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# Quality of work life (QWL) and job stress among Iran public employees

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Iran public organizations have initiated structural reform to enhance productivity. The reform has created some profound changes which lead to a great deal of uncertainty and stress among employees. As organizations take the challenge to cope with these changes, employees look for loyalty from the organization and expect that their job provides them with a certain amount of stability. To actualize these expectations employees search for their legitimate right of having a quality life in their working environment. The primary objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between quality of work life and job stress of Iran public employees. For this a descriptive cross sectional design was used. From 24 public organizations of Sirjan township in Kerman province a proportional cluster sampling method was deployed to draw 200 employees. Variables in the study were assessed using two validated instruments. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data. The significant findings of the study revealed that quality of work life and job stress of Iran public employees are correlated. The practical implications of the findings in the context of Iran public sector are discussed.

**Key words:** Quality of work life, job stress, job security, decision making, continuance learning, monetary compensation.

## INTRODUCTION

The world has moved into a new paradigm of organization (Peters, 1992; Drucker, 1992; Clegg, 1992; Quinn, 1993). Work culture has changed drastically and so have employee's needs and expectations.

In this new paradigm, public organizations have undergone some drastic transformations. They are being broken up, restructured into decentralized, flattened, and quasi-autonomous units. This organizational break up has taken place through outsourcing of certain services and deployment of fewer workforces (Thomas and Dunkerley, 1999; NORA, 2002).

Outsourcing is being increasingly used, especially, by the public sector in developing countries (Jack, 2003; Vining and Globerman, 1999). It is considered as a strategic necessity to enhance productivity in these countries (Pirannejad et al., 2010).

Organizational reform in Iran public sector has been considered as a fundamental solution by public administrators and recommended to be practiced in public organizations (Editorial, Sep. 2005). Actually, it has been one of the main pivots of administrative reform in Iran 'Third Development Plan' which was approved by the council of ministers on March 7, 2002 (Beshkoh, 2002). To lay the ground for proper realization of the targets and objectives of the Third Plan, government is required to carry out the reform in the public sector organizations (Salam Iran, 2002).

Consequently, outsourcing with decentralization as its underlying element has taken place in public sector, in the last decade (Siddiqi et al., 2006). Furthermore, Iran public sector is promoting the expansion of private sector participation in public sector. In fact, government downsizing is a key strategy through this expansion (Baradaran, 2005) which is the focal point in rightsizing state run agencies (Azadehdel and Ramli, 2009).

However, the reform has created some profound

**Abbreviation:** QWL, Quality of work life.

changes in the public sector. Some researchers (Callan, 1993; Terry and Jimmieson, 2003; Ashford, 1988; Pollard, 2001; Schweiger and DeNisi, 1991) contended that these changes lead to a great deal of uncertainty and stress among employees. There is a growing literature on the nature and consequences of uncertainty during organizational change (DiFonzo and Bordia, 1998; Maurier and Northcott, 2000; Nelson et al., 1995; Pollard, 2001; Rafferty, 2002; Schweiger and Denisi, 1991; Terry et al., 1996).

As organizations take the challenge to cope with all these changes, according to Conlon (2003) and McDonald and Hite (2005) employees look for loyalty from the organization and expect their job provide them with a certain amount of stability. They had certain expectations when they joined public organizations (Woods, 1993). To actualize these expectations, despite the disturbances which have been created by the reform, employees search for their legitimate right of having a quality life in their working environment. As a result, an enhanced interest has evolved around the concept of employees working life (Dolan et al., 2008) in the public sector.

Therefore, this study takes QWL as a legitimate right of public employees and investigates the relationship between QWL and job stress of Iran public employees.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Quality of work life (QWL)

The concept of QWL has always been used as an index of quality of human experiences in working environment. It is a comprehensive construct that includes an individual's job related well-being and the extent to which work experiences are rewarding, fulfilling and devoid of stress and other negative personal consequences (Shamir and Salomon, 1985).

The evolution of QWL began in late 1960s emphasizing the human dimensions of work by focusing on the quality of the relationship between the worker and the working environment (Raduan et al., 2006). QWL is considered as a means of enhancing productivity and decreasing inflation and a pathway to industrial democracy which minimize employee disputes (Khera, 2010).

It requires employee commitment to the organization and an environment in which this commitment can flourish (Walton, 1975). This will enhance organizational loyalty among employees, result in higher levels of job satisfaction, lower employee turnover, and fewer employee complaints (Werther and Davis, 1992).

Mirsepasi (2005) contends that QWL is a dual construct. On one hand, it is objective which comprises actual conditions of work and work environment, such as salary and monetary compensations, employee well being and safety, participative decision making, job

enrichment and task variety. On the other hand, it is subjective and comprises employees' attitude regarding QWL. In this regard, quality of work life depends upon the perception of employees related to the safety of physical and psychological environment. This, especially in public organizations, can be considered as employees legitimate rights. Fernandez-Alles et al. (2006) asserted that effective implementation of management practices including focus on improvement of quality of work environment influence legitimacy.

Loscocco and Roschelle (1991) also believe that the most common consideration of QWL is the individual attitudes. Individuals selectively perceive and make attributions about their jobs in accordance with the expectations they bring to the workplace. Nadler and Lawler (1983) came up with a working definition that describes QWL as a way of thinking about people, work and organization. Sirgy et al. (2001) defined QWL as employee satisfaction with a variety of needs through resources, activities and outcomes stemming from participation in the workplace. This definition appears to be holistic as it includes aspects of other domains, such as family life, social life and financial life. Moreover, it deals explicitly with subjective wellbeing (Lau, 2000). With regard to this subjective concept, employees' perception of safety and suitability of physical and psychological work environment is different from one another. Therefore, there are different indices for measuring QWL.

According to Dessler (1994) having a job that you like, safe and sound working conditions, sufficient salary, job security, a competent supervisor, performance feedback, good relation with coworkers and feel as a family, possibility of promotion based on meritocracy, opportunities for training and education and appointing individuals based on seniority are part of these indices. Shermerhorn (Farsi translation, 2002) believes that paying fair and equal wage and salaries, safe and sound working conditions, opportunity to learn and apply new skills, career development, and supporting individual rights are indices of QWL.

Walton (1975) proposed eight major conceptual categories as indicators of QWL. These are (1) adequate and fair compensation, (2) safe and healthy working conditions, (3) immediate opportunity to use and develop human capacities, (4) opportunity for continued growth and security, (5) social integration in the work organization, (6) constitutionalism in the work organization, (7) work and total life space and (8) social relevance of work life.

Rossi et al. (2006) contend as the concept of QWL is multi-dimensional it may not, of course, be universal. However, key concepts tend to include job security, reward systems, pay and opportunity for growth among other factors. Therefore, QWL is a dynamic multidimensional construct that currently includes such notions as job security, reward systems, training and

career advancement opportunities, and participation in decision making (Lau and Bruce, 1998). In the same view, Tatel's model (as cited in Mirsepasi, 2005) considered job security, monetary compensations, opportunity for constant learning and development of new skills, and participative decision making as QWL indices. These indices are believed, not only, to be appropriate and reliable in the context of Iran Public Organizations, but also, are management-related conditions of work which are linked with employees' health. Therefore, they were used to frame hypothesis in this study.

Job security is one of the key indicators which were considered by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007) in an effort to design a measurement framework for quality in work. It is the central feature of QWL which stands for strength of the organizations to provide permanent and stable employment regardless of the changes in work environment (Rethinam and Maimunah, 2008). Hayrol et al. (2010) contended that job security affects employees' motivation and accordingly, their performance. It is a dimension of QWL as identified by Sirgy et al. (2001) which is a key concept in the existing literature related to QWL (Beauregard, 2007).

Job security concern, nowadays, is a growing general apprehension among employees which consumes an enormous part of their mental energy. Research reveals that perceptions of these concerns are increasing (Kelley et al., 1998; Saunders et al., 2000). Thus, providing a sense of security when many aspects of job can be outsourced is especially important for the employees (Rethinam and Maimunah, 2008)

Employees would like their jobs to provide them with a sufficient level of security; however, there is a discrepancy between what they would like to exist and what they, actually, perceive to exist. This discrepancy creates an insecurity feeling which is woven with social insecurity and being viewed from a new perspective (Hartley et al., 1991).

Rousseau and Parkes (1993), for instance, pointed out that employees find their 'psychological contract' is now one of employability rather than employment for life. This makes employees to be uncertain about their future working life.

Monetary compensations as another indicator of QWL have a profound effect on job satisfaction; managers use money to attract, retain, and motivate employees and achieve organizational goals and productivity (Milkovich and Newman, 2002). Wan (2007) and Martzler and Renzl (2007) believe that it is an important aspect of an organization success.

Finegold et al. (2002) found that pay linked to individual performance was related to the new generation's employee commitment and, usually, is associated with quality of work life practices.

Insufficient remuneration not only has a negative effect on organizational efficiency, but also reduces employees'

QWL. Lewis et al. (2001) found support for the important role of extrinsic factors (such as: Salary and benefits) in determining QWL. Poor performance, job stress, absenteeism and turnover are other effects of deficient monetary system (Kazemi, 2001).

Another most general factor in QWL is the opportunity for continuance learning and skill development. Employees want to use and develop skills and knowledge to perform personally meaningful and important task (Huse and Cummings, 1985).

Rapidly changing technologies require that employees continuously hone their knowledge, skills, and abilities through continuous learning (Snell and Bohlander, 2010).

According to Finegold et al. (2002) opportunities to exercise and develop one's skills are also related to the new generation's employee commitment and are usually associated with QWL practices. This is seen as an important aspect of competency development that enhances QWL (Rethinam and Maimunah, 2008).

Organizations leave most of their employees' talents untapped. They fail to make use of their employees' complete creativity, skills and energy. Consequently, employees feel vain and ineffective.

Thus, lack of skill utilization and subjective underemployment is considered as management-related condition of work that is linked with negative employees' health (Dolan et al., 2008).

Nowadays dynamic changing environment, commitment to training and growth of employees is an essential element of organizational success.

According to Shermerhorn (Farsi translation, 2002) one of the general deficiencies of productivity in organizations is improper handling of potential capacities of efficient individuals who are not granted sufficient opportunity to grow to their full potential. Whereas, nurturing employees' proficiency to perform continually and precisely is an inevitable necessity of these days' successful organizations (Ronagh, 2000).

Dolan et al. (2008) asserted that the opportunity to learn and develop skills enhances the acquisition and utilization of knowledge which not only results in a better performance but also enhances the ability to cope with uncertain demands thus reducing the possibility of poor QWL.

Another index of QWL, according to Tatel's model (as cited in Mirsepasi, 2005) is participation of employees in decision making. Participation, in general, is a sort of cognitive- affective involvement in group activities.

Group members share information which according to Hayrol et al. (2010) is an important aspect of interpersonal communication and motivates individuals to take responsibility to accomplish group goals.

Participation of employees in decision making is one of the major principles of QWL and is considered as a common ground for almost all QWL activities. Nadler and lawler (1983) denoted that QWL distinctive elements are concern about the impact of work on people as well as on

organizational effectiveness and the idea of participation in organizational problem solving and decision making.

According to Dyer and Quine (1998) and Glass and McKnight (1996), lack of participation or decision latitude is a management-related condition of work that is linked with negative employees' health. Consequences of participation, usually, take place in the form of reduced job stress and ....

### Job stress

The generic definition of work related stress is "the inability to cope with the pressure in a job" (Ganster and Schaubroeck, 1991). When job stress disrupts one's equilibrium, individuals often deviate from their normal behavior patterns, which in turn affect their work outcomes (Jamal, 1990).

Therefore, the experience of stress reactions in the workplace is not an isolated phenomenon (Fletcher, 1988). It is associated with impaired individual functioning in the workplace. It costs organizations directly and indirectly. Direct costs come from absenteeism, tardiness, sick leave, and court-ordered compensation. Indirect costs include poor communication, decreased productivity, job dissatisfaction, and poor performance (Alluisi and Fleishman, 1982; Nelson and Elsberry, 1992), dampened initiative and reduced interest in working, increased rigidity of thought, a lack of concern for the organization and colleagues, and a loss of responsibility (Greenberg and Baron, 1995; Matteson and Ivancevich, 1982).

Job stress has also been related to organization's problems such as turnover, accidents and errors (Williams et al., 2001), alcoholism (Patton and Questell, 1988; Scanlon, 1986) and drug abuse (Patton, 1988).

In job stress situations it is not important what you do, where you work and in what organizational level you work; unlike physical and chemical hazards, job stressors respect no occupational boundaries, so the potential for exposure to this class of health risks is ubiquitous (Murphy, 1995).

The literature supports the prediction that workplace factors could have direct effects on stress (Kirkcaldy et al., 1999; Leong et al., 1996; Lyne et al., 2000). Medical professions who treat individuals for various adjustment disorders have noted that frequency with which work-related issues appear to play a role in the etiology of the disorder (Warr, 1987; Landy, 1989).

Thus, the quality of the work environment is associated with stress (Sparks and Cooper, 1999). Stressful working condition results in employees' poor health and well being. It affects psychological conditions which prevent employees from proper functioning. This by itself provides an uncomfortable work life (Iacovides et al., 2003). When QWL does not exist or it is reduced to the lowest level in an organization, the balance of work and

psychological needs is disturbed and results in stress.

Based on aforesaid, management-related conditions of work including lack of job security, inadequate remuneration, and subjective underemployment as well as lack of skill utilization and lack of participation or decision latitude (Dolan et al., 2008) are indicators of QWL and linked with employees' negative health.

### Association of quality of work life (QWL) indicators and job stress

When employees are uncertain about their job security, they feel stressed. According to Nelson and Burke (2000) threat of redundancy is stressful. Russ and Altmier (Farsi translation, 2006) believe that a kind of stress which is created by lack of job security generates 'ripple effect' which cause even those who are not at the risk of losing their jobs become anxious and experience stress.

The positive link between employees concern about job security and job stress has been well established (Catalano et al., 1986; Hartley et al., 1991; Dekker and Schaufeli, 1995; Mak and Mueller, 2000; and Naswall et al., 2005). The increase rate of unemployment in Iran and outsourcing trends in public organizations have made it clear that job security in public organizations cannot be taken for granted.

In regard to monetary rewards, Rutter et al. (2002) asserted that inadequate remuneration is one of the causes of job stress among employees. There are other studies which support these results (Abel and Swell, 1999; Keinan and Malach-Pines, 2007; Ogunjimi et al., 2009).

According to Scully et al. (1995), learning process encompasses the opportunity to develop and to use skills. This is true, especially, when the employee is required to use cognitive skills to perform the job. When these opportunities are taken away from the employees, not only poor QWL is ensued but also they feel unsecured and stressful.

Moreover, when employees are not provided with a voice in management and cannot participate in decision making they feel stressed (Landsbergis, 2000). Public sector productivity is one of the important factors in economic performance of a country (Linna et al., 2010). Iran like many other countries with mixed economies has outsourced more profitable activities of the public sector for the sake of more accountability and productivity at lower price (Pirannejad et al., 2010), but what about the public employees' QWL. Socio-technical systems theory retains that QWL and productivity improvement are the result of joint optimization of both social (employees) and technical (equipment and the environment) elements of an organization (Clarke and Brooks, 2010).

As Wurf (1982) asserted "I am skeptical of any employer, in government or private industry who states that he is motivated entirely or in part by the quality of his

employees' work life", Iran public management is not an exception. As it was stated, productivity and accountability in developing countries are important factors; however, plans to carry them out in the public sector might fire back and put a heavy burden on society. Is there any probability that these plans jeopardize the public employees' legitimate right of having QWL and create health problems? Perry and Porter (1982) and Behn (1995) asserted that knowledge improvement of the motivational framework in public sector has been considered as a research agenda. However, according to Wright (2001) just a small amount of research has realized this agenda. Therefore, QWL can be considered as a motivational strategy in public sector which results in job satisfaction; after which not only the well-being of employees might be assured but also it lays the ground to apply motivators more effectively. However, "scientific studies that have examined the quality of working lives of professionals working in the public sector are less frequent and of those the one reported on the psychometric properties that is (construct validity) of the dimensions of QWL and its relationships with health and well being are very scant" (Dolan et al., 2008). Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between perception of QWL indicators and job stress among Iran public employees. Understanding the relationship between these variables in public sector in different cultures not only may extend current knowledge on the association between QWL and job stress of employees in public sector, but also may contribute to understanding the QWL phenomenon as a motivational road map and assist practitioners as well as public policy makers to identify key workplace issues, as perceived by public employees, in order to develop strategies to improve the QWL conditions and address motivation framework in public sector. Furthermore, research on stress in the Iranian public working environment is limited. Understanding the factors that contribute to occupational stress is necessary for improving stress management programs in Iran public organizations. Such knowledge is important for both research and practical purposes. Human resource professionals wishing to implement stress management programs need to understand the sources of stress and stress measures. In order to arrive at this subject, this article poses the following question which was implemented based on a field study: is there a correlation between the rate of perceived QWL (considering job security, monetary compensations, opportunity for continuance learning and skill development, participation in decision making) and job stress of Iran public employees?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Participants

In order to understand the relationship between QWL and job stress

in Iran public employees, a descriptive cross sectional design was used. From 24 public organizations of Sirjan township in Kerman province, where 657 individual employees work, a random sample of 199 (approximately 200) was drawn using the following sample size formula.

$$n = \frac{\sigma^2 \left[ \left| Z_{\beta} \right| - \left| Z_{1-\alpha/2} \right| \right]}{d^2}$$

Kerman is one of the biggest province of Iran with more than two and half million population and more than 20 townships of which Sirjan is one of the main industrial townships with one of the main Free Trade zones. A list of public organizations with all male and female employees was obtained and a proportional cluster sampling method was used to select a sample of 200 individual employees from Sirjan Township. The population comprises male and female public employees from all aspects of public organizations.

### Measures

The survey instruments were two fixed choice questionnaires, the first one was developed by the researcher using Tattel model (as cited in Mirsepasi, 2005) to measure perception of QWL. This Questionnaire comprised of four dimensions: job security, monetary compensations, opportunities for continuance learning and skill improvement and participative decision making. There were 19 items each scored on a five-point Likert-like scale. A higher score represents higher amount in each dimension of QWL as perceived by the respondent.

The second instrument to measure job stress was based on the work of Hellriegel and Slocum (as cited in Moghimi, 2001). The job stress scale had 10 items and is also scored using a five-point Likert-like scale with higher scores representing a greater level of job stress. Note that for the purposes of this study 'stress' is used to refer only to phenomena measured at the individual level of analysis. The validity and reliability of these instruments were obtained, 95.7, 89.4 and 95.7, 90.5 respectively, using test-retest method, Spearman and Kendal correlation tests.

### Procedures

After determining the number of respondents from different organizations, the list of employees was acquired through human resource department of each organization and the sample was randomly generated from the list.

Upon the agreement of top management, through the HRD of each organization, a total of 250 self-administered questionnaires (with a cover letter which explained the purpose of the study and emphasis that their responses would remain anonymous and that management would have access only to the overall findings within the public organizations) were distributed among the sample, employees. Data used in the analysis were from 200 participants (including 158 in male and 42 in female respondents). Data for 50 participants were excluded because of missing items.

Data sets were retrieved and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency tables and percentile) and inferential statistics (Kendal correlation test, Spearman, chi-square, Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests). A P-value less than 0.05 were considered significant. Statistical calculations were done by SPSS version13.

## RESULTS

Respondents included 200 public employees aged 22-54

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the sample (n=200).

Variable	Frequency (%)
Gender	
Male	158 (79)
Female	42 (21)
Age	
Under 30 y/o	44 (22)
30-50 y/o	149 (74.5)
More than 50 y/o	7 (3.5)
Education	
High school diploma	60 (30)
Associate degree	47 (23.5)
Bachelor degree	89 (44.5)
Master degree or higher	4 (2)
Marital status	
Married	175 (88.8)
Single	22 (11.2)
Organizational tenure (in year)	
Less than 10	60 (30)
10-20	68 (34)
More than 20	72 (36)

**Table 2.** The relationship between quality of work life (QWL) and job stress level.

	Total	Seldom stressed	Sometimes stressed	Usually stressed
Low QWL (%)	65 (32.5)	17 (26.2)	28 (43.1)	20 (30.8)
Moderate QWL (%)	116 (58)	38 (32.8)	72 (62.1)	6 (5.2)
High QWL (%)	19 (9.5)	6 (31.6)	11 (57.9)	2 (10.5)
Total N	200	61	111	28
Note: $P < 0.001$	$df = 4$	$\chi^2 = 23.01$		

years old. Nearly 20% of the sample was under 30 years of age. The sample was predominantly male (79%) (Table 1). The majority of workers had bachelor degrees (44.5%) and all of them worked full-time. Data analysis illustrated that perception of QWL in public organization of Sirjan township of Kerman, Iran was significantly related to employees job stress.

### Explanation of variables

#### Quality of work life (QWL) and job stress of employees

Using Chi-Square test, correlation of QWL and job stress was significantly related ( $P < 0.001$ ). More than 32% of all respondents had low QWL and among those 30.8% were

usually stressed (Table 2). Less than 10% of all the respondents had high QWL; however, more than 68% of them sometimes or usually experienced stress in their jobs (Table 2). In order to make sure of the relationship between these two variables, Kendal correlation and Spearman tests were also utilized (Table 3). The differences between mean of QWL in male and female, single and married subjects, in different age groups and in different educational background subgroups were not statistically significant.

#### Job stress and demographic characteristics of participants

The differences between mean of job stress level in male

**Table 3.** Spearman's and Kendal's correlation coefficients between quality of work life (QWL) and job stress.

		<b>Job stress (N=200)</b>	
<b>QWL</b>	Kendal's Coefficient	-0.243	<i>P</i> <0.001
	Spearman's Coefficient	-0.279	<i>P</i> <0.001

**Table 4.** The relationship between job security and job stress level.

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Seldom stressed</b>	<b>Sometimes stressed</b>	<b>Usually stressed</b>
Low job security (%)	77 (38.5)	23 (29.9)	37 (48.1)	17 (22.1)
Moderate job security (%)	93 (46.5)	33 (35.5)	53 (57.0)	7 (7.5)
High job security (%)	30 (15.0)	5 (16.7)	21 (70.0)	4 (13.3)
Total N	200	61	111	28
Note: <i>P</i> <0.027	<i>df</i> = 4	$\chi^2 = 10.98$		

**Table 5.** The relationship between monetary compensation and job stress level.

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Seldom stressed</b>	<b>Sometimes stressed</b>	<b>Usually stressed</b>
Low compensation (%)	102 (51)	32 (31.4)	63 (61.8)	7 (6.8)
Moderate compensation (%)	76 (38)	23 (30.3)	41 (53.9)	12 (15.8)
High compensation (%)	22 (11)	6 (27.3)	7 (31.8)	9 (40.9)
Total N	200	61	111	28
Note: <i>P</i> <0.001	<i>df</i> = 4	$\chi^2 = 18.43$		

and female in different age groups and in different educational background subgroups were not statistically significant. However, the difference between job stress level and marital status of subjects were statistically significant.

#### **Employees' job security and job stress**

The results showed that only 15% of study participants felt highly secured in their jobs, which among them just nearby 17% seldom felt stressed. Using chi-square test, correlation of job security and job stress of employees was investigated. Analysis of data revealed that these two variables are significantly related (Table 4).

#### **Monetary compensation and job stress of employees**

Monetary compensation of 51% of respondents was considered low, while just 11% of them considered it high. Among those who evaluated their monetary compensation low 68.6% sometimes or usually tolerate job stress. Using chi-square test, the correlation of monetary compensation of employees and their job

stress was investigated and the results illustrated that these two variables are correlated (Table 5).

#### **Opportunity for continuous learning, skill development (OCLS) and job stress**

Based on data analysis only 6.4% of participants with high opportunity for continuous learning and skill development usually felt stress in their job, while among those with low opportunity for continuous learning and skill development more than 74% sometimes or usually felt stress. The relationship between OCLS and job stress is shown in table 6 and the difference was significant.

#### **Employees' participation in decision making and job stress**

High participation in decision making were seen in 22% of employees, while more than 38% had low participation in decision making. Among those employees with high level of participation in decision making only 6.8% usually felt stressed and among those with low level of participation more than 74% sometimes or usually were

**Table 6.** The relationship between opportunity for continuous learning and skill development (OCLS) and job stress level.

	Total	Seldom stressed	Sometimes stressed	Usually stressed
Low OCLS (%)	43 (21.5)	11 (25.6)	20 (46.5)	12 (27.9)
Moderate OCLS (%)	95 (47.5)	28 (29.5)	55 (57.9)	12 (12.6)
High OCLS (%)	62 (31.0)	22 (35.5)	36 (58.1)	4 (6.4)
Total N	200	61	111	28
Note: $P < 0.036$	$df = 4$	$\chi^2 = 10.27$		

**Table 7.** The relationship between employees' participation in decision making (EPDM) and job stress level.

	Total	Seldom stressed	Sometimes stressed	Usually stressed
Low EPDM (%)	77 (38.5)	20 (25.9)	35 (45.5)	22 (28.6)
Moderate EPDM (%)	79 (39.5)	26 (32.9)	50 (63.3)	3 (3.8)
High EPDM (%)	44 (22.0)	15 (34.1)	26 (59.1)	3 (6.8)
Total N	200	61	111	28
Note: $P < 0.001$	$df = 4$	$\chi^2 = 22.39$		

stressed. Using chi-square test, the correlation of employees' participation in decision making and their job stress was investigated and the result showed that these two variables were correlated (Table 7).

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study revealed that QWL and job stress are correlated (Table 2). This correlation is negative and from the linear kind. Therefore, in Iran public organizations employees well being is tied to their QWL.

After organizational reform, organizations are supposed to become flat with fewer supervisors and middle managers and fewer layer of management. In this situation, executives are believed to be closer to employees at operating level (Green and Hatch, 2002). However, Iran is a high power distance society which according to Yaganeh and Su (2008) suggests that the less powerful members of a society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally and expect obedience towards superiors. In such a culture subordinates are expected to obey their superiors without question (Javadian and Dastmalchian, 2009).

The culture and the necessary prerequisites of restructuring in Iran public sector is not established yet. The functional environment is not geared up to cope with the changes which are going to be in effect as a result of reform. The public managers are not prepared to be leaders and facilitators. They cannot set aside control and command structure which has been practiced for years. Therefore, on one hand, in such an environment

"the often suggested direction of change in many QWL programs which is for power distance to be lowered" (Wyatt, 1988) cannot be practiced and QWL programs are not welcome. As An et al. (2011) also contended QWL is potentially affected by the culture.

On the other hand, public employees observe that reform (downsizing and outsourcing) has taken place; however, they just have to put longer hours to work and wondering when is going to be their turn to be laid off. According to Green and Hatch (2002) they have to 'do more with less' without any attention being paid to their needs as human beings.

Of course, employees in this study were mostly permanently employed; nevertheless, they were working in a reforming environment which the pressure, undeniably, led to increase occupational stress. Aghaei et al. (April, 2010) also declared that after organizational reform in Iran the job stress of employees increased significantly.

Based on aforementioned, the negative correlation between QWL and job stress cannot be denied. Rethinam and Maimunah (2008), Cooper and Baglioni (1988), Pelsma et al. (1989), Hart (1994) and Warr (1987) also highlighted that poor QWL leads to stressful working condition.

The difference between mean of QWL in demographic variables were not statistically significant. Perhaps it is important to acknowledge that there are certain concerns that all people, at least to some degree, have in common. Campble (1981) believes that one of these concerns is work. Most of individuals spend a good deal of their waking hours at work; it prescribes how their days are spent and places restriction on them. Based on these

restrictions their living standards are determined and their QWL is set. Therefore, it seems that, in statistical population of the study, QWL affects standards of working life regardless of gender, age, educational background, marital status and....

The results showed that the difference between job stress level and marital status of subjects were statistically significant. Married working people are expected to look for their family welfare and prosperity. They are challenged by the changes which are imposed by organizational reform and restructuring more drastically. These changes negatively affect their family economy and even according to Burke and Greenglass (1999) might also cause work-family conflict which makes the matter worth.

Their daily tasks, thus, become more time-consuming and daunting; rather than engaging in their usual and preferred activities, they end up in asking themselves, what is going to happen to their job as a source of income? What is going to happen to their family?

The outcome of these changes, considerably, can elevate their level of job stress and make them to react in a more stressful manner on the job. This finding is in accordance with Perrewe et al. (2000).

The findings demonstrated that employees' job insecurity and their job stress are correlated. As was stated, employees in this study were mostly permanently employed who were working in a reforming environment dealing with the pressure of job insecurity.

They feel if they are laid off their psychological contract is being violated and as a result according to (Turnley and Feldman, 1999) their expectations regarding job security is not realized. Obviously in such a situation according to Ashford et al. (1989) and Davy et al. (1991) the more likely they quit their job.

In case of Iran public sector employees, this is not a rational decision. According to Salehi-Esfahani and Egel (2007) Iran's formal labor market is one of the most rigid in the developing world. Iran's official unemployment rate is about 13% and joblessness is a growing concern among university graduates (Iran Daily, 2005). Some like Yeganeh and Su (2008) believe that this rate is even more. They asserted that in recent years economic growth has not kept pace with labor force increase, leading to an unemployment rate, which is estimated about 20%.

As a result, public employees are going to struggle against all the odds and stay on their job. This creates more pressure and leads to more job stress. Of course, they may emotionally or mentally "withdraw" from the organization and have no interest in their jobs which by itself is a consequence of job stress.

Pelfrene et al. (2003), Pelletier (1985), Kuhnert et al. (1989), Gillespie et al. (2001), Noblet and Gifford (2002), Taris (2002) and Paulsen et al. (2005) also found that many stress related disorders result from psychological stressors such as job insecurity. Therefore, correlation of

job insecurity and job stress among the respondents can be envisaged.

The findings showed that monetary compensation of employees is related to their job stress. According to Luthans and Sommer (1999) one of the frequent outcomes of restructuring is pay decrease which is being used to avoid employees' lay-off.

Iran public sector is at the start up stage of outsourcing and privatization (Rajabzadeh and Anvary Rostamy, 2008); thus its wages have taken the impact of the adjustment process. Iran public sector is the major provider of services in the economy and the major employer. Consequently, it cannot resort to massive lay-offs; however, according to Thornhill (2006) employees are retained with low remuneration or just promise of raise.

As a result, low remuneration creates adverse consequences, such as having a second job to cover for the expenses and according to Lienert (1998) strong incentive to accept bribes.

Studies on stress resulting from fiscal cutbacks suggest that economic changes tend to increase health problems among employees (Sharif, 2000). Larson (2004) also found that low monetary compensation was the top-ranking job stressor for employees. Larson (2004) reported that employees become unhappy if they receive what they consider low financial rewards.

Based on aforesaid, correlation of monetary compensation and job stress in Iran public sector is foreseeable.

The findings revealed that opportunity for continuous learning, skill development and job stress are correlated. Restructuring and downsizing call for job redesigning. The new job responsibilities may include new tasks, technologies, and job specifications (knowledge, skills) that the surviving employees do not currently possess (Lewin and Johnston, 2000). Not only that, but there was an informal infrastructure which was used to solve the problems and carry on the duties of the formal organization which according to Keller (1989) is not in place anymore. To make it worth the managers' unnecessary dynamism which is caused by top governors' changes in the country (Bidmeshgipour, 2009) creates more disturbances in the informal infrastructure, if there remain any.

Thus, training is an indispensable part of the existing work structure, if it is to maintain a minimal level of productivity. Edwina (2002) believes that employees require long-term professional development to improve their services and to maintain a valued role in the work place. However, training has been targeted at individuals through short courses with minimum emphasis on skills required for the job.

In such a situation, opportunity for continuous learning and skill development is the key to be retained and survive in Iran public sector. If this opportunity does not exist, public employees can not contribute to the job in a

positive manner and might be at the verge of job loss much sooner than they expect. Consequently pressure builds up and in such an environment the correlation between this factor and job stress is not far from expectations.

The findings illustrated that lack of participation in decision making is correlated to employees job stress. Hofstede (2001) believes that participation in decision making cannot be investigated without considering national culture. As was stated, Iran is a high power distance society. In such a society both managers and subordinates consider each other as existentially unequal, which results in wide acceptance of the visible signs of the status (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005).

Managers prefer to control power and discourage the sharing of information and the participation of employees (Wang and Nayir, 2010). The responsibility for decision making is in the upper echelon of the hierarchy and this is accepted by employees because for them inequality is tolerated and considered as something natural (Sagie and Aycan, 2003).

Actually many cross-cultural researchers (Adler, 2002; Francesco and Gold, 1998; Guillén, 1994) claimed that the use of participation may be inappropriate in high power distance societies as it could create an impression of managerial incompetence. If the information which is a source of power (French and Raven, 1959) is disclosed, it might eradicate the managers' influence over their subordinates.

Managers who are reluctant to share information create an obstacle to the transfer of best practices within any organization (Szulanski, 1996). Consequently, lack of participation in decision making is inevitable which according to Omolayo (2007), Colligan and Higgins (2005) and Israel et al. (1989) leads to occupational stress.

This finding is in accordance with previous investigation of Larson (2004) who demonstrated that lack of participation in decision making was one of the leading causes of job stress. Beehr (1985) also found that workplace stress results when employees are not included in problem solving and decision making.

## LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

The study has couples of limitations. The first limitation is that the study was undertaken within a single state and referred only to public organizations in one township. It would be more constructive to examine this issue in a broader perspective and focus on several townships of a province as well as other states. By this the generality of the results can be assured.

Another limitation of the study may include this fact that it is not known how employees might have responded if asked whether their participation was direct and voluntary. This becomes an especially important point because measures of participative decision making just

ask whether employees are consulted by their supervisor, not whether employees can fully determine/influence organizational decisions. Some of the respondents might not consider this as participation in decision making. This in further studies should be taken into consideration.

## Conclusions

Public sector in many developing countries such as Iran is experiencing tremendous challenges in management and resource strategies. Management of this sector should strategize for better human resource practices and other work place improvements that contribute to an employee's sense of dignity and satisfaction. For the sake of well-functioning society, public employees should be provided with a secure and satisfactory workplace.

Based on the findings of this study, it appears that the absence of QWL initiatives caused public employees experience damaging consequences. To confront the challenge of this trend, managerial support can go hand in hand with productivity. Therefore, integration of these factors in public sector can be made through QWL programs. These programs are tied down to the employees well being, satisfaction and as a result organizational productivity.

What is required is the commitment on the part of government and top public management to work on these initiatives and create a sound and harmonious working environment. Public management ought to reduce feelings of uncertainty related to structural reform. Employees should feel more in control of change outcomes.

QWL programs can create a win-win situation; it can relieve the stress and make it easier to be managed. Public sector's effort to provide more employee security, benefits and incentives to enhance employee self-esteem can result in important bottom line public productivity improvement that will benefit all stakeholders including the entire society.

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