

Perception of Veterinarians about Organisational Role Stress

Soumya Sankar, P. Reeja George, P.J. Raj Kamal, T.S. Rajeev and K.A. Mercey

Department of Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Extension, College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Mannuthy, Thrissur 680 651, Kerala, India

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ABSTRACT Veterinarians of the Department of Animal Husbandry play a major role in carrying out various developmental activities in this sector. However, increased demands of the job have resulted in the veterinarian being in a position where he has to play more than one role which could have repercussions for job performance and job stress. Thus a study was undertaken to understand the perception of veterinarians in the Animal Husbandry Department of a South Indian state about the degree of organizational role stress. The questionnaire technique was adopted in this study among a total 155 veterinary surgeons and 45 senior veterinary surgeons. Nearly eighty percent of the veterinarians studied felt that stress due to organizational roles was in the medium to high level. Among the ten dimensions of organizational role stress, role over load was perceived as the most important dimension causing organizational role stress.

INTRODUCTION

Veterinarians of the Department of Animal Husbandry play a major role in carrying out various developmental activities in this sector. They have been traditionally involved in treatment of animals and of late they have the additional responsibility of carrying out project work associated with implementation of schemes in the animal husbandry sector in the *panchayats* where they work. Consequently, the responsibility and work load of an average veterinarian has increased considerably and the veterinarian is placed in a position where he has to play more than one role. In such cases if the role occupant is unable to balance the two roles it may lead to inadequate performance of either role, or role stress which could affect the productivity of the veterinarian. Thus from the point of view of the organization it is important to study the nature and type of stressors of the veterinarians. Numerous studies have been conducted about stress and burnout in healthcare professionals. However there are few formal studies about stress among veterinarians (Hansez et al. 2008). The importance of this study lies in the fact that stress has a cost for individuals in terms of health, wellbeing and job dissatisfaction as well as for the organization concerned in terms of absenteeism and turnover which in turn may impact upon the quality of patient care. Further, a better understanding of the stressors in veterinary practice may allow identification of strategies to improve the working conditions of veterinarians with resulting benefits for the quality of veterinary health care.

Keeping the aforesaid facts in mind, a study was under taken to understand the perception of veterinarians in the Animal Husbandry Department of a South Indian state about the degree of organizational role stress.

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire technique was adopted in this study. Two separate lists of 920 veterinary surgeons and 270 senior veterinary surgeons of the Department of Animal Husbandry, who perform clinical as well as extension project functions were prepared by consulting official records as well as the address list of the State Unit of the Indian Veterinary Association. A simple random sample of 460 veterinary surgeons and 135 senior veterinary surgeons were selected from the prepared lists. Thus randomization of responses was ensured. A total of 47 senior veterinary surgeons and 170 veterinary surgeons returned the filled up questionnaires. Incomplete and carelessly filled questionnaires were discarded and the final study sample hence consisted of 155 veterinary surgeons and 45 senior veterinary surgeons. Veterinary surgeons and senior veterinary surgeons were considered as separate strata for comparison purposes.

Organizational role stress (ORS) was measured using the ORS scale developed by Pareek (1983). According to Pareek (1983), roles are any position a person holds in a system or organization as defined by the expectation that various significant persons, including him, have from that position. The organizational role stress scale measures stress on account of ten dimen-

sions viz:- inter-role distance, role stagnation, role expectation conflict, role erosion, role overload, role isolation, personal inadequacy, self role distance, role ambiguity and resource inadequacy.

The respondents were asked to indicate how often he/she had the feeling expressed in the statements in relation to his/her role in the organisation on a five point continuum viz: - never or rarely feel this way; feel occasionally; feel sometimes this way; frequently feel this way and very frequently / always feel this way with scores of 0,1,2,3 and 4 respectively. The total score of an individual for each type of organizational role stressor was obtained by summing up his /her scores for each item. The obtainable score range was between 0 and 20 for each dimension.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Perception of Veterinarians about Organizational Role Stress

Data in Table 1 indicate that 45.5 per cent of the respondents fell in the medium organizational role stress category, while 34.5 per cent and 20 per cent respectively fell in the high and low organizational role stress categories. It can thus be inferred from the results of the present study that nearly eighty percent of the veterinarians studied felt that stress due to organizational roles was in the medium to high range. Bano and Jha (2012) reported that there was moderate levels of role stress among the employees in public and private sectors. Hansez et al. (2008) remarked that thought only moderate stress levels were observed among the Belgian veterinary surgeons, this result was surprising when the inherent stressful working conditions and increased responsibilities of veterinary surgeons were considered. The results of the present study confirm the findings of Hansez et al. (2008) that the veterinary profession was inherently stressful. Gardner and Hini (2006) also observed moderate stress levels among veterinarians. Rejula et al. (2003) reported that 73 per cent of Finnish veterinary surgeons studied, perceived the feeling of 'rather' or 'very stressed'. Elkins and Elkins (1987) presented similar results. Jogaretnam and Buchanan (2004) and Bartram and Baldwin (2008) examined stress among veterinarians in terms of

mental and physical outcomes and observed higher levels of suicide among veterinarians when compared to other professional groups. They concluded that this phenomenon was an indicator of the high stress levels inherent to this occupation. The results of the present study also highlight the need for urgent measures to identify strategies to improve the working conditions of veterinarians in the organization which in order to improve the quality of veterinary health care delivery.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents based on their perception of organizational role stress n =200

No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	<47 (Low)	40	20.0
2.	47-93 (Medium)	91	45.5
3.	>93 (High)	69	34.5
Total		200	100.0

b. Perception of Veterinarians about Various Dimensions of Organizational Role

Data in Table 2 shows that among the ten dimensions of organizational role stress, role over load was perceived as the most important dimension causing organizational role stress followed by resource inadequacy, inter role distance, role stagnation, self role distance, role isolation, personal inadequacy, role expectation conflict, role ambiguity and role erosion in that order.

Table 2: Perception of various dimensions of organizational role stress

No.	Dimensions	Mean score	Rank
1	Role overload	1.92	1
2	Resource inadequacy	1.91	2
3	Inter role distance	1.90	3
4	Role stagnation	1.69	4
5	Self role distance	1.61	5
6	Role isolation	1.55	6
7	Personal inadequacy	1.47	7
8	Role expectation conflict	1.37	8
9	Role ambiguity	1.22	9
10	Role erosion	1.14	10

Role overload develops when the role occupant feels that there are too many expectations from significant others in his role set. It is more likely to occur when the role occupant lacks power, where there are large variations in the expected output and when delegation of assis-

tance cannot procure more time (Pareek 1993). Role overload is important since having a heavy workload interferes with work quality and results in the feeling of not being able to finish an ordinary day's work in one day (Kahn et al. 1964).

Similar findings were made by Hansez et al. (2008) who observed that long working hours were a source of stress inherent to the situation of veterinary surgeons. Long working hours as a potential cause of stress among veterinarians was also reported by Elkins and Elkins (1987), Gardner and Hini (2006) and Welsch (1998). Wilkes et al. (1998) also observed that work overload and time constraints were significant contributors to work stress among community nurses. Harling et al. (2009) also observed that long working time was a significant contributors to work stress among veterinarians in Germany. Hansez et al. (2008) observed that excessive workloads represent a real threat to practitioners' health and safety.

The second most important dimension of organizational role stress as perceived by the respondents was resource inadequacy. Resource inadequacy referred to the non availability of resources needed for effective role performance. The results of the present study indicated that the veterinarians perceived resource inadequacy as the second most important cause of stress during the discharge of their roles.

Inter role distance, the third dimension of organizational role stress that was considered as important by the respondents referred to the respondents' perception of conflict between the his/her organizational role and other roles. The results of the present study indicated that veterinarians experienced stress due to conflict between their organizational role and other roles in their life.

Role stagnation was perceived by veterinarians as the fourth important dimension of organizational role stress. Role stagnation referred to the perception of the respondent that there were fewer opportunities for learning and growth in his or her organizational role. Role stagnation has been reported to be a feeling of being stuck in the same role. In role stagnation, the changing demands of the role may produce stress. Pareek (1993) observed that role stagnation also included stress related to career pro-

gression and obstacles in career. Gohar et al. (2012) also reported that role stagnation has significant impact on dimensions of stress and burnout.

Self role distance was perceived by the veterinarians in the study to be the fifth most important dimension of organization. It referred to the conflict of a respondent's values and self-concepts with the requirements of the organizational role.

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