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A study on workplace stress factor among veterinary profession

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Abstract

Although previous literature indicates that students in health professions face significant levels of stress, there has been comparatively less examination of stress among veterinary professionals. The aim of this research was to investigate the extent of stress experienced by veterinary professionals. The study involved 100 veterinarians from the vicinity of Haryana. The results confirm the notion that veterinary professionals encounter considerable levels of stress. Additionally, the findings revealed that a majority of the veterinarians expressed apprehension regarding the possibility of contracting zoonotic diseases from animals.

Keywords: Stress, veterinary professionals, health professions, zoonotic diseases, veterinarians

Introduction

Stress is characterized as 'a condition of psychological or emotional pressure or tension arising from challenging or unfavorable circumstances'. Several investigations have been carried out on stress and burnout within healthcare professionals, (Wolfgang, 1988; Firth and Britton, 1989; Revicki and May, 1989; Garrett and McDaniel, 2001) [16, 4, 11, 7]. Despite this extensive research, there is a notable scarcity of formal studies focusing specifically on stress among veterinary surgeons. Veterinarians encounter a diverse range of stressful situations and occupational risks throughout their careers. These stressors may include balancing work and family commitments, lack of job security, lack of job satisfaction, Excessive workload, managing challenging relationships with colleagues or staff, navigating financial pressures, facing physical hazards such as bites, scratches, and other injuries from animals, as well as risks such as needle stick injuries, musculoskeletal issues, occupational skin conditions, and exposure to zoonotic diseases and various chemicals (Gardner *et al.*, 2006; Wiggins *et al.*, 1989; Smith *et al.*, 2009) [6, 15, 13]. Over the past few years, veterinarians in Haryana have been grappling with a significant source of stress: job security. The precarious nature of employment has emerged as a predominant concern among veterinary professionals in the region, impacting their well-being and overall job satisfaction. The uncertainty surrounding job stability has created a pervasive sense of unease and anxiety within the veterinary community, prompting a closer examination of the factors contributing to this phenomenon. The primary physical hazards encountered in the veterinary profession include injuries, trauma, and musculoskeletal disorders, as well as exposure to ionizing radiations. Chemical risks primarily stem from the utilization of gaseous anesthetics, various drugs (particularly anti-neoplastic and anti-parasitic agents), as well as detergents and disinfectants. Biological risks are inherent in tasks involving potential exposure to biological agents, such as the rabies virus, and any organisms capable of causing infections, allergies, or poisoning (Arluke, 1991; Bonini *et al.*, 2016; Johnson and Griswold, 1996) [2, 3, 9]. Research has suggested that people whose work requires them to kill animals suffer from euthanasia-related traumatic stress (Rohlf and Bennett, 2005; AVMA, 1995) [12, 1]. A research study conducted in Kerala, India sought to understand the key elements of job situations in relation to stress factors that impact job satisfaction (Soumya Sankar *et al.*, 2013) [14]. In recent times, there has been a growing focus on psychosocial elements and occupational stress among veterinarians, which encompasses client engagement, career advancement, and peer support.

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However, stress distribution is not uniform, as factors such as gender, age, and practice type are recognized as significant correlates. However, despite this acknowledgment, only a limited number of studies have directly examined stress among veterinarians. Therefore, the objective of our present study was to analyze the various aspects of stress experienced by veterinarians.

Materials and Methods

A survey consisting of an anonymous questionnaire was distributed to veterinary professionals located in and around Haryana. This approach was selected to ensure optimal cost-effectiveness and minimal disruption to their professional responsibilities. The questionnaire comprised questions categorized into three dimensions of stress: [1] Career Factors (including aspects such as career structure, salary, promotion opportunities, work hours, and holidays), [2] Professional Factors (encompassing the attitudes of colleagues, superiors, customers, and recognition from the public, colleagues, or family), and [3] Practice-Related Issues (such as patient load per day, pressure to provide excessive service, the potential for litigation, and risks associated with animals and diseases). Participants were asked to rate their responses using a three-point Likert scale, ranging from 'none' to 'extreme'. Surveys were distributed to veterinarians, with subsequent reminders sent to those who hadn't responded to the initial or follow-up mailings. The data collected was entered anonymously into a spreadsheet software and subjected to statistical analysis.

Results and Discussion

Surveys were distributed to 100 participants, out of which 90 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 90.0%. Respondents with incomplete or missing responses were then excluded, leaving a total of 85 veterinarians for the final analysis. Of these, approximately 35% were female. About 30% of respondents fell within the 31-40 age range. Nearly half

(45%) reported working between 31-50 hours per week and 35% being their own principal employer. Additionally, close to half (47%) of the respondents worked in small animal practice. Stress related to career aspects was observed as the most common cause of extreme stress among veterinarians (45%). In the state of Haryana, where many veterinarians lean towards government employment, the scarcity of such opportunities in recent years might contribute to the higher proportion in this category. Conversely, concerns about future promotion and a reduced number of holidays per year were least likely to induce stress, with nearly half (43%) of respondents indicating no stress from these factors at all. The findings regarding Professional Factors are illustrated in Figure 2. The attitude of clients/customers emerged as the primary source of stress for veterinarians, with 35% experiencing extreme stress. While the relationship between practitioners and clients is pivotal in contemporary veterinary practice, it seems that this aspect has received limited attention in research. What has been established, however, is that clients have the potential to evoke considerable negative emotions among veterinarians (Milani, 2003) [10]. However, over half reported no stress due to the attitude of their colleagues and understanding from their partner/family. This discovery is intriguing as it contrasts with previous findings where leadership quality and cooperation with colleagues have been identified as factors contributing to stress in various occupations (Gamperiene *et al.*, 2006) [5]. Responses to Practice Issues are depicted in Figure 3. Approximately half of the veterinarians expressed concern about acquiring zoonotic diseases from animals. Lost work days due to human and zoonotic diseases were reported in previous studies. Various zoonotic diseases such as Q fever, ornithosis, ringworm, leptospirosis and toxoplasmosis results in occupational health hazards (Jeyaretnam *et al.*, 2000) [8]. Conversely, having an excessive number of patients was least likely to cause extreme stress.

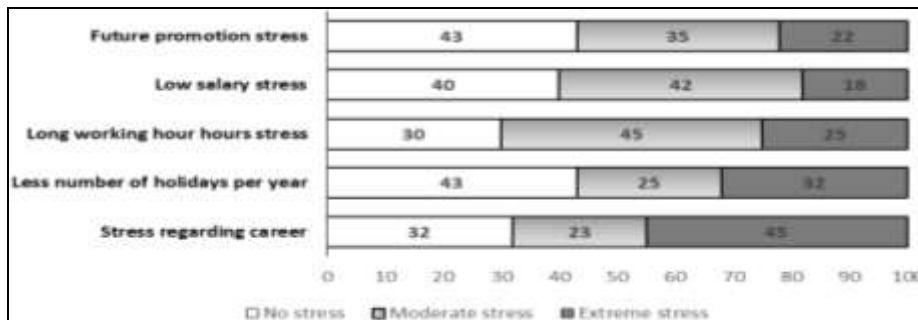


Fig 1: Responses to Career Factors

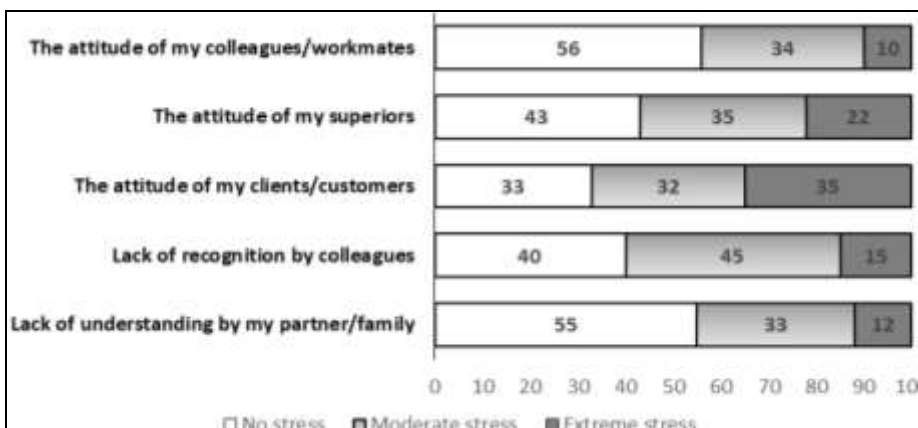


Fig 2: Responses to Professional Factors

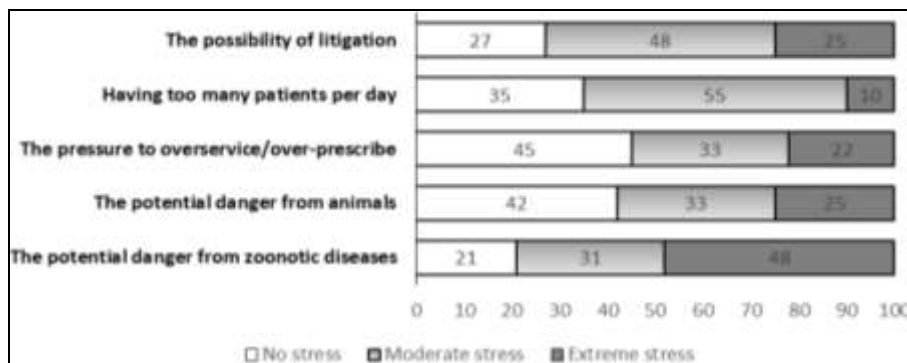


Fig 3: Responses to Practice Issues

Conclusion

In essence, this study has uncovered significant connections between workplace stress and diverse aspects of career, professional, and practice-related matters. It is evident that stress persists as a prevalent issue among veterinarians, permeating various facets of their professional lives. Considering the present results, it is imperative to redirect more attention towards addressing workplace stress within the veterinary field. This will aid in equipping practitioners with better strategies to manage the stressful situations encountered in their daily professional endeavors.

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