning tasks according to job descriptions can prevent employees from having to work overtime, which can contribute to occupational stress. Secondly, administrators should regularly update working conditions by upgrading supportive equipment to create a comfortable workspace and reduce stringent rules. Additionally, they should prioritize leisure and vacation programs to maintain employees' physical and mental well-being, fostering connections among colleagues and between employees and leaders to cultivate a friendly work environment. Thirdly, it's important for office workers to build strong bonds with their colleagues, being friendly and approachable. This makes it easier to share work problems and reduce stress together. Employees should also try to understand their bosses and coworkers better, communicating effectively to avoid any misunderstandings. Lastly, Being supportive and respectful towards each other and supervisors is key for a harmonious work environment.

Despite the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, certain limitations exist, which also guide future research directions: Firstly, this study focused only on analyzing the effects of three research concepts, namely Work Pressure, Occupational Stress, and Turnover Intention among office employees in two cities in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, including Can Tho City and Hau Giang Province. Subsequent studies may incorporate additional factors such as employee psychological characteristics, corporate culture, and expand the research scope to other provinces and cities in Vietnam. Secondly, the study used the Snowball sampling method, resulting in relatively low representativeness.

About the authors

Mai Le Ngoc Email: MaiLNCS160790@fpt.edu.vn. She is a student at FPT University, Can Tho Campus, Vietnam. Her academic interests involve Marketing, customer behavior and Human Resource Management.

Huong Tran Dong Email: HuongTDCE150469@fpt.edu.vn. He is a student at FPT University, Can Tho Campus, Vietnam. His academic interests involve Marketing, customer behavior and Human Resource Management.

Long Vo Trung Email: LongVTSS160120@fpt.edu.vn. He is a student at FPT University, Can Tho Campus, Vietnam. His academic interests involve Behavioral Psychology and Human Resource Management.

Quang Nguyen Phuong Email: QuangNP3@fpt.edu.vn. He is a lecturer in Faculty of Marketing & Sales, FPT Polytechnic, FPT University. His research interests include Marketing, Consumer behavior, Human Resource Management.

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