

Analysing the Stress of Frontline Employees of Hospitality and Tourism Industry

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Abstract. Hospitality and tourism industry are among the most important sectors of India and provide huge economic benefits to the country. These sectors comprise of entertainment, cruises, events, parks, amusement park, casinos, hotels, restaurant, historic places, museums and various services related to tourism. Industry of hospitality and tourism is not only important in respect to business but it also employs a huge number of employees by creating full time as well as part time jobs. Both tourism and hospitality rely on each other for business and so does the people who work in these industries. Employees of these sectors have to be skilled in communicating with the customers even when maintaining a polite communication is hard. Frontline workers have to work harder as they are the face of the business.

Frontline workers are those who face the customer and make instant decisions for fulfilling the demands of the customers along with maintaining the image of the company. It has been seen various times that frontline workers often get caught in the conflict of the company and demand of the customer. This causes stress among the employees.

This research work aimed to assess the stress level of the employees and to accomplish its goals, survey method has been used. For conducting a survey, 2 hypotheses have been created based on which a questionnaire was designed using 5-point Likert's scale. Further, the questionnaire was sent to 100 frontline employees working in the hospitality and tourism industry. There were 54 responses which were received. These responses were then properly sampled and analysed. The hypotheses were tested by using one-way ANOVA. The study shows a significant impact of role conflict over the stress of the frontline employees in the hospitality and tourism industry. Also, performance is also a major cause because of which frontline employees are stressed.

Keywords: Stress; frontline; employees; hospitality; tourism; performance

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1 Introduction

The hospitality and tourism industry of India have grown to be the main sectors that supports the growth of the nation. A huge amount of financial support is generation with this industry and also it provides a numerous job for the individuals. Since the country have rich historical heritage and culture, diversity, different geographical areas, natural beauty, diverse traditions, various food culture, etc., industry have a wide scope of development in future also. The industry also helps in attaining a huge amount of FDI for the country (Huang et al., 2018).

The issue of occupational stress has been hiked and the frontline workers of hospitality and tourism industry are the one who have been affected the most. Their job is most vulnerable which also comprises of reduction in job performance, therapeutic decision-making, and mental health. Performance and role conflict are the major reasons because of which frontline workers gets stressed which reduces their ability to perform better.

The hospitality and tourism industry often offers financially beneficial career options, few of which are: tourism officers, event planner, theme park manager, hotel manager, tour guides, travel agents, waiters, chefs, etc.

1.1 Employment Opportunities and Challenges in Tourism and Hospitality Sectors

Hospitality and tourism sector is a very customer cantered industry and therefore, requires workers who are highly skilled. There are huge opportunities offered by the industry, even for the student who wants to work as a part time. At many places, there is no requirement for waiting to get hired. One can simply start working as a guide without making any investments. Various other employment opportunities are tour operation companies, transport services, food and beverages, hotels, etc.

Along with these benefits, this industry comes with various challenges such as political instability, seasonality, rigid corporate and undemocratic culture, low training and education, unequal treatment, discrimination sexual harassments, poor working conditions and poor pay. These challenges decrease the customers' visits which increase the turnover of the employees.

1.2 Front line employees

The first conversation of a customer is handled by a frontline employee and it is the role of the frontline employee to create and maintain the interest of the customer to increase the business. There are various types of skills required for working in this industry; however, the most essential skill is the skill of communication. Frontline employees handle the problems, clears the obstacles, promotes the brand and increases the business (Kang et al., 2021). They are basically the base of the business and acts as a bridge between the customer and the organization. Frontline worker works face to face, through calls, social media or other platforms (Sampson, 2014).

Frontline workers must be very skilled as they are face of the brand and they are the only person who will interact with the customers. they represent the company and the reputation of the company very much depends upon their skill. There skills constitute of emotional intelligence, wit, common sense, IQ, intuition, empathy, adaptability, poise and composure along with appropriate communication skill.

Since hospitality and tourism industry is a business of service and frontline workers are the only interaction for the customers, these workers are considered as the key for success of the business. They have to show patience, handle the calls, drive the customers to long distance different locations, take the order of the customer, etc. along with maintaining the integrity of the company.

1.3 Stress issues of front-line employees

Stress is very common for the employees and workplace is a major concern and it can also damage the employees both emotionally and physically. Frontline workers are more prone to these issues as they have to suffer from harmful emotional and physical responses from the customer and also from the organization if the customer files a complaint against them or the organization loses any business (Ross, 1995). It is one of the major causes for stress which leads to deteriorate the performance and productivity of the frontline employees. Such stress also triggers “common mental disorders” like “post-traumatic stress disorder”, anxiety and depression.

There are many employees in the industry of hospitality and tourism who are searching for other career options because of the stress level which they cannot endure. The main problem is that stress is still not taken as illness in this industry even though, this industry suffers the most from this issue. A better work life balance is a basic requirement for all the employees and this sector is hugely lagging in this aspect. In the field of hospitality and tourism industry, stress has grown to be a major issue for all the employees. When the season is down and the business is at its lowest, the employees suffer from stress because of the fear of losing their job. On the other hand, during the peak season during the peak season the employees are distressed because of the work pressure and work timing.

Undoubtedly, high work pressure has to be endured by the workers working in the hospitality and tourism industry. It needs high level of alertness and patience which sometimes become unbearable and the situation goes out of control (O'Neill & Davis, 2011). Stress is a major factor for reduction in the performance and still performance is assessed on those factors which cause maximum stress. Some employees take it as a challenge and finds solutions for it but most gets stressed and lose their productivity.

There are numerous definitions for stress but very commonly it is defined as a disturbance among the inside and outside world. The approach is with which every individual response over the issue of stress they are facing decides their vulnerability towards it. The environment in which individuals work, is a major determinant of their stress issue. With so many aspects, defining stress has become very difficult. There are many operations in the hospitality industry and it is very hard to maintain all those operations. Inefficiency and ineffectiveness make the employees incompetent and force them towards stress issues.

The frontline workers, even when they can't endure the pressure and are in extreme stress, don't complain or take medication and continue with their work as they fear of losing their job, which is probably their only source of income. They don't understand that this stress is dragging them down both emotionally and physically. In addition, stress is dragging their performance also.

Distinguishing among stress and pressure is of high importance along with understanding an individual can feel challenged. (Palleesen, 2007)

There are various types of demands made in the hospitality and tourism industry which also constitutes of physical demands like lifting heavy stocks, standing for long time, long working hours, and cleaning large space for whole day, etc. Moreover, during the time of recruitment, many workers are asked to sign a agreement in accordance of which they will work over 48 hours every week but many of the workers doesn't accept this clause and opt themselves out of it. Majority of the chefs are seen to work for more than 60 hours every week. However, if a worker opts out of the "working time regulations", it means that they are not legally provided with the 11 hours/day resting period within their shifts. They are also not permitted for taking a rest after every 6 hours of working and also, they are not entitled with weekly rest day. Since, rest is the most important medication a stressed person can use, unavailability of rest can damage them more.

Considering all the mental demands is of high importance for an employee, especially in hospitality and tourism industry. Frontline workers have to deal with all the complaints, slangs and abuses of the customers and still they have to maintain their calm and work with a smile on their face. However, they don't have any place to relieve their stress and insufficient rest boosts their stress level.

Role conflict

When incompatible demands for work is experienced by employees, occurrence of role conflict takes place. Role conflict has been very extensively researched as a variable for job stress and is brought in consideration as a major reason for causing stress among the employees. Role conflict reduces the productivity of an employee and impact the mental as well as physical health. Role ambiguity is another factor which is also a major cause for stress. When employees are not clear of their role or they are provided with the role they are suited for, they lose their performance and productivity. There are various types of strains with which the role conflict is linked.

A theoretical base is provided by role theory for understanding the concept of role conflicts. In accordance of the role theory, every worker has their own operations and every operation has their responsibilities and rights. Simultaneously, employees skill themselves for multiple tasks. A frontline worker has to sometimes work for back-office work which can both be exhausting and interesting. Role conflict is generally for those employees who are multi tasker.

Performance related stress

Performance is a major concern which when reduced boosts the stress level of an employee, especially for the frontline employees. Generally, stress and performance go in a cycle; when performance is reduced, stress increased and when stress increases,

performance is reduced. Performance is considered to be a major factor affecting the employees with mental and physical hazards. When an employee feels stressed, he/she loses concentration over the work and a clear reduction in performance can be observed. However, recognizing the factors causing the stress is very critical as the front-line employees are trained for managing their emotion. But managing the emotions cannot keep them away from being stressed and rather make them more prone to it.

1.4 Stress and Health

Emotional Exhaustion

Frontlines have to be in contact with customers for whole day and are deprived of expressing their real feelings. They spend so much time expressing their gratitude for their customers that they forget the way of expressing their own feelings. This makes them emotionally exhaust.

Overall Health

Frontline workers have to speak for long hours, even when they are stressed. This impacts their health negatively. There are various types of health issues which they endure on daily basis like backaches, headaches, soreness of muscles, etc.

Daily Stress and Health

Various types of health and stress issues are there which are faced by frontline employees like conflict with customers or co-workers, overload of work, etc. On some occasions, when they are having some health issues, they still have to be active and cannot let their health problem affect their working.

Daily Stress and Substance Use

Many a times, it is seen that, when employees are in stress, they use caffeine, alcohol or tobacco to relieve their stress. It might mentally relieve their stress for time being but it's a slow poison which will ultimately make them more ill. Since, frontline employees have to face the customers for long hours, they are usually seen addicted to these and consider it as a solution which in fact is making them more ill.

1.5 Employees empowerment

It is important to empower the employees but with appropriate methods. Below mentioned are few methods which can empower the employees, increase their performance and reduce their stress levels:

Satisfied Frontline Employees Create Satisfied Customers

The most important factor which must be understood by every organization is that when employees are satisfied, they will satisfy the customer more enthusiastically.

Those businesses who are focusing and making efforts for their frontline employees are basically investing in their business only and increasing the quality of their operation. Frontline employees are the one who converts the customers into real sale. There are various reasons because of which an organization must keep their frontline employees happy:

- Happy employee provides better service to the customers
- Happy employee is more productive that basically hike the business' profitability
- Happy employee performs better and keeps the customer happy that provided a better service experience to the customer and enhances the loyalty of the customers.

Frontline Employees are the Face of the Company

It must be understood that frontline employees represents the brand. This means that whatever a frontline employee does is basically done by the company. It shows the values, culture, mission and vision of the company. It stresses upon the importance of keeping the frontline employees more enthusiastic and engaged.

Frontline Employees Know and Understand Customers' Pain Points

The job of frontline employees is to entertain the customers and they spend their years doing the same. This also states that they know the company's customers better than the management. They know what will be the reaction and turning point of the customer. It shows the importance and value of the frontline employees.

Empowering Frontline Staff Creates a Bottom-up Culture

The days when management orders were to be followed blindly are gone now. Nowadays, employees have to be witty and capable of making quick decisions otherwise they might lose potential customers and huge amount of profit. On the other hand, employees also have to be creative and innovative or else they can lose their position as frontline employees

It is important to keep the Frontline Employees engaged at work

It is important that frontline employees are kept engaged with work. If frontline employees are not engaged in their work, then it affects:

- Absenteeism
- Performance
- Customer ratings
- Quality
- Profit

2 Literature reviews

(Sérgio Borralha et al., 2016) conducted a review study and reviewed the data on hospitality professionals. The authors collected the data from science direct, web of science (Medline, “social sciences citation index”, “Social Sciences Index Expanded”) and Web of Knowledge. The authors made a search over the articles which were published with the year 2000 to 2014. The authors verified that there were 51 articles over job satisfaction, 31 articles over mental exhaustion, burnout and stress. The importance of such variable in the tourism and hospitality industry was described and discussed.

(O’Neill & Follmer, 2020) performed a systematic review for synthesizing and summarizing those past literatures which is related to the occurrence of conflict among the work family. Various areas which require addition attention were highlighted. The review stated work-family conflicts as a major reason for stress. Further, suggestions were provided for enhancing the performance through reducing the stress.

(Wen et al., 2020) aimed for understanding the turnover intention of the employees and to attain the same, authors revealed the impact of stress and related issues over the turnover intention of the frontline employees in the service sector. The authors also examined the impact of the work environment over the frontlin. An analytical study was performed by collecting a sample size of 583 from a primary source and used questionnaire to do the same. The data was collected of the frontline employees of hotels located in South China. Further, on the basis of the respondents’ views, role stress was revealed as a 4-D construct (quantitative overload, qualitative overload, ambiguity and conflict). This construct has a significant impact over burnout.

(Bi et al., 2021) performed an investigation over the behaviours of the Jay-customers as it is considered as an important factor which induces job stress and also reduces the work satisfaction level of the frontline employees in the hospitality industry. To provide a base to this theory, the authors conducted an analytical study and collected data of 302 employees working in restaurant business. The study area was selected as various towns of South Korea. Based on the results obtained in this study, the authors suggested a conceptual model to understand the manner in which the frontline employees get negatively influenced by the jay-customers.

3 Objectives

- To find the impact of role conflict over the frontline employees of hospitality and tourism industry.
- To analyze the impact of performance over the frontline employees of hospitality and tourism industry.
- To study the stress issues of frontline employees as stress is taken as an important aspect.

4 Methodology

This research work aimed to assess the stress level of the employees and to accomplish its goals, survey method has been used. To conduct a survey, 2 hypotheses have been created based on which a questionnaire was designed using 5-point Likert's scale. Further, the questionnaire was sent to 100 frontline employees working in the hospitality and tourism industry. There were 54 responses which were received. These responses were then properly sampled and analyzed. The hypotheses were tested by using one-way ANOVA. The results were interpreted based on the testing. The study area Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. The collection of data is only made through primary sources. It helped this research work to attain a real time data and analyze the current stress issues of frontline workers working in hospitality and tourism industry.

5 Data analysis and interpretation

The collected samples are converted into proper data form and are exhibited and interpreted in this section:

Table 1. Age group

Age group	Responses	Percentage
18-30 years	19	35.19%
31-40 years	15	27.78%
41-50 years	13	24.07%
Above 50 years	7	12.96%
Grand Total	54	100%

Based on the above-mentioned table, it can be interpreted that out of 54 respondents, 19 (35.19%) respondents belong to age group of 18-30 years, 15 (27.78%) respondents belong to age group of 31-40 years, 13 (24.07%) respondents belong to age group of 41-50 years and 7 (12.96%) respondents belong to age group of above 50 years.

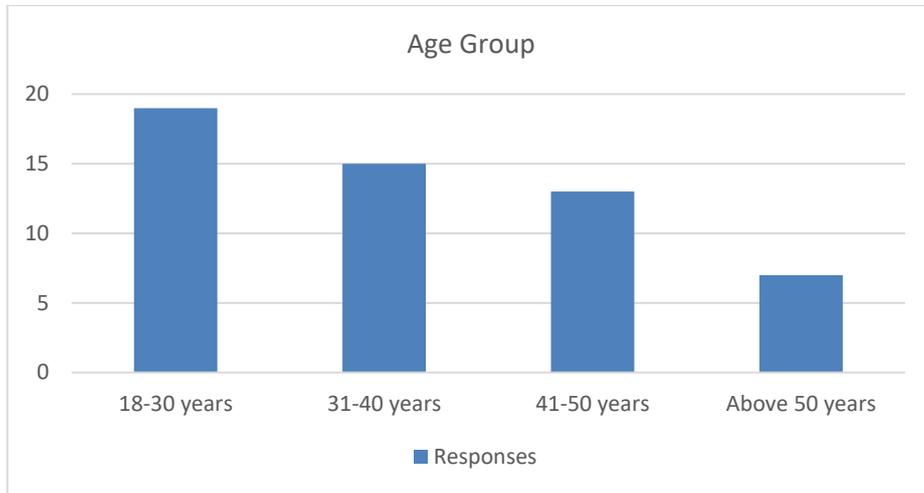


Fig. 1. Age group

Table 2. Gender

Gender	Responses	Percentage
Male	40	74.07%
Female	14	25.93%
Grand Total	54	100%

The above-mentioned table exhibits that there were 40 (74.07%) male and 14 (25.93%) female respondents.

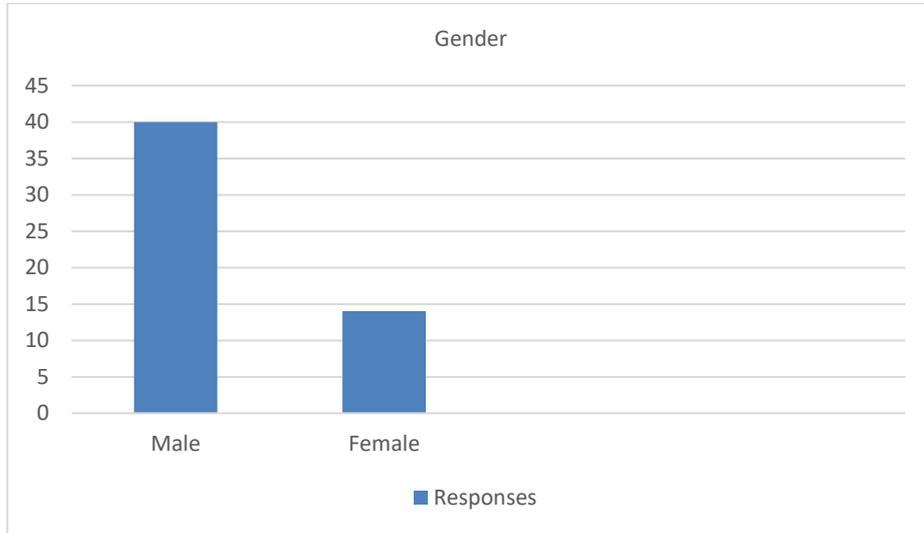


Fig. 2. Gender

Table 3. Education

Education	Responses	Percentage
10 th passed	15	27.78%
12 th passed	11	20.37%
Graduate	25	46.30%
Post graduate and above	3	5.56%
Grand Total	54	100%

On the basis of educational qualifications, the responses obtained exhibits that 15 (27.78%) are 10th passed, 11 (20.37%) are 12th passed, 25 (46.30%) are graduate and 3 (5.56%) are graduate.

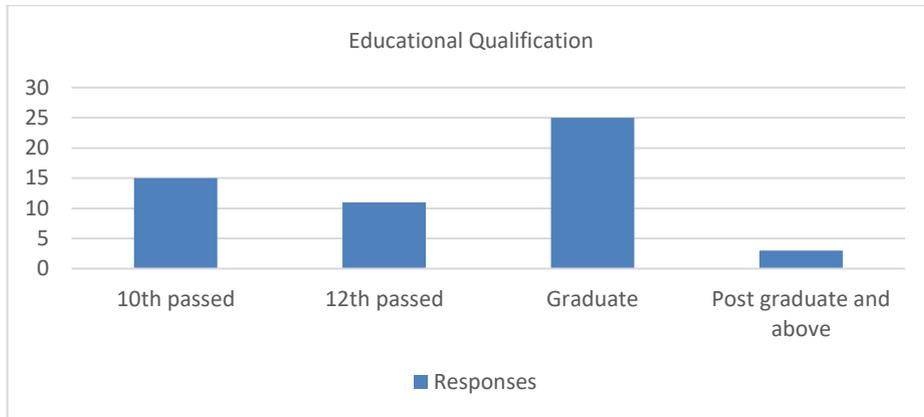


Fig. 3. Education

Table 4. Responses over questionnaire

Questionnaire	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
An employee of hospitality and tourism industry are generally confused regarding their role	18	12	7	6	11
Employees feel more stressed when they don't know their role	16	12	11	10	5
A frontline employee has to deal with different and rude customers which make them question their role and they think of changing their role because of the associated stress	21	11	8	1	13
In hospitality and tourism industry, employees work in shifts and they have to share the credit of their work with other colleagues.	20	15	7	4	8
Generally, frontline employees of hospitality and tourism industry fights to host their customers which often becomes very stressful.	17	15	1	12	9

Frontline workers have more burden of performing better	7	14	6	12	19
Meeting rude customers often degrades their performance level	14	12	6	9	17
Many a times, frontline employees are rated bad by the customers even after performing at their best	16	11	3	12	16
Performance is the parameter on which the frontline workers are judged because of which they over stresses for performing better	6	15	11	14	12
Over stressing over performance often results in stress and employees lose their performance	16	14	6	8	14

The above-mentioned table exhibits the responses of the 54 respondents along with the questions of the questionnaire. These responses are further utilized for testing the hypotheses of this study.

5.1 Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis 1:

H₀₁: There is no significant impact of role conflict over the stress of the frontline employees in hospitality and tourism industry

H_{a1}: There is a significant impact of role conflict over the stress of the frontline employees in hospitality and tourism industry

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	494	4	123.5	12.35	3.21E-05	2.866081
Within Groups	200	20	10			
Total	694	24				

From the above table, it is observed that the “value of p is less than 0.05, i.e., $p=0.000$ ”. Hence, null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, it can be stated that there is a significant impact of role conflict over the stress of the frontline employees in hospitality and tourism industry.

Hypothesis 2:

H₀₂: There is no significant impact of performance over the stress of the frontline employees in hospitality and tourism industry

H_{a2}: There is a significant impact of performance over the stress of the frontline employees in hospitality and tourism industry

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	230	4	57.5	5.927835	0.002583	2.866081
Within Groups	194	20	9.7			
Total	424	24				

From the above table, it is observed that the “value of p is less than 0.05, i.e., $p=0.002$ ”. Hence, null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, it can be stated that there is a significant impact of performance over the stress of the frontline employees in hospitality and tourism industry.

6 Conclusion

Hospitality and tourism industry comprises of various types of challenges and mostly these challenges are their frontline employees. Role conflict and performance are pushing the frontline employees towards stress. The study shows a significant impact of role conflict over the stress of the frontline employees in hospitality and tourism industry. Also, performance is also a major cause because of which frontline employees are stressed. Stress has become a major issue for the frontline employees and without proper training, it cannot be treated. There are various training programs which can be modified and used. Various questions like how big is the factor of stress is in the hospitality and tourism industry or what can be done to reduce, are worked by many researchers. Many researchers provided solution which could have been effective, if brought in use. So, it stresses on the importance of implementation of training programs with proper tested approaches.

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