

# A Systematic Literature Review of Causes, Effects, and Strategies for Prevention of Occupational Stress in the Workplace

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*Abstract: Occupational stress is widely recognized as a significant challenge impacting employee health, well-being, and organizational effectiveness across various professional settings. Increasing levels of stress-related conditions, such as anxiety, burnout, and depression, have resulted in notable human and economic consequences for organizations and society. Based on the Person–Environment (PE) Fit Model, this systematic literature review explores the causes, effects, and prevention strategies related to occupational stress in the workplace. Utilizing a qualitative thematic approach, in line with the PRISMA method a 41 peer-reviewed journal articles were systematically identified from key academic databases, including Scopus, PubMed, EBSCO, ScienceDirect, and SABINET. Findings indicate that occupational stress often stems from ongoing mismatches between individual capabilities and workplace demands, especially in high-intensity sectors such as healthcare and emergency services. Common stressors include excessive workloads, role ambiguity, shift schedules, emotional labour, insufficient managerial support, and suboptimal work environments. Evidence shows that prolonged exposure to these stressors can lead to psychological and physiological health issues, decreased job performance, higher absenteeism, and reduced organizational effectiveness. While moderate stress (eustress) can enhance performance when properly managed, unmanaged or chronic stress generally results in adverse outcomes. The review emphasizes that individual coping mechanisms alone are inadequate to address structural sources of stress. Effective prevention requires comprehensive interventions at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels. Strategies such as job redesign, leadership development, resilience training, cognitive-behavioural techniques, and fostering supportive organizational cultures are essential in mitigating occupational stress. Overall, the study highlights the importance of developing context-specific, evidence-based frameworks for stress management to support sustainable employee well-being and organizational success.*

*Keywords: occupational stress, psychological/physiological health issues, excessive workloads and emotional labour*

## Introduction

Occupational stress is recognized as a significant health risk associated with various psychological, behavioural, and medical conditions. Individuals and organizations can reduce these risks through proactive stress management strategies and the promotion of overall well-being. (Quick, & Henderson, 2016).

Today, stress is among the most common psychological conditions. Related issues such as anxiety, tension, depression, and burnout continue to rise, contributing to the prevalence of psychological difficulties and borderline mental health states. The working population is exposed continuously to both social and occupational stressors, which impose significant financial costs on organizations and society. (Fagamova, Kaptsov, Karimova, Shapoval, & Muldasheva, 2022).

Some business leaders lack effective strategies to mitigate occupational stress and promote constructive growth. Workplace stress can negatively impact productivity, damage an organization's reputation, and contribute to an unhealthy work environment. (Irby, 2023). Grounded in the Person-Environment Fit Model, the purpose of this systematic literature review is to explore the causes, effects, and strategies for prevention of occupational stress in the workplace.

## Literature Review

### *Definition and Characterisation of Occupational Stress within Professional Workplace Environments*

The concept of occupational strain encompasses various dimensions, including both physiological and psychological pressures experienced by employees in the workplace. According to Abebe and Alemseged (2016), occupational stress involves physical or emotional factors that arise when there is a mismatch between an employee's physical health and emotional well-being in the work environment. Similarly, Desa, Yusooff, Ibrahim, and Kadir (2014) define occupational stress as a

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condition characterized by physical and psychological disturbances resulting from workplace pressures. Nwokeocha (2015) describes occupational stress as the response employees have when they are exposed to work demands and pressures that exceed their abilities, skills, or competencies. Rizwan, Waseem, and Bukhari (2014) further explain that occupational stress involves reactions to various psychological and physical demands encountered during work efforts. These concepts primarily relate to the work environment and are often triggered by work-related factors.

Occupational stress is often considered to result from a combination of work-related stressors and job roles, which many professionals recognize as challenging (Amiri, 2018a). It can also be defined as the interaction between external work environments and individual characteristics, where the demands of the organization may exceed an employee's capacity to cope. In some cases, working irregular or unpredictable hours that do not align with an individual's abilities or work expectations can lead to increased stress. Occupational stress is a form of ongoing mental strain caused by difficult work environments, which can adversely affect an individual's personal well-being, performance, and overall resilience (Singh, Amiri, & Sabbarwal, 2019).

Pfejfer-Buczec, Nowicka, Ciekanowski, and Marciniak (2023) highlight that occupation stress is an inherent aspect of workplace environments, significantly influencing employee performance. Elevated stress levels can adversely affect employees' mental health and job satisfaction, thereby impacting motivation and overall work performance, which in turn can influence organizational success metrics. Workplace stress not only affects individual employees but also has broader implications for organizational effectiveness. Chronic stress among employees may lead to various health issues, including sleep disturbances such as insomnia, hypertension, concentration difficulties, and mood-related challenges. Additionally, stress can result in decreased product quality, difficulties in issue recognition, and increased employee absenteeism. It is therefore essential for organizations to understand the internal factors contributing to workplace stress. With this understanding, organizations can develop and implement strategies aimed at reducing workplace tension and improving overall working conditions.

### ***Person-Environment Fit Model***

The Person-Environment (PE) fit model is widely recognized as a prominent framework for understanding organizational stress. The concept of fit suggests that individuals have an inherent tendency to align themselves with their environments and actively seek settings that match their personal traits. This pursuit of alignment is driven by a desire for consistency, a need to exercise control over one's life, and a goal to reduce uncertainty. Additionally, individuals have a fundamental need to belong, along with a preference for happiness and life satisfaction (Yu, 2013). Scholars often define PE fit as the alignment between an individual and their work environment, with particular focus on individual-level factors (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). In summary, workplace stress arises from the interaction between an individual and their environment, especially when job demands threaten the person's well-being. This can lead to a mismatch in PE fit, resulting in physical and psychological symptoms (Edwards & Cooper, 1990). The PE fit model provides a valuable framework for assessing and predicting how personal characteristics and work environment variables collectively influence employee well-being. Furthermore, this model can be utilized to develop preventative strategies aimed at improving occupational health outcomes (Abbas et al., 2013).

### ***Primary Factors Contributing to Occupational Stress***

Factors contributing to occupational stress in the workplace are extensively documented in occupational pressure literature. A cross-sectional study conducted by Gholamzadeh, Sharif, and Rad (2011) among nurses working in the Admission and Emergency Departments at hospitals affiliated with Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Iran, identified workload and insufficient economic incentives as primary contributors to employee stress, which ultimately affected overall employee performance. Additionally, a cross-sectional analysis of stress and related factors among ward nurses at a public hospital in Kuala Lumpur indicated that staff members face numerous demands from supervisors, peers, and senior management. Furthermore, Heliso, Babore, and Ashine (2024) advise that primary sources of workplace stress include workload, emotional challenges related to patient mortality, uncertainties regarding treatment, job satisfaction, shift schedules, and the availability of necessary work equipment. This occupational stress experienced by nurses can potentially lead to a decline in the quality of nursing care and increase risks to patient safety (Khan, Anwar, and Sayed, 2014; Madadzadeh, Barati, and Asour, 2018). Across various industries, a study by Jafarzadeh,

Pordanjani, and Ebrahimi (2025) highlighted key factors contributing to occupational stress among rescue workers, including work overload, interpersonal conflicts, shift work, encounters with death and mortality, lack of mental health support, conflicts with management, and unclear authority structures. Research by Khattak and Qureshi (2020) identified several factors impacting stress levels among rescue workers in Pakistan, such as job role clarity, role ambiguity, workload, and support from supervisors, family, and colleagues. Additionally, Sepidarkish et al. (2013) observed that high workloads, extended shifts, and insufficient rest periods contribute to job-related stress among firefighters in Tehran. Given the high levels of stress and demands placed on rescue personnel, which can adversely affect their physical, mental, and social well-being—and pose health risks—it is essential to identify the underlying factors of occupational stress and develop effective stress management strategies..

**Table 1**

Work Related	Personality	Work environment
long antisocial working hours work overload and under load Low pays and negative work patterns worker disempowerment bad employee relationships Work overload, role ambiguity and incompatibility Downsizing/privatization	Uneven social relations Quick to anger Distrustful	Dirty and untidy Crowded work area Noisy and polluted Run down Poor ventilation ill regulated

Sources: Murray-Gibbons, & Gibbons, (2007) and Chiang et.al (2010)

***Effects of Occupational Stress on Employee Performance and Well-Being***

Premised on the ongoing discussion, Stress can contribute to a range of physiological and behavioural challenges in individuals (Amiri, 2017b). When employees experience substantial stress, their concentration on tasks may diminish, which can impact both their performance and the overall organizational environment. In general, work-related stress has the potential to reduce employee productivity. While work conditions play a significant role in contributing to employee stress, individual factors should also be considered (Cox,2004).

Furthermore, research conducted by Hashim, Khattak, and Kee (2017) at the University of Peshawar suggested that employees with high workloads struggle to maintain a balance between their professional responsibilities and family obligations, leading to decreased performance in service delivery.

In studies across various industries, It was affirmed that occupational stress in intensive care units significantly undermines healthcare professionals’ psychological well-being and job performance, with potentially severe consequences for individual workers and healthcare systems. Occupational stress in intensive care units significantly undermines healthcare professionals’ psychological well-being and job performance, with potentially severe consequences for individual workers and healthcare systems. Multiple studies reveal alarming stress levels, for example, Saravanabavan, Sivakumar, & Hisham, (2019) found 80% of ICU healthcare professionals experiencing high burnout, with 69% of nurses particularly affected. Whilst Vandevala et al., 2017 demonstrated that increased ICU stressors directly correlate with higher burnout, depression, and psychiatric morbidity risk, mediated through psychological rumination. In addition, Holmberg et al., (2020) further illustrated that higher distress levels are associated with lower work engagement, with psychological flexibility playing a crucial protective role. Chuang, Tseng, Lin, Lin, Chen, (2016) identified multiple stress factors including workload, shift work, and ethical challenges, suggesting complex, systemic origins of occupational stress in intensive care settings.

In line with the ongoing discussion, Occupational stressors significantly impact employee performance and well-being, influencing both psychological and physiological health. Research indicates that stress can lead to decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, and various health issues, while also highlighting the potential for positive stress (eustress) to enhance performance under certain conditions. The following sections detail the effects of occupational stressors on employees.

### ***Psychological Effects***

- **Mental Health Issues:** Long-term occupational stress is linked to anxiety, depression, and decreased job satisfaction (Islam, 2025).
- **Cognitive Impairment:** Stress negatively affects memory, focus, and decision-making abilities, further impairing performance (Islam, 2025).

### ***Physiological Effects***

- **Health Problems:** Chronic stress can lead to physical ailments such as headaches, fatigue, and musculoskeletal disorders (Shahzadi et al., 2025) (Mupeyi, & Malowa, 2022).
- **Performance Decline:** A significant percentage of employee's report reduced job performance due to stress-related health issues (Mupeyi, & Malowa, 2022).

### ***Organizational Impact***

- **Productivity Loss:** Stressed employees are often less motivated and engaged, leading to lower overall productivity (Islam, 2025).
- **Work Environment:** Factors like job security, workload, and organizational support play crucial roles in mitigating stress and enhancing performance (Pant, 2025).

Conversely, some studies suggest that under certain conditions, stress can foster resilience and improve performance, indicating a complex relationship between stress and employee outcomes (Mercado Ollarzabal,2025).

### ***Strategies for the Prevention and Management of Occupational Stress Among Employees***

Effective prevention and management of occupational stress among employees require a multifaceted approach that addresses both individual and organizational factors. The strategies involve implementing comprehensive programs that focus on enhancing coping mechanisms, improving work conditions, and fostering a supportive work environment. These strategies are crucial for maintaining employee well-being and organizational productivity. The following sections outline key strategies for managing occupational stress.

#### ***Individual-Level Strategies***

**Cognitive-Behavioural Techniques:** These techniques help employees reframe negative thoughts and develop healthier coping mechanisms (Dhingra & Rani, 2023).

**Mindfulness Practices:** Incorporating mindfulness can reduce stress by promoting relaxation and focus (Dhingra & Rani, 2023).

**Time Management:** Training employees in effective time management can alleviate stress by reducing workload pressure (Dhingra & Rani, 2023).

**Resilience Training:** Programs that enhance coping skills and resilience are particularly effective in high-stress environments like healthcare (Ávila Vera,2023).

#### ***Organizational-Level Strategies***

**Support Systems:** Establishing robust support systems, including counselling and psychological support, is essential for stress management (Amiri, 2024c; Ávila Vera, 2023).

**Open Communication:** Encouraging open communication between employees and management can help identify stressors early and address them effectively (Amiri, 2024c).

**Recognition and Career Advancement:** Providing recognition and opportunities for career growth can mitigate stress by enhancing job satisfaction (Amiri, 2024c).

**Work Environment Improvements:** Interventions to improve the work environment, such as conflict management and structural empowerment, are crucial (Farias et al., 2023).

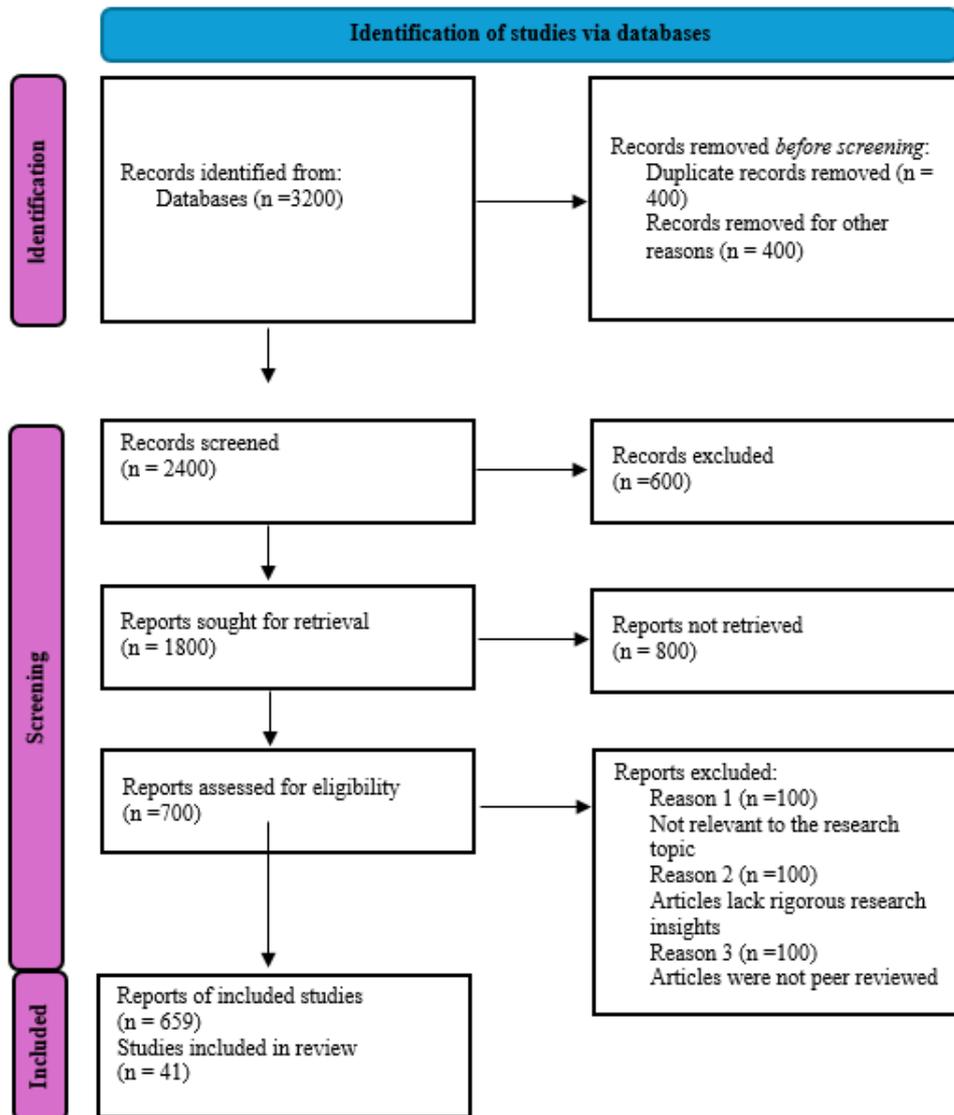
#### ***Role of Management***

Supervisors as Change Agents: Training supervisors to act as change agents can facilitate the implementation of stress management strategies (Chen, 2023).

Leadership and Planning: Effective leadership and strategic planning are vital for creating a stress-free work environment (Farias et al., 2023).

While these strategies are effective, it is important to recognize that stress management is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Tailoring interventions to specific organizational contexts and individual needs is crucial for their success. Additionally, ongoing research and adaptation of strategies are necessary to address the evolving nature of workplace stressors.

## Method



Source: Page (2021)

Data Search: This paper systematically reviews existing literature related to the causes, effects, and prevention strategies for occupational stress in the workplace. Its academic contribution lies in providing a clear and concise overview of the concept of occupational stress, including its underlying causes, potential consequences, and effective prevention techniques. A total of 41 relevant articles were identified through targeted keyword "occupational stress" "psychological/physiological health issues", "excessive workloads" and "emotional labour" searches across various databases and search engines, including Scopus, EBSCO, ABI/INFORM, PubMed, PapersFirst, SABINET, ScienceDirect, and Academic Search Complete.

**Inclusion Criteria:** Building upon the ongoing discussion, the inclusion criteria permitted the selection of articles that directly address the research topic. Additionally, only relevant articles that adhere to rigorous research standards, including peer-reviewed measures, were incorporated into the study.

**Exclusion Criteria:** In the exclusion criteria of this study, articles were omitted if they were deemed not relevant to the research topic. Additionally, articles lacking rigorous research insights or not subject to peer review were excluded.

**Data Analysis:** For this study, a qualitative thematic data analysis approach was employed. The significance of thematic analysis lies in its ability to provide a structured yet flexible framework for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within the data.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The reviewed literature characterizes occupational stress as a systemic issue arising from persistent misalignments between individual capabilities and workplace demands, consistent with the Person-Environment Fit model. Key stressors identified across various sectors including high-intensity environments such as healthcare and emergency services include excessive workloads, management practices, emotional labour, and insufficient organizational support. These factors can contribute to psychological and physiological strain, increasing the risk of burnout, mental health challenges, physical health problems, and cognitive impairments. Such issues can negatively impact individual performance, lead to higher absenteeism and turnover, and reduce overall organizational effectiveness. While moderate levels of stress may temporarily enhance performance when supported appropriately, chronic or unmanaged stress tends to generate significant human and economic costs. Evidence suggests that relying solely on individual coping strategies is generally insufficient to address persistent structural stressors; instead, comprehensive approaches that involve individual, organizational, and systemic interventions are more effective. Frameworks such as the Theory of Preventive Stress Management emphasize the importance of proactive strategies such as job redesign, resilience development, and targeted support to mitigate stress and promote employee wellbeing. Overall, the findings highlight the need for context-specific, evidence-based interventions that address underlying causes and stress responses to support sustainable employee health and organizational performance.

### ***An Analytical Framework for Occupational Stress***

This framework conceptualizes occupational stress as a dynamic, multi-level process resulting from a mismatch between the individual and their environment. It is activated through psychological and physiological mechanisms, influenced by contextual factors, and mitigated through targeted interventions. At the initial stage, occupational stress arises from the interaction of job demands, organizational conditions, environmental pressures, and individual characteristics. Factors such as workload, role clarity, time constraints, leadership quality, resource availability, work environment stability, and socio-economic stressors contribute to demands that may surpass an individual's coping capacity. These stressors are further affected by personal attributes, including personality traits, emotional labour requirements, and coping strategies, creating a core mismatch between individual capabilities and environmental expectations.

These antecedents initiate stress responses that operate through psychological and physiological pathways. Psychologically, employees may experience cognitive overload, ruminative thoughts, emotional fatigue, and challenges with emotional regulation. Physiologically, prolonged exposure activates stress responses, leading to symptoms such as fatigue, sleep disturbances, and somatic complaints. Together, these mechanisms elucidate how stressors are internalized and expressed as strain. Activation of these mechanisms can result in outcomes at various levels. On an individual level, extended strain may lead to burnout, anxiety, depression, physical health issues, and decreased well-being. Behaviourally, stress can manifest as increased absenteeism, presenteeism, disengagement, and reduced discretionary effort. Organizationally, these effects contribute to declining performance, higher turnover rates, workplace accidents, and diminished quality of service or products.

The nature and strength of these relationships are moderated by factors such as social support, leadership quality, organizational culture, and the availability of resources. Additionally, the level

and type of stress exposure influence whether demands are experienced as distress (detrimental) or eustress (motivating), which affects subsequent outcomes.

The framework also integrates intervention strategies aligned with the Transactional Process Stress Model (TPSM), recognizing stress as shaped by ongoing appraisal and coping processes. Primary interventions focus on reducing stressors through job redesign, workload management, and leadership development. Secondary interventions aim to enhance individual resilience through training in coping skills, cognitive-behavioural techniques, mindfulness, and stress management programs. Tertiary interventions prioritize recovery and rehabilitation via counselling, occupational health services, and return-to-work programs.

## Conclusion

This systematic literature review aimed to explore the causes, consequences, and prevention strategies related to occupational stress, utilizing the Person–Environment (PE) Fit model as a framework. Based on an analysis of 41 peer-reviewed studies from various academic databases, the review confirms that occupational stress is a widespread and systemic issue, stemming from persistent mismatches between employee capabilities, resources, and workplace demands. The evidence indicates that high-intensity sectors such as healthcare, emergency services, and rescue operations are particularly susceptible, often due to factors including excessive workloads, emotional labour, shift work, role ambiguity, and inadequate managerial and organizational support. The findings further reveal that prolonged exposure to these stressors can lead to significant psychological, physiological, and behavioural outcomes, such as burnout, anxiety, depression, physical health issues, decreased job performance, absenteeism, and turnover. While a moderate level of stress referred to as eustress may temporarily enhance motivation and performance, most of the literature suggests that unmanaged or chronic stress has detrimental effects on both employees and organizations. Importantly, the review emphasizes that reliance solely on individual coping mechanisms is insufficient, as it does not address the underlying organizational and structural contributors to occupational stress. Overall, the review highlights the importance of implementing comprehensive, multi-level prevention strategies that encompass individual, organizational, and systemic interventions. Evidence-based approaches such as job redesign, leadership development, fostering supportive organizational cultures, resilience training, and preventive stress management are vital for enhancing PE fit and promoting sustainable employee well-being. Future research should further investigate context-specific applications of these strategies, examine the long-term outcomes of stress mitigation programs, and explore the influence of leadership and organizational policies in reducing occupational stress. Addressing occupational stress comprehensively is essential not only for safeguarding employee health but also for ensuring long-term organizational effectiveness and societal well-being.

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