

# **Work Overload Stress of Russian Working Adults: Do Age, Gender, Education, Religion, Management Experience and Government Work Experience Make a Difference?**

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## **Abstract**

Work overload stress has become a common workforce issue in today's workplace. This type of stress can lead to changes in the employee's psychology and physiology, which has great impact on their performance productivity. This paper examines the work overload perceptions of Russian working adults based on various demographic factors. As a result of the analysis of 519 responses, this study finds that Russian respondents fell into the moderate stress range. It appears that Russian respondents have similar work overload stress regardless of the differences in their age, gender, level of education, work experience and management experience. However, this paper finds significant differences in the work overload stress scores among difference religion groups. People with Muslim religion have higher stress scores than that of Christian and non-practicing believers. In this paper, Russian history, culture and leadership are presented along with practical implications and suggestions for managers, practitioners and future studies.

**Keywords:** Russia, stress management, work overload stress, working adults

## **Introduction**

Stress is a part of life and so is work-related stress in work environment. Stress can be both good and bad. The impact of stress can be seen in many aspects of a human being's life. It is evident in the feelings and perceptions of people when they don't have enough time, skills, or resources to effectively handle personal or professional demands (Hyde and Allen, 1996; Nichols, 2008; Selye, 1956; 1974).

According to World Trade Organization (WTO) 2007 Report, work-related stress is an issue of growing concern in developing countries due globalization and the changing nature of work. Research has indicated that work-related stress is considered a disease or a cause of disease (Selye, 1956, 1974; Doublet, 2000; Kinman & Jones, 2005). Stress in the workplace not only impacts on individual performance but also on the organization's effectiveness as a whole. Work-related stress may affect the organization's effectiveness due to costs associated with increased absenteeism and staff turnover, replacement of absent workers, increased unsafe working practices, accident rates, complaints from clients/customers, and reduced productivity, performance and profitability of organization.

The purpose of this study is to examine the level of work overload stress perception of Russian working adults based on age, gender, level of education, religion, management experience, and government experience. More specifically, this paper addresses the following research questions: (1) What is the level of work overload stress of Russian working adults in 2013? (2) Do age, gender, level of education, religion, management experience, and government experience make a difference in the level of work overload stress? In this study, we used the Overload Stress Inventory, adapted from Hyde and Allen's conceptual analysis of overload (1996, p.29-30), to assess the work overload stress perception of respondents.

We chose Russia for several reasons. Russia is the eight largest economy in the world by nominal value with an estimated GDP of \$2,117.8 billion in 2013 (Australian Government-

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2014). According to Russian Federation Federal State Statistical Service (Goskomstat Russia, 2014), Russia has a population of about 143.3 million in 2013 and is considered the largest country in the world in terms of geographic territory. Labor force is 75.24 million workers (52.8% of total population). Unemployment rate was 6.2% in 2012. There are high social disparities in Russia. The population below poverty line is 13.1% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013).

Russia has emerged as one of the key players in the world, both politically and economically. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has made remarkable improvements to become more open in terms of its market and global integration. With its membership in the WTO in 2012, Russia has strengthened its position in the world economy and opened more opportunities for its international trade. As a result, there have been a lot of changes in cultural norms and behaviors, and peoples' motivation and entrepreneurship. This makes it important to analyze the current developments in Russia. According to the Russian employment agency "Unity", about 35% of the managers' termination of employment at will told that one of the main reasons for this dismissal is stress at work. In addition, there has been limited number of research examining the work-related stress in Russia. This paper expands the body of knowledge of stress management and provides practical implications for managers who work with this specific population. In addition, by using a widely accepted questionnaire survey created in the U.S. on a Russian sample, this study further fulfills the need to validate such instrument for cross-cultural comparison purposes later on.

## **Literature review**

### **Work-Related Stress**

According to Ellis (2006), stress is a sequence of events with the presence of a demand. Concerns about successful performance and fear of negative consequences resulting from performance failure evoke powerful negative emotions of anxiety, anger and irritation. Nguyen, Mujtaba and Boehmer (2012, p.13) stated "stress can be all those feelings and perceptions in lack of time, ability, skill, or resources to effectively deal with personal or professional demands in a given time". Aneshensel (1992) wrote that stress research typically is viewed as a subspecialty within medical sociology, a perspective that obscures commonalities with more traditional sociological areas of inquiry, especially social stratification. Pearlin (1989) suggested that stress research tends to be concerned less with the consequences of stressful life experience for outcomes of illness, especially psychological disorder.

Bolino and Turnley (2005) found that those higher levels of individual initiative are associated with higher levels of employee role overload, job stress, and work-family conflict. They found that the relationship between individual initiative and work-family conflict is moderated by gender. Their findings suggested that the relationship between individual initiative and work-family conflict is stronger among women than among men.

Some authors analyzed the differences on work overload stress perceptions of working adults in different countries. In a series of cross-cultural studies, Vietnamese working adults appeared to experience more work overload stress than their German, Dutch, Russian, and Japanese counterparts (Nguyen, Mujtaba, & Boehmer, 2012; Nguyen, Lee, Mujtaba, & Ruijs,

2013; Nguyen, Ermasova, Pham, & Mujtaba, 2013; Nguyen, Mujtaba, & Pham, 2013). Nguyen et al. (2012) found that German working adults appear to experience more work overload stress than Dutch working adults. However, no significant difference in the stress scores was found between German and Japanese working adults (Nguyen, Kass, Mujtaba, & Tran, 2014).

Several authors analyzed occupational stress across a large and diverse set of occupations. Johnson et al. (2005) compared the experience of occupational stress across a large and diverse set of occupations and found that six occupations (prison officers and police, ambulance workers, teachers, social services, customer services – call centers) in UK are reporting worse than average scores on each of the factors – physical health, psychological well-being and job satisfaction.

Beehr, Walsh, and Taber (1976) analyzed work-related stress of 79 male and 64 female members of a white-collar union employed in drafting, mechanical, and technical-clerical jobs in a Midwestern manufacturing company. They found that some effects of role stresses on individually valued states were incompatible with their effects on 3 organizationally valued motivational states: involvement, effort toward quantity, and effort toward quality.

Stress can be positive and motivating when it is short, for example, you need more quickly submit reports: sometimes the work is done more efficiently under pressure of deadline. Moreover, the work in conditions of constant scarce resources, including time, is mid-level stressors. A similar tension occurs when a person has (1) difficulty in dealing with employers, (2) worries about career development, and (3) the tasks contradict each other. Risk of serious and chronic stress increases when there are sudden changes in working conditions or when a person is deprived of the support of colleagues, family and leadership. Stress is formed from a combination of these factors and the inability to relax. The results of constant work-related stress are complex somatic pathology, reduced adaptive abilities of the organism, and chronic fatigue syndrome earn. The symptoms of work-related stress are fatigue, weakness in the morning, frequent headaches, insomnia, conflicts or susceptibility to loneliness.

## **Economic and social stress in Russia and its Impact on Work-Related Stress**

Yiu, Bruton and Lu (2005) argued that the early Russian transition experience provided uniquely important insights into the historic characteristics of business groups because it represented a case in which market failures were important, institutional transition was in place, and business groups were young and newly formed. Since the beginning of Perestroika (“openness”) in 1987, the business environment in Russia has been turbulent and unpredictable (Holt, Ralston, & Terpstra, 1994; Puffer, 1996). Ermasova (2013) highlighted high level of uncertainty in economic, investment, and social aspects of life and business in Russia. In case of Russia, Carr (2006-2007) showed that the effect of the unstable, uncertain economic environment in the country had an impact on strategic decisions of Russian people. Alexander Moskvina, scientific director of the clinic “Infoecology Social Stress Clinic” said in his interview in Gorelova (2013) that “Negative social factors much more influence on the stress level of managers in Russia than their foreign counterparts.” He highlighted following reasons of the high stress level of managers in Russia: (1) the situation in the country; (2) the uncertainty, which increases negative expectations; (3) distrust of people; (4) lack of uniform rules in

business; and (5) constantly changes in accounting and legislature that does not allow managers to develop a sequence of actions.

According to Gupta et al. (2013), Russia has been a diverse and socially volatile country. Although the country is considered politically Russian, 20 percent of its population is ethnically non-Russian minorities. There are over 100 minority languages in the various regions. A considerable body of research suggested that ethnic or racial hostility and its behavioral expressions were likely to be more intense in areas where minorities comprise a smaller segment of the population relative to other areas (Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993; Levin & McDevitt, 1993; Dekker, Malová, & Hoogendoorn, 2003; Gudkov, 2003). In our research we suggest that religion affect the level of work-related stress perceptions in Russia, especially the religious minorities (Muslims).

WTO 2007 Report (2007, p.1) highlighted the problem of work-related stress in Russia. Working adults in Russia are “subjected to rapid and drastic economical and social changes, where there is an increased demand for adaptation of workers, the over-riding of traditional values, the reorientation of the occupational health system, and generally poor working conditions.” Psychosocial stress has increased as a result of unprecedented changes in Russia’s economic condition and the reduction of “safety net” services. During transition times Russian workers had to deal with: (1) increased demands of learning new skills; (2) the need to adopt new ways of working; (3) the pressure of the demand for higher productivity and higher technical and computer skills; (4) demands for increased quality of work and time pressure; (5) higher job competition; (6) increased job insecurity and less benefits; and (7) less time for co-workers and socializing. These various global and local changes led to increasing demands on a growing number of workers. When workers are unable to deal with these demands, work-related stress may result. When stress persists or occurs repeatedly, it can have various negative effects on workers and the companies they work for. Psychosocial stress may manifest itself as depression, anxiety, domestic violence, increase of smoking, work injures, increase of alcohol consumption, and divorce.

In Russia, managers have to spend a lot of efforts on defending themselves in response to pressure from top managers. This can cause stress. Another feature of the Russian corporate stress is the habit of bringing personal problems to work. Russian leaders are traditionally broadcast their emotions on subordinates (Matveev, 2002).

A specific problem of work-related stress is the presence of two work-forces in many Russians firms. The first consists of older workers, with a traditional Russian mindset who resist change. The second workforce is made up of young, aggressive "New Russians" who are generally eager to adapt. Members of this group are driven by career ambitions and often have some training in business, English, or a few years’ experience working for a foreign firm in sales or marketing. It also appears to be a common pattern to place younger workers in charge of older ones early in their careers, adding to the tension in work place. This indicates that Russians with different age groups may have different perceptions on work related stress.

## Study Methodology and Analysis

The Overload Stress Inventory, adapted from Hyde and Allen's conceptual analysis of overload (1996, p.29- 30), was used to assess the stress perception of respondents. It included 10 items with a 5-Likert scale. A rating of 1 indicated "Strongly Disagree" and a rating of 5 indicated "Strongly Agree." The responses were assessed according to the following general criteria:

- Scores in the range of 40–50 tend to mean *severe* stress from overload.
- Scores in the range of 30–39 tend to mean *high* stress from overload.
- Scores in the range of 20–29 tend to mean *moderate* stress from overload.
- Scores in the range of 19 and below tend to mean *low* stress from overload.

The specific hypotheses for this study are as follows:

- *H1: Russian respondents who are 26 years old or older will have similar work overload stress scores than Russian respondents who are 25 years old or younger.*
- *H2: Russian respondents who are 41 years old or older will have similar work overload stress scores than Russian respondents who are 40 years old or younger.*
- *H3: Russian male respondents will have similar work overload stress scores than Russian female respondents.*
- *H4: Russian respondents with high school degree or less will have similar work overload stress scores than those with higher degree.*
- *H5: Russian respondents with no management experience will have similar work overload stress scores than those with management experience.*
- *H6: Russian respondents with no government experience will have similar work overload stress scores than those with government experience.*
- *H7: The work overload stress scores of Russian respondents will be similar based on different religion.*

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of work overload stress of Russian adults. Another aspect of this study was to determine whether there is any difference between the level of work overload stress of Russian working adults based on, age, gender, education, religion, work experience and management experience.

A convenient sampling procedure was adopted for selecting the target respondents. The target respondents were Russian adults who are 17 years of age and above. The English version of the survey was first translated into Russian then was back-translated into English. Both the original English and the back-translated versions were compared and checked by three university professors to insure the validity of the instrument. They concluded that there was no significant difference.

This study applied the self-administered survey method, which helps eliminate the errors caused by the subjectivity of interviewers and provides greater anonymity for respondents. This is really helpful in achieving high response rate because Russian people sometimes feel uncomfortable to reveal their ideas and thoughts through survey questionnaires.

The questionnaire was made available as a webpage with a direct link that could be attached to email, as well as a hard copy that could be handed out directly, to respondents by the authors and their contacts. This helped increase the response rate as Russian people prefer to deal with surveys that are provided by someone they know such as an instructor, lab assistant... Informed consent, explanation of study, procedure of maintaining confidentiality, and detailed instructions on how to complete the questionnaire successfully were included. The authors assumed that if the respondents read and proceeded to take the surveys (either hard copy or online), they consented to the survey. For those questionnaires completed through the web link, the data were automatically saved and converted into a database in excel format file for analysis. For those questionnaires completed through hard copy format, the data were entered manually. Majority of respondents were from Moscow, Chelyabinsk, Saratov, and Ulyanovsk. There were 611 questionnaires obtained, of which 519 were fully completed and ready for use.

As seen in Table 1, 167 respondents were from the age of 17 to 25 (32.2%); 132 from the age of 26 to 30 (25.4%); 174 from the age of 31 to 40 (33.5%); and 46 from the age of 41 and above (8.9%). There were 397 female respondents (76.5%) and 122 male respondents (23.5%). There were 86 respondents who earned a high school degree or less; 66 respondents who earned bachelor degree or were working on earning it; 348 respondents who earned master degree or were working on earning it; and 19 respondents who earned doctorate degree or were working on earning it. In this sample, 420 respondents had no government experience (80.9%); 57 respondents had 1 to 5 years of government experience; 29 respondents had 6 to 10 years of government experience (5.6%); and 13 respondents had 11 or more years of government experience (2.5%).

Table 1. Demographic Variables (N=519)

Variables		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	17 to 25	167	32.2	32.2	32.2
	26 to 30	132	25.4	25.4	57.6
	31 to 40	174	33.5	33.5	91.1
	41 and above	46	8.9	8.9	100.0
	Total	519	100.0	100.0	
Gender	Female	397	76.5	76.5	76.5
	Male	122	23.5	23.5	100.0
	Total	519	100.0	100.0	
Education	Earned a high school degree or less	86	16.6	16.6	16.6
	Bachelors Degree or working on earning it	66	12.7	12.7	29.3
	Masters Degree or working on earning it	348	67.1	67.1	96.4
	Doctorate Degree or working on earning it	19	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	519	100.0	100.0	
Government Experience	1 to 5 years	57	11.0	11.0	11.0
	6 to10 years	29	5.6	5.6	16.6
	11 or more years	13	2.5	2.5	19.1
	none	420	80.9	80.9	100.0
	Total	519	100.0	100.0	

## Results

As seen in Table 2, Russian respondents in this sample had a moderate level of overload stress perception as their stress scores fell in the “moderate” range (20-29 points). Also according to Table 2, no significant difference was found in each of the hypothesis tests (Hypotheses 1 to 6). These hypotheses, therefore, cannot be rejected.

Age, gender, education level, work experience, and management experience made no significant difference in the overload stress perception scores of Russian respondents in this sample. However, it is worth noting that the Levene’s Test for equality of variances showed significance in hypothesis 2 (17-40 age group against 41 and above age group) as well as hypothesis 6 (no government experience against with government experience).

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results (Stress Scores)

Hypotheses (Stress Scores)	Group Size		Group Mean		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
	1	2	1	2	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference
H1: Age (17-25 vs 26 and above)	167	352	28.10	27.34	.485	.486	.963	517	.336	.764
H2: Age (17-40 vs 41 and above)	473	46	27.61	27.35	5.35	.021	.199	517	.843	.259
H3: Gender (male vs female)	122	397	28.06	27.44	.089	.765	.709	517	.479	.619
H4: Education (High School Degree or less vs Higher degree)	86	433	28.63	27.38	.838	.360	1.257	517	.209	1.25
H5: Management Experience (No management experience vs with management experience)	266	253	27.08	28.11	1.33	.249	-1.399	517	.162	-1.036
H6: Government Experience (No Government Experience vs With Government Experience)	420	99	27.31	28.75	5.34	.021	-1.527	517	.127	-1.438
p<.05										

As seen in Table 3, One-way ANOVA test among different religious groups showed a significant difference in the mean stress scores among these group ( $F=3.276$ ,  $p=.039<.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 7 is rejected. There is a significant difference in the overload stress scores among different religious groups in this sample. More specifically, post hoc tests indicated a significant difference in the mean scores of Christian and Muslim believers, which Muslim believers had a higher stress scores than Christian believers ( $-2,72207$ ,  $p=.046<.05$ ). Also the

difference in the mean scores between Christian and non-practicing believers were partially supported at .10 level (-2.15584,  $p=.074<.10$ ). Non-practicing believers had a higher stress scores than Christian believers.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results of Religion Variable (Stress Scores)

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Stress_Scores	Christian	422	27.1351	8.37218	.40755
	Muslim	42	29.8571	7.65274	1.18084
	Non-practicing believers	55	29.2909	9.12805	1.23083
	Total	519	27.5838	8.43692	.37034

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Stress_Scores	Between Groups	462.315	2	231.157	3.276	.039
	Within Groups	36409.789	516	70.562		
	Total	36872.104	518			

Post Hoc Tests

Multiple Comparisons

LSD

Dependent Variable	(I) Religion	(J) Religion	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Stress Scores	Christian	Muslim	-2.72207*	1.35913	.046	-5.3922	-.0520
		Non-practicing believers	-2.15584	1.20422	.074	-4.5216	.2099
	Muslim	Christian	2.72207*	1.35913	.046	.0520	5.3922
		Non-practicing believers	.56623	1.72133	.742	-2.8154	3.9479
Non-practicing believers	Christian	2.15584	1.20422	.074	-.2099	4.5216	
	Muslim	-.56623	1.72133	.742	-3.9479	2.8154	

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

## Discussion and Managerial Implications

First of all, this study found that Russian working adults in this sample perceived a moderate work overload stress. Second, it did not find any significant difference in the overload stress scores of Russian working adults based on age, gender, level of education, work experience and management experience. Finally, this study found a significant difference in the overload stress scores of Russian working adults based on religion. Muslim believers had the highest scores compared to Christian and non-practicing believers. Thus, they perceived more overload stress than the other two groups. This somehow reflects the reality of Russia that religious minorities may feel more stressful because of how they feel about the ethnic or racial

hostility and its behavioral expressions. Managers and business owners who deal with this group need to create and support an effective stress management program to help minorities feel more relaxed and comfortable when working with other dominant ethnic and religious groups. They should assign an adequate amount of work that matches their skills and qualifications to make them feel capable of performing their jobs and not too overwhelmed. They should also create and foster a collaborative and supportive work environment to improve the communication as well as relationships among peers, leaders and subordinates, and other work units.

## **Limitations and Recommendations**

There are several limitations that need to be addressed in this study. First of all, this study was conducted on an adult population available and receptive to our survey. These adults were from several cities in Russia including Moscow, Chelyabinsk, Saratov, and Ulyanovsk. Future studies should include adults from other cities and regions in the country. Second, because of the small sample size, the results cannot be generalized to the larger population. Future studies should extend to larger sample size with similar population. Third, this study only examined a few demographics factors and the work overload stress. Future studies can include other non-demographic factors such as organizational and departmental factors and they should look into other type of work-related stress in addition to overload stress. Finally, this study only focused on Russian respondents. Future studies should examine the stress perception of people from different countries for comparison purposes since the workforce has become more globalized and diverse than ever.

## **Conclusion**

We can say for certain that Russian working adults in this study perceived a moderate level of work overload stress and religion made a difference in how they perceived about work overload stress. This study has shed light on the differences in work overload stress perception in Russia. Researchers and scholars can benefit from this study as it provides more empirical results regarding the work overload stress perception in Russia. Managers and practitioners can also benefit from the study as it provides real-world implications in managing these working adults more effectively.

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