

Psychosocial factors and work stress in civil servants: a scoping review

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Abstract

Purpose: Occupational stress is a challenge in occupational health that can affect worker and company productivity. Government employees often face a high workload, but research on work stress among them is limited. Therefore, through a scoping review, this study examined the psychosocial factors influencing workload among civil servants. **Methods:** Following JBI Scoping Review guidelines, literature was retrieved from PubMed, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. Screening and full-text reviews were conducted using Rayyan, with descriptive synthesis applied. Studies on medical and security personnel and COVID-19-specific stress were excluded. **Results:** Of the 970 articles identified, 11 studies met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed in this scoping review. The most dominant psychosocial factors influencing civil servants' work stress were their relationship with the organization and work environment (45.5%), followed by job demands (36.4%) and work-family balance (36.4%). Other factors contributing to job stress included job control, career prospects, supervisor support, and job dissatisfaction, while public motivation and social support were found in 1 study. **Conclusion:** Civil servants' work stress is shaped by multiple psychosocial factors, particularly organizational dynamics, workload, and family demands. Strengthening workplace support systems and promoting work-life balance are critical to reducing stress in this sector.

Keywords: civil servants; psychosocial factors; scoping review; work stress

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INTRODUCTION

Occupational health and safety are global issues that annually cause 2.93 million workers to die from accidents and occupational diseases [1]. The impact of lost work time affects 4% of a country's gross domestic product [2]. One of the significant challenges in occupational health is occupational stress, which causes depression and anxiety, and negatively impacts physical health, including gastrointestinal disorders, heart disease, and musculoskeletal disorders [3,4]. Job stress affects individual performance, decreases productivity, increases work errors, and increases absenteeism [5,6]. Stressed workers tend to experience a decrease in job satisfaction and loyalty [7,8].

Multiple factors contribute to job stress, including excessive workload, time pressure, job instability, and a lack of support from supervisors and coworkers [9]. Individual factors such as gender, education level, marital status, and family conflict also increase the risk of occupational stress [10–12]. In particular, female workers tend to be more vulnerable to stress due to their dual roles in family and work [13,14]. Systematic research shows that psychosocial factors have a strong relationship with job stress. High work demands, low control over work, and lack of social support at work are the main factors contributing to job stress [15,16].

The State Civil Apparatus is a group of workers with high work demands, which can increase the risk of work stress [17]. Research addressing job stress, particularly in Indonesia, remains limited. Studies

using robust methodologies are still rare, with only about 1% of articles examining occupational stress [18]. Given the limited research on occupational stress, its significant impact on workers' health and organizational outcomes highlights the fundamental importance of this area of study.

Previous studies in Indonesia have highlighted psychosocial factors and work stress in the private sector, such as among employees of construction projects and mining service companies [18,19]. However, studies focusing on civil servants as a work group with different bureaucratic characteristics, organizational structures, and workloads are still minimal. Civil servants have a strategic role in public services and national development. The limited literature that systematically examines the psychosocial factors contributing to work stress among civil servants reveals a research gap that needs to be addressed. This study aimed to fill a significant research gap in understanding the psychosocial factors contributing to job stress among civil servants, highlighting the urgency of our findings in addressing this pressing and timely occupational health issue. This study aimed to fill a significant research gap in understanding the psychosocial factors contributing to job stress among civil servants, underscoring the urgency of our findings.

METHODS

This research employed the JBI scoping review guidelines [20] to determine the eligibility criteria. The population consisted of government workers, and the concept included psychosocial factors and job stress; the research context was a government institution. This scoping review excludes research conducted on medical personnel (doctors, nurses, midwives) and security personnel (police) due to their unique work environments and stressors, which may not be directly comparable to those of civil servants. Focusing on civil servants allows for a more targeted and in-depth analysis of the factors influencing work stress in this population. Similarly, articles discussing stress during the COVID-19 pandemic were excluded and regarded as an exceptional circumstance that may introduce additional stressors not typically present in the workplace.

The research databases used in this study include PubMed, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest. We adjusted the search keywords in each database to align with their respective provisions. In PubMed, the search was conducted by entering keywords such as “government employee” or “civil servant” and “work stress” in the title and abstract, and adding relevant MeSH terms, including “occupational stress.” We applied a similar approach to the literature search in ProQuest, utilizing the “summary” filter. Meanwhile, the search in ScienceDirect was limited to a maximum of 8 keywords. Therefore, the search in ScienceDirect used the following keywords: (“government employee” OR “civil servant” OR “civil apparatus” OR “local government employee”) AND (“work stress” OR “job stress” OR “work-related stress” OR “occupational stress”).

A search for other potential materials and grey literature was conducted via Google Scholar using the exact keywords as in the different database literature searches, focusing on the first 300 articles according to Haddaway's guidelines [20,21]. After the initial search, we conducted a meticulous duplicate check and screening review of titles, abstracts, and full texts using Rayyan. Two reviewers conducted this process, and any discrepancies in the screening results were resolved through a rigorous discussion, ensuring the reliability of our findings.

Our scoping data synthesis was conducted using a comprehensive descriptive approach to map and summarize the findings on psychosocial factors that influence work stress in government employees. The data is presented in tables and narratives, providing a clear and comprehensive overview of the factors influencing work stress.

Figure 1 illustrates the process of collecting data for the scoping review. The study selection process was rigorous and transparent. A duplication-checking process was conducted using the initial pool of 970 articles, comprising 265 from PubMed, 515 from ScienceDirect, and 190 from ProQuest, resulting in 914 articles for the title/abstract review. After excluding 845 articles that did not match the title and abstract, 69 were included in the full-text review. Finally, nine articles that met the inclusion criteria were selected, and two additional articles were identified through a gray literature review using Google Scholar.

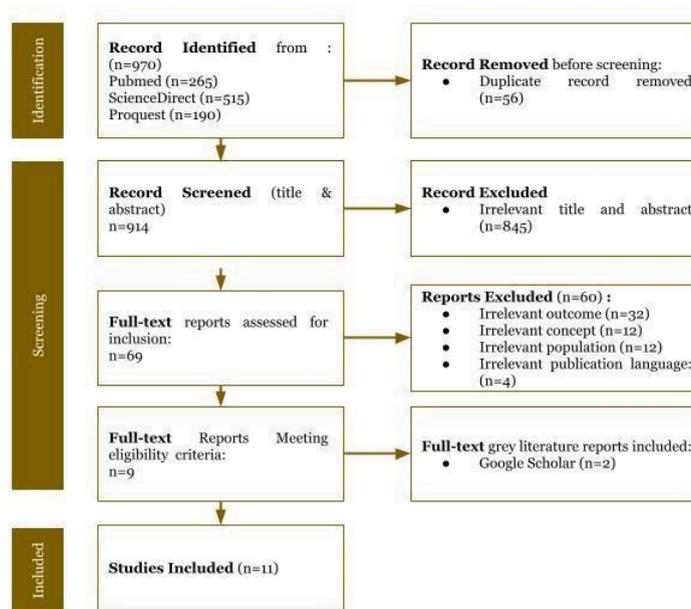


Figure 1. PRISMA scoping review

RESULTS

Study characteristics

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the results from the scoping review on psychosocial factors influencing work stress among government employees. The majority of studies in this scoping review were published after 2015, with a reasonably balanced distribution between the periods before 2015 (36.3%), 2015-2020 (27.3%), and 2021-2025 (36.3%). The pattern of publication origins highlights that research on psychosocial factors affecting work stress in government employees remains relevant.

Table 1. Characteristics of included studies

Characteristics	n (%)	Supporting articles
Publication period		
< 2015	4 (36.3)	[22], [23], [24], [25]
2015 – 2020	3 (27.3)	[26], [27], [28]
2021 - 2025	4 (36.3)	[29], [30], [31], [32]
Countries		
China	3 (27.2)	[32], [31], [27]
US	2 (18.2)	[30], [25]
Indonesia	2 (18.2)	[22], [29]
Jepang	1 (9.1)	[23]
Brazil	1 (9.1)	[26]
Inggris	1 (9.1)	[24]
Malaysia	1 (9.1)	[28]
Research sample		
<500	5 (45.4)	[31], [22], [25], [28], [29]
500 – 1000	3 (27.3)	[32], [30], [27]
>1000	3 (27.3)	[23], [26], [24]

Most research publications came from China (27.2%), followed by the United States and Indonesia. Japan, Brazil, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia also contributed to the scoping review, each with one publication. The included studies primarily involved samples of fewer than 500 respondents (45.4%), indicating that methodological improvements are needed in future research examining psychosocial factors that influence job stress. It also points out the need for future studies to consider larger and more representative samples to enhance generalizability and statistical power.

Psychosocial factors affecting work stress

Table 2 below summarizes the psychosocial factors identified in multiple studies, along with the number of articles that support them. The most frequently reviewed factors in studies related to work stress in civil servants are the relationship between workers and the organization, as well as the workplace environment, with five supporting articles [32], [30], [27], [24], and [28]. This factor encompasses how employees interact with the organization and the work environment conditions that can impact stress.

Other often-researched topics include job demands [25,27,28,30] and their relationship to family issues [22,29,31,32], each with four supporting articles, suggesting that workload and work-life balance are crucial in determining employees' work stress levels. Other factors, such as job control and career prospects [25,27], supervisor support [27,31], and job dissatisfaction [23,27], were identified in two studies each. In contrast, public motivation [30] and relationships or social support were only mentioned in

one study [24]. These factors remain essential for understanding the dynamics of work stress in civil servants, despite the limited number of articles that address them.

Table 2. Psychosocial factors identified in the included studies

Psychosocial factors	n (%)
Job demands	
Job demands	4 (36.4)
Job dissatisfaction	2 (18.2)
Career prospect	2 (18.2)
Job control	
Job control	2 (18.2)
Public motivation	1 (9.1)
Social support	
Supervisor support	2 (18.2)
Family relationship - worker	4 (36.4)
Social support	1 (9.1)
Individual factors	
Person – Organization	5 (45.5)

As summarized in Table 2, psychosocial factors influencing work stress can be grouped into four main themes: job demands, job control, social support, and individual-organization fit, as outlined in the Job Control Demand Support framework [34–36]. Job demand factors include job demand (four studies), job dissatisfaction (two studies), and career prospects (two studies). This factor dominates the study results, indicating that it has the most significant influence on work stress among civil servants. Job control factors identified in the study results include job control (in 2 studies) and public motivation (in 1 study). Job control groups the public motivation aspect because it aligns with individuals' beliefs of having control over their work. Aspects included in the social support factor include supervisor support (2 studies), social support (1 study), and family worker support (4 studies). Meanwhile, the fit between individual and organizational values is the most frequently studied and categorized as an individual factor.

DISCUSSIONS

This review shows that various psychosocial factors contribute to work stress in the state civil apparatus. The most dominant factor is the employee's relationship with the organization and the work environment, which is widely studied in five articles. It confirms that the interaction between employees and the organization, as well as the work environment conditions, are key factors that determine the level of work stress. This finding align with previous research

showing that an unsupportive work environment can increase psychological distress [33].

Job demands and work-family balance were also frequently reviewed factors, supported by four articles each. High job demands can lead to emotional and physical exhaustion, increasing stress [33]. This finding is consistent with the job demand-control model of job stress, which states that the higher the job demands without adequate control, the higher the risk of stress experienced by employees [34,35].

On the other hand, the balance between work and family also plays an important role. Conflict between work and home roles can increase job stress, especially for civil servants who balance complex bureaucratic tasks with family responsibilities. Research indicates that married workers are more susceptible to stress [11], particularly among female workers [36]. The dual role of a woman, as both mother, wife, and worker, is a primary factor contributing to the higher likelihood of female workers experiencing stress compared to men [13,14].

Although supported by only two studies, other factors, such as job control, career prospects, supervisor support, and job dissatisfaction, are also relevant in understanding job stress among civil servants. Low job control is often associated with higher levels of stress, as employees have limitations in making decisions regarding their tasks [37,38]. Support from superiors is also an important aspect in reducing job stress, as effective leadership can create a more conducive work environment and improve employee well-being [15].

Interestingly, the factors of public motivation and social support were only found in one study. Public motivation, particularly among civil servants who work in the public interest, should serve as a protective factor against job stress. Similarly, social support from coworkers or family can reduce the psychological pressure experienced by employees. Future research should prioritize a more in-depth examination of these two factors to understand their potential role as key buffers against work stress in government employees.

This review also highlights some methodological limitations of the existing literature. Most of the included studies used relatively small sample sizes (under 500 respondents), which may limit the generalizability of their findings. Furthermore, many studies employ cross-sectional designs, which makes it difficult to determine causality between psychosocial factors and work stress. Therefore, future studies should use larger samples and more robust research methods, such as longitudinal or experimental studies, to further clarify the causal relationship between psychosocial factors and job stress.

The review suggests that organizations should create a supportive work environment by enhancing organizational communication, clarifying job expectations, and fostering a positive work culture. Additionally, implementing work-family balance policies, such as flexible working hours or more adaptable leave policies, can help mitigate stress associated with role conflict. For example, the flexible work arrangement (FWA) policy and the right to leave to care for children, as regulated in the State Civil Service Agency's (BKN) Regulation No. 24 of 2017, can be concrete efforts to support the balance between life and work for civil servants. Overall, this study highlights that job stress in civil servants is a complex issue influenced by various psychosocial factors. By understanding these factors in greater depth, more effective interventions can be developed to enhance employee well-being and improve work efficiency in the government sector.

CONCLUSION

This scoping review reveals that job stress in the State Civil Apparatus is influenced by various psychosocial factors, with employee and organizational relationships being the most dominant. Job demands and work-family balance also play a significant role, while other factors, such as job control, career prospects, supervisor support, and job dissatisfaction, remain relevant, although less researched. Public motivation and social support, which have the potential to protect against job stress, are less studied, suggesting the need for further research.

The findings underscore the significance of policies that foster a healthy work environment and promote work-life balance, thereby reducing stress and enhancing the well-being of civil servants. Future organizational interventions that foster a supportive work environment and promote work-life balance are crucial for reducing work stress among civil servants.

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