

Exploring Stress Factors among Event Coordinators Which Impacts Their Mental Health and Their Coping Mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

The primary role of an event coordinator is to plan, oversee, and evaluate various aspects of events, including directing staff and ensuring the successful execution of event activities. The objective of this study was to investigate the stress factors impacting the mental health of event coordinators, identify why stress affects their mental health, and explore how they cope with it. This research aimed to uncover the root causes and risk factors of mental health issues in event coordinators, with the goal of informing the development of future support systems.

Using a qualitative approach, this study interviewed 11 event coordinators with over ten years of experience, and thematic analysis revealed four key themes: "Work Challenges," "High-Self Expectations," "Impact of Work Stress," and "Response Towards Stress." The findings highlighted that event coordinators regularly face uncooperative clients and must prepare for unforeseen circumstances, leading to significant stress. This stress manifests in various ways, including sleep disturbances, appetite loss, anxiety, and depression. Despite these challenges, participants developed coping mechanisms such as calming techniques, alone time, and fostering a positive work environment to manage stress and continue their work.

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the experiences of event coordinators, their stress factors, the mental health impacts, and the coping strategies they employ. For future research, it is recommended to conduct more in-depth studies, such as ethnographic or quantitative research, to explore the mental health of event coordinators further. Additionally, research on less experienced event coordinators or those involved in large-scale international and national events may offer different perspectives on stress and its effects on mental health.

BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

Events are typically short-term, lasting from one to a few days, while permanent attractions attract visitors over longer periods. Defining an event is challenging as each has unique goals, purposes, and audiences, shaped by environmental, participant, and management interactions. Events can be categorized into corporate, entertainment, or social events. (Dolasinski,2021)

However, none of these events would be successful without the presence of event coordinators and their teams. Event coordinators play a crucial role in the success of any event. Their responsibilities include planning, overseeing, directing, and evaluating staff, as well as managing event activities. They build relationships with community groups, vendors, and contractors, ensuring smooth operations. Coordinators must be meticulous and well-organized, working across diverse settings like theme parks, wedding venues, and corporations. (Anderson,2017)

Thus with all of these duties placed on their shoulders, they endure stress. The World Health Organization (2023) defines stress as mental strain from challenging circumstances, which can affect both physical and mental well-being. While moderate stress can aid productivity, excessive stress leads to anxiety, irritability, and physical issues like sleep difficulties and headaches. Prolonged stress can also worsen mental health, contributing to conditions like anxiety and depression. Mental health encompasses a range of states, including psychosocial disabilities and disorders, which can cause significant suffering and impaired functioning.

The concept of mental health is not something that was only discovered in the 21st century but throughout history, references to mental illness have been made. Historically, individuals or groups exhibiting behavior deviating from sociocultural norms were often silenced or controlled. A less cultural relativist approach to abnormal behavior now focuses on whether it poses a danger to the individual or others, disrupts their ability to perform daily tasks, maintain relationships, or if treatment is unavailable. (St.Paul, 2023)

The treatment of mental health evolved significantly over time, beginning with prehistoric practices such as surgical drilling of skulls, believed to release evil spirits or treat head injuries and epilepsy. (Farreras, 2023). In 400 BC, Hippocrates shifted the understanding of mental illness, attributing it to bodily imbalances rather than supernatural forces. This led to treatments like bloodletting and asylums, evolving into modern therapies such as mindfulness, psychotherapy, and medications (Rippey, 2023).

Problem Statement

The reason why this study should be conducted is to assess and look into the factors of stress that impact an event coordinator's mental health. Event coordinators juggle multiple responsibilities like managing catering, finances, and public relations, which can cause significant stress. Understanding these stressors is essential for addressing their impact on mental well-being and identifying potential support strategies for the profession.

However, there is very limited research on event coordinators regarding stress and mental health. Mair (2019) highlighted that existing studies on events and festivals are often outdated and fragmented. This study aims to fill the research gap by providing a deeper understanding of stress factors affecting event coordinators.

The high demands placed on event coordinators to satisfy customer needs can lead to significant emotional burden due to the stress and pressure involved. A study by Yun (2019) on customer service's impact on emotional burden found that 27.4% of 11,946 participants experienced emotional strain in the workplace. By addressing this research gap, this will allow the researcher to dive deeper into the topic and bring awareness to the mental health of event coordinators.

Theoretical Framework

There are various ways that stress has been conceptualised and how research has developed alongside these approaches in order to comprehend how people learn to manage stress. It has been suggested that stress is a response, a stimulus, and a transaction. An individual's response, adaptation, and coping mechanisms are determined by how they understand stress.

Hans Selye's concept of stress, introduced in 1956 through his General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) model, views stress as a physiological response that can have both positive and negative effects, depending on how the body interprets it. This study aims to explore how event coordinators respond to stress, its impact on their mental health, and how workplace changes affect their stress levels (Tan, 2018).

Richard Lazarus's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC), developed in 1984, views stress as a dynamic interaction between an individual and their environment. Stress arises when a situation is appraised as threatening or challenging, followed by an evaluation of available resources for coping. This theory is applied in this research to explore how event coordinators cope with workplace stress.

Lastly, this study aims to explore how event coordinators perceive the stress they experience at work. Cohen et al.'s theory of perceived stress will be applied by adapting questions from his Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) into the interview questions. Cohen's theory suggests that the stressor is the "cognitively mediated emotional response" to an event, rather than the event itself. (Carbajal, 2021)

Research Objective

The research objective of this study is to investigate the stress factors of event coordinators that impact their mental health. It is to investigate how it affects their mental health as well as how they cope with it.

Research Question

RQ 1: To investigate the challenges faced by an event coordinator which causes stress.

RQ 2: To investigate how the factors of stress impact the mental health of an event coordinator.

RQ 3: To explore the stress- coping mechanisms practised by the event coordinators

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work Stress

Event coordinators face significant demands and pressure in their roles, which often lead to work-related stress. According to the World Health Organization (2020), various work environments contribute to stress, particularly when employees feel powerless over work processes and lack support from colleagues or supervisors. Poor work design, such as insufficient control over tasks, inadequate management, and unsatisfactory working conditions, can further exacerbate work stress. In a general review of work stress, Singh (2018) identified several key sources of stress in the workplace. These include a toxic work environment, where poor organizational culture, difficult relationships, and bullying contribute to stress. Unrealistic deadlines, job insecurity, and long work hours, particularly without breaks, also significantly increase stress, impacting productivity and mental health. These factors create insecurity, impaired performance, and long-term emotional strain for employees.

Stress Factors of Event Coordinators

Though the studies conducted on the stress levels of event coordinators are limited, a study conducted in Kerala, India (Lakshmi & Somasundaram, 2018) on job stress in event management organisations among ten event coordinators also found that according to the majority of respondents, the main sources of stress at work are long work hours, unforeseen circumstances and uncooperative clients. Through the research of this study, it was found that the stress factors of event coordinators also involved high self-expectations.

Impact of Stress

Recognising the impact of stress is important because stress affects a person's body, thoughts and feelings. Stress is a sign of a limit or boundary in one's physical, mental, or emotional capabilities that, if consistently crossed, will have a detrimental effect on one's general well-being. Habib Yaribeygi (2017) looked into the impact of stress on memory, cognition and learning, the immune system, the cardiovascular system, the gastrointestinal system, and the endocrine system.

The study found that in terms of memory, the hippocampal region of the brain can alter both structurally and functionally as a result of stress. These structural alterations include disorders related to atrophy and neurogenesis, elevated levels of plasma cortisol that result in a decrease in the number of neurons and dendritic branches, structural alterations in synaptic terminals, and a decrease in neurogenesis in the tissue of the hippocampus. Declarative memory disorders may be brought on by elevated stress hormone levels. It was also found that prolonged exposure to high plasma concentrations of glucocorticosteroids can cause hippocampal atrophy, which can impair memory. Other than that, it was also found that stress affects our immune system, cardiovascular system and gastrointestinal system.

Impact of Stress on Mental Health

The likelihood of both physical and mental health issues rises with excessive and prolonged stress. When stress is prolonged, it raises the risk of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

Schneiderman (2005) did a meta-analysis on the psychological, behavioural and biological determinants of stress and found psychosocial stressors that affect mental health. They found that the onset of depression is directly related to stressful life events and depressive episodes typically start after a significant negative life

event in adulthood. The study also found that anxiety disorders are often preceded by stressful life events as well. It was found that anxiety more frequently happens before depression. In fact, following stressful life events, patients with anxiety are more likely to develop major depression.

Coping Mechanisms Towards Stress

The definition of coping is the mentality and actions used to deal with stressful situations, both internal and external. When people encounter stressors, they respond to it in different ways that are referred to as "coping styles." Coping styles are a collection of generally constant characteristics that influence an individual's behaviour when faced with stress. There are four types of coping styles namely problem-focused, emotion-focused, meaning-focused and social coping. Problem-focused coping focuses on addressing the root cause of distress, using strategies such as active coping, planning, restraint coping, and suppression of competing activities. Emotion-focused coping aims to reduce negative emotions associated with the problem, utilising techniques like positive reframing, acceptance, turning to religion, and humor. Meaning-focused coping involves using cognitive strategies to understand and manage the meaning of a situation. Lastly, social coping involves seeking support from one's community, either emotional or instrumental, as a way to reduce stress. (Algorani, 2023)

The impact of using coping mechanisms for stress when it comes to problem-focused strategies, decreased the likelihood of stressors recurring in the future when individuals were able to positively relate to a feeling of mastery when handling the specific stressor with a coping strategy. The impact of emotional focused strategies represented a more private environment where individuals confront their own personal feelings and thoughts and understand them. The impact of meaning-focused enabled individuals to find meaning in their own situation and stressors. Lastly, the impact of social coping acted as a buffer or distraction from the individual's stressful situation. (Hudson, 2014)

Research Design

The research design of this study was conducted in qualitative research and the approach used were conducted in interviews. Qualitative research aims to investigate people's behaviour, beliefs, and attitudes in greater detail using an open-ended approach rather than by carefully adhering to a predetermined set of questions. Since it's more intimate, it delves deeply into attitudes and behaviours and can produce or investigate the issue in greater detail by providing a clearer knowledge of their perspectives and behaviours. To better comprehend human experience, qualitative research gives access to study data that is difficult to translate into numerical form.

Sample

The sampling methods used were purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling were used in which the participants were only selected according to the required criteria, which in this case is the fact that the participants must be an event coordinator. Snowball sampling was used with a method of recruiting whereby the researcher will ask research participants to help find other possible participants who would be willing to participate. The criteria for this sample is that they must be an experienced event coordinator with at least 10 years of experience whether in the past or present. The reason why experienced event coordinators was chosen for this research is because they have likely encountered a wide range of stressful situations as well as may have developed various coping mechanisms over the years, thus the data collected from them will be useful in answering the research questions.

The age requirement for the participants is that participants must be at least 30 years old and above since the sample criteria is experienced event coordinators. There was no requirement for race and gender but participants must be fluent in either English or Malay.

Sample Population

In this research, a sample size consisting of 11 participants were collected due to data saturation. All participants were event coordinators based in Malaysia and came in a variety of races and ethnicity however

the gender scale leaned more towards males. The names of participants have been changed to their initials to protect their identity and only their age, gender, race and work experience will be revealed.

Table for Sample Population

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Work
				Experience
O.O	40	Male	Malay	13 years
K.G	45	Male	Indian	12 years
A.P	39	Female	Chinese	15 years
K.K	49	Male	Indian	30 years
A.D	43	Male	Indian	23 years
G.R	50	Male	Indian	32 years
S.S	45	Male	Indian	10 years
K.I	39	Female	Malay	16 years

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Work
				Experience
O.O	40	Male	Malay	13 years
K.G	45	Male	Indian	12 years
A.P	39	Female	Chinese	15 years
A.N	37	Female	Malay	12 years
R.G	49	Male	Malay	30 years
K.Y	50	Male	Indian	25 years

Apparatus and Instruments

The interviews were conducted online and physically depending on the comfort of the participant. If conducted physically, the location would take place in a private university in Selangor or the workplace of the event coordinators themselves whereas if conducted online then it will be conducted on Zoom. Every interview was audio-recorded for interview transcripts. Participants were provided a consent form and project information sheet beforehand in order to provide consent prior to recording. The interview questions consisted of a set of 12 questions, some of which were adapted from the Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ), while the others were crafted from the theories used in this study from the theoretical framework. Each interview took a duration of 15 to 30 minutes. The identity of the participants will remain anonymous throughout the research and only their age, gender and initials will be revealed in the transcript. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Research Procedure and Method of Analysis

For the research procedure, participants were identified and recruited through third-party references as well as recommendations from participants after the interview. If they are willing to participate, the researcher will give the participant the project information sheet for more information on the participation of the research. Participants will meet with the researcher at their preferred location for face-to-face interview and platform of choice for online interview and will be given a consent form to obtain the consent for participation as well as the recording of the interview. The interviews were conducted in the span of 2 months. Data from the interview was collected after it is transcribed. The researcher took 2 weeks to transcript all the interviews to conduct a thematic analysis and found the relevant themes that apply to the research.

RESULTS

The findings of this study used thematic analysis, the four themes produced from the analysis were “Work Challenges”, “High-Self Expectations”, “Impact of Work Stress” and “Response Towards Stress”.

Theme 1 : Work Challenges

In relation to the first research question proposed which is to investigate the challenges faced by an event coordinator which causes stress, this theme emerged. This theme defines the external stress factors faced by event coordinators. Under this theme, two sub themes were produced.

Subtheme 1: Uncooperative Clients

This sub-theme explores how uncooperative clients contribute to stress for event organizers. A.P. described a client who repeatedly changed the event venue, while S.S. faced demanding clients making unreasonable requests, like using external caterers without paying the full package price. A.N. highlighted stress from clients with tight budgets, and K.Y. pointed out the challenges of last-minute changes on the event day.

Subtheme 2 : Unforeseen Circumstances

This sub-theme discusses how unforeseen circumstances, like last-minute issues and technical errors, contribute to stress. K.G. shared how an artist broke their leg and couldn't perform which resulted in them having to find a replacement, while A.D. and S.S. mentioned suppliers arriving late or unprepared on the event day itself. K.I. and R.G. highlighted stress from technical and equipment failures on the event day.

Theme 2 : High Self-Expectations

This theme defines the internal stress factors faced by event coordinators and the self-induced demands that they place on themselves. Under this theme, two sub themes were produced.

Subtheme 1: Pressure

This subtheme refers to the stress that participants feel due to pressure exerted by clients to achieve what they have promised to deliver as well as to make sure that everything goes as planned. (A.D) explains that he feels pressured because he is in charge of making any decisions when conflict arises. (S.S) explains that he feels pressured to perform because customers will start complaining. (G.R) explains that he feels pressured with making the paperwork look nice in order to get selected by clients.

Subtheme 2: Perfectionist

This sub-theme highlights how participants feel stressed by the high standards they set for themselves. A.P. strives for perfection which causes stress, but A.D. does the same thing and finds it motivating. G.R. and R.G. experiences stress but manages it without compromising work quality.

Theme 3: Impact of Work Stress

In correlation with the second research question of this project, this theme defines the impact of work stress faced by event coordinators, meaning the effect of the stress that is caused by their work. Under this theme, five sub themes were produced.

Subtheme 1: Anger

This sub-theme explains how work stress leads participants to feel irritated or angry. K.G. gets angry but controls it, while A.P. takes her frustration out on close family. A.D. and G.R. express anger by shouting at their teams in the moment, while R.G. feels irritated but avoids shouting and practices mindfulness instead.

Subtheme 2 Lack of Sleep

This sub-theme highlights how work stress affects participants' sleep. A.P. experienced a month of sleeplessness due to stress from an event. G.R. drinks more coffee when stressed, leading to poor sleep. S.S. struggles with less sleep during back-to-back events, while A.N.'s stress impacts both her sleep and work focus.

Subtheme 3: Physical Effects

This sub-theme discusses the physical impact of work stress on participants. G.R. notices his hair greying faster and a reduced appetite. K.I. experiences an increased heart rate, anxiety, and muscle tension. A.N. gets muscle tension and headaches, while K.Y. suffers from frequent headaches and migraines due to stress.

Subtheme 4: Mental Exhaustion

This theme highlights the mental exhaustion participants experience due to work stress. K.G. feels drained when clients ask for repeated changes. G.R. gets mentally burnt out by constantly visualizing event details. S.S. gets pressured to not to ruin the clients' special day, while K.I. gets exhausted by tight deadlines. A.N. experienced significant mental exhaustion, even facing Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), leading to burnout.

Subtheme 5: Work Performance

This sub-theme explores how stress impacts work performance. O.O. and K.K. find stress helps them perform better, with O.O. handling pressure well and K.K. staying calm and professional. However, K.I. mentions that she experiences negative effects, particularly in high-pressure situations, and K.G. feels that being stressed makes him overlook simple solutions, leading to confusion.

Theme 4: Coping Mechanisms Towards Stress

This theme is related to the third research question of the study which explains how the participants cope with their stress. Under this theme, three sub themes were produced.

Subtheme 1: Remain calm and focused

This sub-theme highlights how some participants remain calm and focused under stress. K.G. vents to a friend or takes deep breaths to stay calm, then reconsiders the problem from a different perspective. S.S. takes naps to keep his mind calm, while K.I. uses mindfulness techniques, like deep breathing, to stay composed.

Subtheme 2: Alone Time

This sub-theme explores how participants use alone time to cope with stress. A.P. spends time in her room, shops, or enjoys a morning drink and breakfast. K.K. relaxes with music, exercise, and singing. A.D. takes breaks to exercise or swim, while G.R. listens to music and watches movies. A.N. clears her mind with family,

friends, or short vacations, limiting phone use. R.G. unwinds by playing snooker, sleeping, or dining out with his crew.

Subtheme 3: Positive Work Environment

This sub-theme emphasizes how participants cope with stress by surrounding themselves with a positive work environment and understanding coworkers. G.R. values a team with a shared mindset, despite differing skills. S.S. finds his team's support helps him stay calm, while K.I. highlights the importance of a supportive network during stressful times.

DISCUSSION

The most common stress factors identified by participants in response to the first research question are uncooperative clients and unforeseen circumstances on event day. Participants mentioned that these challenges often occur simultaneously, creating additional stress. Tiyarattanachai's (2020) study on handling difficult customers supports this, emphasizing that maintaining customer satisfaction is crucial for event coordinators to avoid damaging their reputation and securing future clients.

The first research question also reveals that participants' self-imposed perfectionism is a major source of stress, causing pressure and anxiety. Research supports this, as perfectionism has been linked to various psychopathological conditions, such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders (Fang, 2022). Suh's (2022) study further indicates that while perfectionism based on personal standards causes stress, self-critical perfectionism is more likely to lead to stress and depression, highlighting the high risk of negative outcomes when perfectionism is self-critical.

The second research question, exploring how stress affects the mental health of event coordinators, revealed that many participants experience lack of sleep, leading to depression and difficulty focusing. This is supported by Medic's (2017) study, which found that sleep disruption results in increased stress, emotional distress, mood disorders, and cognitive deficits—issues noted by the participants. Additionally, participants reported outbursts of anger, mental exhaustion, muscle tension, and other physical symptoms.

Continuing with the findings from the second research question, the impact of stress on mental health also affects work performance, with participants experiencing either positive or negative outcomes. Those who perform well under stress are experiencing eustress, while those who suffer negative effects are experiencing distress. Um-e-Rubbab (2021) explains that eustress, a positive form of stress, enhances performance and serves as a coping mechanism, motivating individuals and boosting their energy. In contrast, distress hampers productivity, as noted by Iskanto (2021), who found that distress leads to decreased work efficiency, poor decision-making, and even work paralysis. This aligns with participants' experiences, where distress caused them to feel "blind" or burnt out, unable to make decisions or effectively manage tasks.

The third research question, which explores the coping mechanisms of event coordinators, revealed that many participants manage stress by spending alone time or by surrounding themselves with a positive work environment. Dixon (2020) supports the benefits of alone time, stating that self-care through solitude, free from distractions like social media, can improve mental well-being. In addition to alone time, participants also emphasized the importance of a supportive work environment, where positive interactions with coworkers help them cope. Zhenjing (2022) highlights that a positive work environment boosts employee performance, fosters resilience in challenging situations, and encourages greater commitment, all of which contribute to stress management.

Many participants discussed the importance of staying calm and practicing techniques to manage stress. Karunakaran (2022) highlights that prevention and relaxation techniques are effective in calming the mind and body, reducing physical and mental strain. These techniques help the body transition from a stressed state, with elevated blood pressure and heart rate, to a relaxed state, restoring normal hormone levels, blood pressure, and digestion. By using such calming methods, individuals can reduce the physiological effects of stress and remain energized, which is crucial for managing life's challenges effectively.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the interviews with participants have provided valuable insights into the experience of being an event coordinator, highlighting the challenges that lead to stress, the mental health impacts, and the coping mechanisms employed. The findings reveal that being an event coordinator is a highly demanding job, requiring participants to manage uncooperative clients and adapt to unforeseen circumstances, often resulting in ongoing stress even after the event is over. The impact of stress on their mental health is significant, with effects ranging from lack of sleep and appetite to anxiety and depression. However, over time, participants have developed various coping strategies, such as practicing calming techniques, taking alone time, and building supportive networks, to help manage stress and continue performing their roles effectively.

Implications

This study provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by event coordinators, the stress they experience, and its impact on their mental health, along with the coping strategies they use. Understanding the specific stressors event coordinators face can help employers create a more supportive work environment. By recognizing the causes of stress, employers can implement better scheduling practices, offer additional staff during peak events, and provide resources to mitigate stress, ultimately improving the well-being and performance of their event coordinators.

Based on the insights from this study, companies can implement mental health and well-being programs for event coordinators to help manage stress and improve mental health. Workshops on stress reduction, work-life balance, and access to mental health resources, including peer support groups and counseling services, could be valuable. Research supports the effectiveness of such programs: Slattery (2020) found that mental health workshops help participants feel more comfortable discussing their mental health, sharing their stories with family, friends, and even the public. This shift allowed them to focus on their recovery and accomplishments rather than the negative aspects of their illness. Similarly, Yusop (2020) demonstrated that group counseling reduces anxiety, enhances communication skills, improves decision-making, and boosts self-efficacy, all while fostering better social interactions and reducing anger. These findings suggest that providing mental health support in the workplace can greatly benefit event coordinators, both personally and professionally.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research highlights a distinct gap in the existing literature on event coordinators, focusing specifically on their mental health and coping mechanisms, while much of the current research primarily examines event coordination processes and operational aspects. For instance, studies like Ansuini (2022) explored event planning through qualitative interviews with event planners, Richards (2022) conducted a meta-analysis on successful event planning processes, and Tambde (2024) examined event management from an entrepreneur's perspective. These studies mainly address the logistical and procedural elements of the role. Therefore, it is suggested that future research delve deeper into the mental health of event coordinators, exploring areas such as psychological disorders, job satisfaction, motivation, and other factors that influence their well-being. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges event coordinators face and help develop more effective support systems for their mental health.

Another recommendation for future research is to expand the scope of the study by including event coordinators with more diverse backgrounds and experiences. This study focused on coordinators involved in private events in Malaysia, but future studies could include those who have managed larger-scale events, such as international conferences or government national events. The higher stakes and more complex logistics of such events may contribute to greater stress levels, offering valuable insights into how event coordinators handle these pressures.

Additionally, this study mainly involved experienced event coordinators, so it would be beneficial to explore the experiences of newcomers to the industry. Entry-level event coordinators may face different stressors, such as adapting to the learning curve, managing new responsibilities, and dealing with uncertainties in their roles.

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