
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Factors Contributing to Work-Related Stress: A Qualitative Content Analysis

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| ABSTRACT

This article provides a theoretical basis for the causes of work-related stress. Research objective: to identify the factors determining stress experienced at work based on qualitative content analysis. Data were collected by presenting open-ended questions to the study participants (n=303), and the obtained data were processed and interpreted using the content analysis method. The results of the study showed that a heavy workload and unrealistic deadlines, as well as a lack of clearly defined employee responsibilities and functions and a lack of precise instructions for performing tasks, were identified as factors contributing to workplace stress. The study also found that the risk of workplace stress is heightened by limited opportunities for professional development and career advancement, as well as a lack of training on stress management within the organization, as well as a failure to recognize employees' efforts, a lack of incentives for good performance, and predominantly tense relationships with colleagues and supervisors. The study's results provided valuable insights into the causes of workplace stress, which, in the context of future research, opens up opportunities to reasonably identify directions for the prevention and management of workplace stress at the organizational level.

| KEYWORDS

Work-related stress, causes of work-related stress, employees

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The modern labor market is undergoing significant changes. According to Počepavičiūtė & Kiaušienė (2025), innovations such as blockchain, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things are having an increasingly significant impact on the labor market: new jobs are being created, the nature of work is changing, the need for new skills and competencies is growing, and demand for traditional jobs is declining. These changes in a digitalized and globalized world inevitably affect workers across various sectors, albeit to varying degrees—they face a skills gap or the need to acquire new skills, and are adapting to hybrid or remote work arrangements. The constant changes and challenges employees face in the work environment inevitably create significant tension and increase the risk of work-related stress. The fact that such macro-level—global and societal—and micro-level, i.e., organizational, challenges can contribute to employee stress is also highlighted in a report by the World Health Organization (2017), which notes that workplace stress is a reaction people may experience when faced with demands and pressures that exceed their knowledge and abilities and challenge their capacity to cope with the situation. Based on the insights presented, it can be argued—and, at the same time, agreed with Madhavi & Srinivas Rao (2023) — that stress has become an integral part of the modern work environment, affecting employees across various fields and roles. It is therefore clear that it is necessary to identify the signs of work-related stress and its specific characteristics, as well as to determine its sources and causes. Identifying the causes of workplace stress and analyzing the factors that contribute to it provides the foundation for further research aimed at empirically substantiating and developing methods for the prevention and management of workplace stress.

Although every employee may subjectively experience, identify, and cope with stress, certain common trends prevail in the scientific literature, indicating that employees who experience stress at work unequivocally face additional psychological and/or

physiological challenges. At the same time, it is emphasized that experienced stress reduces work productivity, contributes to errors, and leads to absenteeism (Madhavi & Srinivas Rao, 2023). After assessing the negative effects of workplace stress on both an individual's physical and psychological well-being (Pajarskienė & Jankauskas, 1998, 2000; Cox et al., 2002; Jusienė & Laurinavičius, 2007; Bagočiūtė, 2010) and on work efficiency and productivity (Cranwell-Ward & Abbey, 2005; Vyas & Luk, 2011), the current situation encourages researchers to continuously investigate the signs of workplace stress and identify its causes. Research suggests that a favorable microclimate within an organization (Kiaunytė, 2012) and an atmosphere of openness and respect toward colleagues and supervisors in the workplace (Cooper et al., 2001; Burba et al., 2014; Šorytė & Pajarskienė, 2014), as well as the motivation system in place (Bagočiūtė, 2010) and an appropriate workload (Bubnys & Petrošiūtė, 2008) and the distribution of duties based on individual employees' abilities and capabilities (Cranwell-Ward & Abbey, 2005) are among the factors contributing to lower levels of work-related stress. At the same time, other researchers believe that appropriate working conditions (Pikūnas & Palujanskienė, 2005) and clearly defined employee roles and functions (Koszela, 2020), as well as opportunities for career and professional development (Vilmantė & Šeškevičius, 2006; Alvi et al., 2020) can reduce the risk of work-related stress. However, the scientific ideas analyzed in researchers' works, which identify factors that reduce the manifestation of workplace stress, are insufficient when they are limited to identifying factors associated with the organizational level. Therefore, the identified causes of work-related stress and the factors determining it form the basis for further research focused on the prerequisites for the prevention of work-related stress and the development of coping strategies. Given the relevance of the topic, a key aspect is the need for more detailed scientific research that would reveal respondents' views on the causes of work-related stress and the factors determining it. The relevance of this study was also determined by the fact that the factors determining work-related stress are analyzed based on respondents' answers to open-ended questions.

The scientific relevance allowed for the formulation of the following research question: what factors determine the stress experienced at work?

Research objective. To identify the factors determining the stress experienced at work, based on qualitative content analysis.

Research Objectives:

1. Based on an analysis of the scientific literature and studies related to the topic under investigation, identify the factors contributing to workplace stress and provide a theoretical basis for its causes.
2. Provide empirical evidence for the factors contributing to workplace stress.
3. Based on the insights revealed during the study, to identify possible organizational-level directions for the prevention and management of workplace stress.

The scientific novelty lies in the fact that the causes of workplace stress are analyzed using the qualitative *content* analysis method, and the study demonstrates that the factors determining workplace stress are related to processes occurring within the organization. Thus, this study supplemented the findings of previous research and provided knowledge that forms the basis for further studies focused on identifying ways to manage workplace stress. Based on the results obtained during the study and an understanding of certain patterns, this allows for scientifically grounded decisions regarding the planning of stress management processes in the workplace.

Limitations of the study. One limitation is that the study was conducted online using Office 365, which resulted in a relatively low response rate for detailed answers to the open-ended questions. Therefore, it would be advisable to repeat the study in the future by expanding the sample size. Furthermore, future research could be conducted using different research methodologies and supplementing the results with quantitative data, while regression modeling and factor analysis would provide further insights and supplement the conclusions regarding the identification of causes of workplace stress and the challenges of managing it.

Originality/value of the study. The originality of the study lies in the use of open-ended questions and the application of qualitative *content* analysis to process and interpret the data. The results of the study will have lasting value in academic discourse, as the qualitative research strategy identified problem areas related to workplace stress and examined the factors contributing to the stress experienced at work. The results of this study may contribute to further research aimed at identifying strategies for managing workplace stress and effective prevention methods, particularly at the organizational level.

2. Research Methodology

Sample Selection. In accordance with methodological guidelines, respondents were selected deliberately, based on an assessment of whether they were relevant to the study and could provide sufficient information about the phenomenon under investigation (Bitinas, 2006). The total sample consisted of 303 respondents (individuals working in Lithuanian organizations), of

whom 204 (67.3%) were women and 99 (32.7%) were men. However, despite the fact that the number of respondents was sufficiently large—which allowed for a reasonably objective assessment of the factors contributing to workplace stress—the survey was conducted online using Office 365, which resulted in a relatively low rate of detailed responses to the open-ended questions posed; thus, this latter indicator can be identified as a limitation of the study. Given this fact, with a view to future research and in order to achieve greater representativeness, and also to ensure that the results obtained can be generalized to the entire population, it would be advisable to conduct the study repeatedly using the triangulation method, whereby data on the same object would be collected using different research methodologies and the research results supplemented with other data collection methods.

Research methods. Analytical and descriptive. A systematic analysis of scientific literature and studies related to the topic under investigation, based on comparative and summarizing methods. *Questionnaire survey.* To analyze the situation regarding stress experienced at work and to assess its causes, open-ended questions were posed, allowing study participants to express their thoughts and experiences and enabling the identification of the specific characteristics of real-life situations, problematic situations, and reveal the full picture of the phenomenon under study in its everyday context, showing how it is interpreted by those directly involved (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016), and helped to shape a newer and broader perspective on the phenomenon under study, as well as to understand and comprehend it more thoroughly (Žydžiūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017). Given that the specific research topic—factors contributing to workplace stress—was selected for study, the respondents were presented with open-ended questions that were designed and formulated based on the research problem, scientific insights, and the theoretical context. The study allowed us to verify whether the chosen methodology was appropriate for exploring the topic under analysis, and the results obtained enabled us to generate ideas and formulate the study's conclusions. At the same time, this could serve as a direction for further research focused on identifying effective methods for preventing and managing work-related stress and developing measures to overcome it.

Research methodology. Respondents for this study were selected using convenience sampling. An online survey was used as the distribution method. The survey lasted two weeks. For further data analysis, only the respondents' answers to open-ended questions that were relevant to the topic under study and the research objective were considered valid.

Analysis of research data. The data collected from the participants' responses to open-ended questions were processed and interpreted using qualitative *content* analysis, grouping the responses by semantic meaning based on the frequency of word repetition, the intensity and precision of the responses, and by dividing the text under analysis into analytical units. The data analysis was based on multiple readings of the responses to the open-ended questions, identifying frequently recurring answers, and grouping them into categories supported by quotes from the study participants. The respondents' answers have not been altered or edited, except in cases where grammatical or stylistic errors were corrected to ensure that the meaning was accurately conveyed. In interpreting the respondents' answers, empirical data is presented in parallel, and its descriptions and explanations are grounded in theoretical concepts. The information obtained during the study, which reflected the respondents' personal opinions and was based on their subjective perceptions, made it possible to assess the causes of workplace stress and identify problem areas. By analyzing the experiences of the study participants in the context of workplace stress, recurring trends and new insights were identified, which made it possible to identify indicators reflecting the topic under study, such as: assessment of employees' adaptation to a new workplace; characteristics of work organization; assessment of the incentive system; characteristics of internal communication; assessment of the microclimate in the work environment, etc.

Research Ethics. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of social research, providing respondents with information about who was conducting the study, its purpose, and how the collected data would be used. The study was conducted anonymously to ensure confidentiality, and the data obtained was processed and presented in summary form without mentioning any information related to the study participants. The study adhered to the ethical principle of voluntariness and free will regarding participation in the survey. Participants were free to decide whether or not to participate in the study; therefore, the responses provided by respondents to open-ended questions were treated as consent to participate in the study. Study participants were also informed of the option to request that their data not be included in the subsequent analysis of the results.

3. Causes of Workplace Stress: A Theoretical Perspective

According to Michie (2002), stress is defined as a psychological and physical state that arises when an individual's available resources are insufficient to cope with the demands and pressures of a situation. At the same time, the scientific literature notes that stress is a rather complex and subjective concept, since each person perceives and experiences stress individually, and the body's response to sources of stress can vary and be unique; therefore, the search for a common denominator regarding the experience and perception of stress is, nevertheless, inseparable from the aspect of subjectivity (Goel & Verma, 2021). Meanwhile, when analyzing the phenomenon of workplace stress, research in this field focuses on identifying stressors, with an emphasis on determining the characteristics of stressor assessment (Cox et al., 2002).

In analyzing the effects of workplace stress, the concept of chronic workplace stress is highlighted, and it is noted that it is precisely stress experienced over a long period at work that contributes to physical fatigue, which manifests itself in difficulties with concentration, emotional regulation, and a weakened immune system (Kerret et al., 2021). At the same time, it is

emphasized that long-term stress at work also affects the body's hormonal, immune, and cardiovascular systems. Meanwhile, other researchers point out that stress experienced in the workplace can not only have negative consequences for a person's physical and mental health, but can also be one of the causes of reduced work performance and quality. For example, a study by Madhavi et al. (2023) found that stress reduces work productivity and increases the incidence of errors, while Madhavi et al. (2023), employees experiencing stress are more likely to feel job dissatisfaction, burnout, reduced engagement, and strained relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Insights from recent studies indicate that workplace stress experienced by employees affects not only the well-being of the employees themselves but also organizational performance, a view shared by other researchers studying stress in the workplace (Marcatto et al., 2025). Similarly, Aniței et al. (2013) emphasize that different sources of stress are not isolated factors; rather, they interact with one another and have a negative impact on both employees and the organization. Work-related stress negatively affects young employees' health and job satisfaction, which is often linked to dissatisfaction with the organization and the workplace itself. However, Aniței et al. (2013) emphasize that, from a health perspective, employees' psychological well-being and energy levels are more adversely affected, while the impact on physical health is less significant.

Given the negative impact of workplace stress on an individual's health and the resulting negative consequences for the organization—such as reduced work efficiency and diminished work quality—as well as the increased risk of employee absenteeism or turnover, special attention should be paid to identifying the factors that cause stress at work. There are various factors that cause or contribute to stress at work. Some of these are related to personal reasons and, one might say, are not necessarily or in all cases directly caused by the organization where one works. For example, one of the factors contributing to stress is sleep disturbance and difficulty sleeping. According to Marcatto et al. (2025), sleep difficulties deplete a person's cognitive and emotional resources and increase the likelihood of organization-directed counterproductive behavior, i.e., employees are more likely to exhibit inappropriate behavior at work. Another cause is the use of psychoactive substances, which acts as a risk factor that increases the likelihood of dysfunctional behavior under conditions of heightened stress.

However, researchers analyzing the causes of workplace stress most often focus on factors or events at the organizational level. For example, Kerr et al. (2021) emphasize in their article that a fundamental source of workplace stress is the imbalance between effort and reward, but the authors also identify other causes of workplace stress. One of these is working conditions characterized by high psychological demands, little decision-making autonomy, and limited social support. At the same time, studies (Meyer et al., 2024) have identified cases, particularly in the field of education, where students who have just started working face professional challenges that can lead to work-related stress. The results of the latter study revealed that more complex teaching activities, such as independent teaching, are associated with higher levels of work-related stress. Meanwhile, other researchers, having conducted a detailed analysis of stressors, point out that organizational stress is caused not by a single source, but by a combination of several stressors (Aniței et al., 2013). Summarizing the results of this study, the researchers identify poor communication at work, a lack of training to acquire new skills, limited career opportunities, and insufficient recognition of efforts in the workplace as the main causes of stress experienced by young employees at work. Similarly, Aniței et al. (2013) note that the likelihood of experiencing stress at work is increased by insufficient feedback, a tense organizational climate, discrimination, or favoritism. At the same time, the researchers point out that while the intensity of individual sources of stress may vary, their combined effect leads to lower work efficiency and productivity. Meanwhile, other researchers highlight the social aspect and the sense of responsibility for one's actions, noting that stress arises in various work situations, but it often intensifies when employees feel they receive little support from managers and colleagues, and when they have little influence over the work they perform or cannot control how to cope with the demands and pressures of the job (World Health Organization, 2017), meanwhile, Michie (2002) identifies factors associated with stress and health risks in the workplace and categorizes them as those related to the content of work and those related to the social and organizational context of work. According to the researcher, factors inherent to the job itself include long working hours, work overload, time pressure, difficult or complex tasks, a lack of breaks, a lack of variety in activities, and poor physical working conditions (such as inadequate space, temperature, or lighting).

In summary, it can be said that employee stress in today's work environment is becoming an increasingly pressing issue, driven by both global labor market changes and internal organizational processes. In the scientific literature, stress is associated with various psychological, physiological, and organizational consequences that affect employees' well-being, work productivity, and organizational performance. Research shows that workplace stress is most often caused not by a single factor, but by a combination of several stressors.

4. Causes of Workplace Stress: An Analysis of Empirical Research Findings

Although workplace stress and its contributing factors are a well-studied topic, research on workplace stress remains relevant in the context of today's labor market, given the negative consequences of this phenomenon for both individuals and organizations. In examining the effects of workplace stress, Madhavi & Srinivas Rao (2023) note that the stress experienced by employees at work affects not only the well-being of the employees themselves but also the organization's performance. Other researchers agree with this view, pointing out the impact of workplace stress on both the employee and on work productivity

and operational efficiency (Boswell et al., 2004; Hawksley, 2007; Kim et al., 2017), as well as to a decline in work performance and quality (Cranwell et al., 2005; Vyas & Luk, 2011; Main et al., 2005). The findings of this study also confirm these insights from the literature. An analysis of the participants' statements revealed that stress experienced at work and constant tension can lead to a higher likelihood of errors and poorer work performance and quality, as well as hinder work speed and operational efficiency (see Table 1). The same study revealed an aspect of limited social interaction, manifested in a reluctance to disturb colleagues. Furthermore, the stress experienced by study participants at work is associated with negative physical and psychological consequences and may have a negative impact on employees' physical fatigue, emotional tension, and nervousness, as well as poor psychological well-being, difficulty relaxing, disconnecting from work, and concentrating (see Table 1), which can negatively affect relationships with both colleagues and loved ones. Other researchers have also discussed the negative impact of workplace stress on an individual's physical and mental health (Kasiulis & Barydienė, 2005; Chmiel, 2005), while Rovas et al. (2012) point out that chronic workplace stress can negatively impact relationships with coworkers and, over time, may even affect relationships with loved ones.

Table 1. **Assessment of the consequences of work-related stress on work quality and physical and psychological well-being**

Category	Quote
The Impact of Stress on Work Quality	"<...> It took extra time and frayed my nerves, because when you don't know what to do or how to do it, you start to get nervous and feel tense. Then you start making more mistakes while performing tasks, because you don't know if you've done them correctly. Then the quality of work suffers when an employee feels bad and lives under constant stress."; "<...> I asked my colleagues for help. But I didn't want to bother them, because then they can't do their own work."
Physical fatigue	"<...>I come home from work feeling very tired and exhausted. It feels like I have absolutely no energy left to do anything. <...>"; "<...>I often work overtime <...>"
Emotional tension and nervousness	"When I get home from work, I feel tense and nervous."; "In my free time, I think about the problems that came up at work."
Attention deficit disorders	"I can't concentrate when I'm interacting with others—colleagues, family members, or friends—because I'm always thinking about work."

In summary, it can be said that the emotional strain experienced—which, over time, can develop into chronic stress—can affect the employee themselves, leading to physical disorders and health problems, increased physical fatigue and tension, difficulties concentrating, as well as causing difficulties in performing work and having a negative impact on work outcomes and their quality, as well as on operational efficiency, work productivity, and overall productivity. Therefore, given the negative effects of workplace stress on both employees and organizations, it is necessary to identify the causes of workplace stress.

In recent decades, scientific studies have rightly raised the question of what factors contribute to workplace stress. Most researchers define the causes of workplace stress as a complex phenomenon and link them to processes occurring within the organization.

An analysis of the survey participants' responses regarding situations that cause stress in the workplace revealed aspects related to the process of employee adaptation to a new workplace. As the survey results showed, during the first weeks of employment, the lack of a detailed introduction to the specifics and nature of the work was identified as one of the factors causing stress at work. At the same time, an analysis of the study participants' statements revealed an aspect of ambiguity regarding job functions and roles, which manifested itself (especially during the first weeks of employment) both in the limited formal definition of functions in documents (employment contracts) as well as a lack of systematic introduction to core job functions and the practical identification of activities and roles in the actual workplace, which, over time, leads to the employee independently constructing their own role. The study participants emphasized that during their first weeks on the job, they had to take the initiative to learn about their job descriptions and duties, and they had to figure out most work-related issues on their own or by asking colleagues for help. Koszela (2020) also notes that the lack of clarity regarding an employee's role and responsibilities, as well as conflicting demands, can increase the risk of workplace stress. At the same time, when analyzing the causes of workplace stress from the participants' perspective, the lack of internal communication, varying requirements for task completion, vague task descriptions, a lack of information regarding their completion, and the absence of clearly defined boundaries of responsibility for carrying them out. These findings are echoed by Chmiel (2005), who identified contradictory or unclear job requirements as one of the factors contributing to workplace stress. Meanwhile, other respondents focused on the social aspect, noting that stress experienced at work can be influenced by the quality of relationships with coworkers, as well as colleagues' attitudes toward new employees and the behavioral strategies they employ toward them, which can have a negative impact on an employee's well-being or even serve as one of the factors contributing to the formation of an unfavorable work environment.

Other researchers also identify negative interpersonal relationships among colleagues (Kiaunytė, 2012) and a prevailing unfavorable work environment (Chmiel, 2005) as risk factors for workplace stress. On the other hand, the lack of introductory training for new employees, which increases their risk of experiencing work-related stress, as well as the absence of a mentor and support system, which are associated with emotional strain, are identified as sources of workplace stress (especially during the first weeks of employment) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Assessment of the Lack of Organizational Support for New Employees

Category	Quote
Lack of orientation for new employees regarding the specifics of the job	<i>"I felt a lot of pressure during my first few weeks on the job because I didn't know exactly what I was supposed to do. It was also hard to find my way around the building, between the offices, figuring out where to take which documents and to whom, and by when to complete the tasks. <...> This caused me stress every morning"; "<...> no one introduced me to the job or showed me how to work with the software. <...>"</i>
Lack of orientation training for new employees	<i>"<...> when I started working, there was no training on how to do the job <...>"</i>
Uncertainty regarding job duties and roles	<i>"I found the basic information about what my duties would be in the documents and in my employment contract <...>"</i>
Uncertainty regarding tasks and work organization	<i>"<...> Right after I started working, I felt stressed by the lack of communication and vaguely defined tasks."; "<...> What is most lacking is a clear formulation of tasks. <...>"; "<...> There is a lack of clearly formulated tasks with specific deadlines and instructions for completion."</i>
Different work practices within the organization	<i>"<...> During my first few weeks on the job, it became clear that each department had its own procedures and that the same tasks were performed differently. As a result, I couldn't rely on my colleagues' advice. This was stressful."</i>
Unclear responsibilities	<i>"<...> It is not entirely clear who is responsible for what and what tasks each employee is supposed to perform. <...>"</i>
Lack of a mentor or support system	<i>"<...>No one was assigned to explain things to or assist the new employee. <...>"; "When I started working, there was no mentor to show me around, familiarize me with the premises and workspaces, tell me about the organization and the specifics of working there, or introduce me to other employees. I really missed that, and it even caused me stress."</i>
Negative attitudes of colleagues toward new employees	<i>"<...> the unfriendliness and hostility of some colleagues toward a new employee"</i>
Self-directed learning	<i>"<...> I would read and look for information on my own at night, after work <...>"; "<...> I had to figure everything out on my own."; "<...> I had to teach myself."; "<...> So I had to teach myself."</i>
Help from colleagues as an informal source	<i>"<...> During my first weeks on the job, I had to ask other colleagues for help with my tasks."; "<...> I asked my colleagues for help <...>"; "<...> During my first weeks on the job, I had to ask other colleagues for help with my tasks."</i>

Thus, based on the results of the study, it is clear that the lack of a systematic onboarding process and familiarization with the main job functions and nature of the work, as well as the lack of support, a lack of support from colleagues, and varying requirements for task completion may be among the factors contributing to workplace stress (especially during the first few weeks in a new job). In addition, according to the survey participants, the lack of introductory training and mentoring for new employees led to additional tension and stress at work. At the same time, imprecise task descriptions and a lack of clarity regarding the information needed to complete them, as well as uncertainty regarding work organization and unclear responsibilities, and differing work practices across the organization's departments were identified as sources of workplace stress.

Researchers who have analyzed the causes of workplace stress have identified a link between heavy workloads, tight schedules, and a large volume of tasks, on the one hand, and the experience of tension and the manifestation of stress at work, on the other (Bubnys & Petrošiūtė, 2008), and other researchers also note that, over time, the abundance of tasks and tight deadlines can become a source of stress at work (Pikūnas & Palujanskienė, 2005). Similarly, Bagočiūtė (2010), drawing on the insights of other researchers, also identifies a heavy workload as one of the causes of workplace stress. The findings of this study support

these views. According to the respondents' assessments, it was found that a heavy workload and fast pace, as well as a lack of time to complete tasks — especially when work is done both during breaks and at home—cause stress. On the other hand, it became clear that the likelihood of experiencing stress at work can be increased by distributing the workload without taking into account employees' individual capabilities. Cranwell-Ward & Abbey (2005) also identify the assignment of duties without taking into account individual employees' characteristics, abilities, and capabilities as one of the causes of workplace stress, while Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė & Urbanavičiūtė (2018) and Fletcher et al. (2018) note that the risk of workplace stress can be increased by high job demands placed on employees or work tasks that do not match the employee's existing competencies. Furthermore, according to the respondents' assessments, a hectic work pace and tight, unrealistic deadlines for completing work tasks can be identified as factors contributing to stress at work. On the other hand, an analysis of the participants' comments revealed that a large volume of uncoordinated tasks and conflicting or unclear requirements may be among the sources of stress experienced at work. These findings are corroborated by other researchers, such as Pikūnas & Palujanskienė (2005), who, after conducting a detailed analysis of stressors, identified tight deadlines, a heavy workload, and a lack of clear instructions as some of the potential factors contributing to workplace stress, while, according to Bubnys & Petrošiūtė (2008), the risk of experiencing work-related stress may be increased by a demanding work schedule and the sheer volume of tasks. Meanwhile, other researchers identify the specific nature of work as a source of workplace stress and point out that monotonous, tedious work based solely on the performance of technical tasks limits self-expression and self-fulfillment in professional activities, as a result of which the employee experiences dissatisfaction with both the work being performed and with themselves. For example, researchers who have conducted a detailed analysis of stressors note that monotonous work can be a cause of stress experienced at work (Chmiel, 2005), while Cranwell-Word & Abbey (2005) highlight the nature of work and indicate that activities that cause boredom, a work environment that remains unchanged for long periods, or monotonous tasks with insufficient challenge can become sources of stress at work. This is also confirmed by the results of this study, in which respondents identified monotonous, technical work as one of the factors causing stress at work. The assessment of heavy workloads and unrealistic deadlines as sources of stress at work is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. **Assessment of workload and deadlines for completing tasks**

Category	Quote
Heavy workload	<i>"Because of my heavy workload, I often have to work even during my lunch breaks. I can't keep up, and the work has to be done by the deadline. It's stressful."; "A very heavy workload. <...> I often work overtime"; "What I don't have time to finish at work, I have to finish at home."; "Heavy workload and fast pace. My workload isn't distributed in a way that takes my individual situation and capabilities into account. <...>"</i>
Lack of time to complete tasks	<i>"There isn't enough time to complete the tasks."</i>
Unreasonable deadlines for completing tasks	<i>"<...> unachievable deadlines for completing the work are set <...>"</i>
Work overload	<i>"An excessive amount of tasks that need to be completed at the same time."</i>
Characteristics of the nature of work as a source of stress (monotonous work, predominance of technical tasks)	<i>"<...> monotony <...>"; "<...> Constant technical work <...>"</i>

Thus, summarizing the insights presented by researchers in published works and based on the results obtained during the study, it can be concluded that a heavy workload and fast pace, an abundance of tasks, and a lack of time to complete them, as well as high, contradictory, or unclear demands, may be among the primary causes of work-related stress. At the same time, monotonous and tedious activities can also become a source of work-related stress over time.

Opportunities for professional development and favorable career prospects are among the factors that influence employee job satisfaction and motivation; meanwhile, according to Šinkūnienė & Katkonienė (2010), Vilmantė & Šeškevičius (2006), limited opportunities for professional development and career advancement not only reduce work motivation but may also be among the factors contributing to workplace stress. This view is supported by the results of this study, which indicate that a lack of career prospects and limited opportunities for professional development are factors that both create an internal conflict between work and self-improvement and increase the likelihood of experiencing stress at work (see Table 4).

Table 4. Assessment of the limitations of career opportunities and professional development

Category	Quote
Limited career opportunities	"<...> there is a serious lack of career opportunities. It seems like I could hold a higher position, but since I started working, my responsibilities haven't changed <...>"; "<...> I felt like I'd been stuck in the same place since my college days."
Unmet expectations regarding career opportunities	"<...>I wanted to move up the career ladder after finishing my studies, but I'm doing the same job I was doing before.<...>"
Limited opportunities for professional growth within the organization	"<...> I wanted to grow, aim high, and start studying, but the conditions weren't there. I had to choose—either study or stay at work. This caused me stress because I wanted to achieve more."

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that unmet expectations regarding professional development and limited career opportunities within an organization can not only lead to an internal conflict between the need for work and the need for self-improvement, but can also increase the risk of experiencing stress at work.

In the scientific literature, the use of motivational methods and the maintenance of a balance between the work performed, the effort expended, and the compensation received are associated with higher levels of work motivation and job satisfaction, as well as a lower risk of experiencing stress at work. Meanwhile, the absence of a motivational system and the limited use of motivational methods can not only reduce employee job satisfaction but may also be among the factors contributing to stress at work (Bulotaitė et al., 2008). The results of this study also bear this out. When discussing the causes of workplace stress, respondents cited the lack of a motivation system and the failure to recognize employees' efforts as key factors. At the same time, a lack of feedback, managers' view of employees as merely task-oriented, as well as the failure to recognize employees as specialists and the lack of appreciation for their efforts are cited as some of the factors contributing to stress at work. In addition, an understanding of self-actualization as a source of motivation is fostered, the importance of the individual's internal motivation and self-actualization is emphasized, as is engagement in work activities, which is likely to not only increase job satisfaction and promote well-being at work but also reduce the risk of work-related stress (see Table 5).

Table 5. Evaluation of the Employee Motivation System

Category	Quote
The absence of a formal incentive system	"There is no incentive system. <...>"; "There is no employee incentive system."
Lack of recognition and appreciation for employees' efforts	"What I missed the most was recognition of my contribution to the work <...> there is no specific recognition of your work and the effort you put in <...> it gives the impression that, simply because you are an employee, you are expected to work"
Lack of feedback on work being done	"It would be nice to receive feedback so that when performing other tasks, I would know how and what to do. <...>"; "<...> it would be nice to receive not only comments but also praise. <...>"
The Problem with Management's Attitude Toward Employees	"<...> What I miss most is management's positive attitude toward employees <...> they should value them more."; "<...> It's not pleasant to be seen only as an employee who has to carry out the tasks assigned to you. You want your manager to recognize your achievements and appreciate your efforts. That's what I miss the most."
Understanding the Interaction Between Intrinsic Motivation, Self-Actualization at Work, and Stress	"<...> for me, motivation was the opportunity to realize my potential, contribute to certain activities, and collaborate. <...>"; "<...> I am convinced that if you enjoy your work and find fulfillment in it, you feel good while working, and there is less stress."

Based on the results of the study, it is evident that the lack of employee motivation systems and recognition, as well as the lack of evaluation of their efforts—including both the absence of a formal motivation system and a lack of feedback and performance evaluation—can be a cause of tension and stress experienced at work. At the same time, the imbalance between the effort expended, the results achieved, and the compensation received was identified as a factor contributing to workplace stress. Furthermore, the study participants emphasized the importance of self-actualization and noted that opportunities for employees to realize their potential in their professional activities are linked to higher motivation and lower levels of work-related stress.

Researchers who have analyzed the phenomenon of workplace stress and the factors influencing its manifestation highlight the importance of implementing employee assistance programs. For instance, Abromaitienė (2013) emphasizes the benefits of training on stress management, linking this to changes in an individual's perspective, the formation of new insights, acquired knowledge, and its application in assessing and taking action to change a stressful situation, Alvi et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of implementing training on stress management. Meanwhile, the lack of employee training on stress management is cited as a factor that may increase the risk of experiencing stress at work. These statements are also confirmed by the results of this study (see Table 6). Based on the data obtained during the study, it is evident that the organization lacks a systematic approach to implementing employee education and training on the topic of stress management at work. Respondents feel that training on stress management is lacking within the organization, so the responsibility for coping with stress is shifted to the employee, who must independently try to manage stressful situations or compensate for shortcomings in the organizational system through collegial relationships with coworkers. Meanwhile, when dealing with stressful situations at work, employees receive help from their managers less frequently, which suggests that managers are not perceived as a source of emotional or psychological support for managing work-related stress. There is also a near-unanimous call for training on managing workplace stress, and a lack of employee education, organized training, and courses on coping with workplace stress is frequently cited. At the same time, survey participants feel there is a lack of specialists with whom they could discuss situations causing tension and stress at work during working hours and plan ways to resolve them, and they acknowledge that support for employees in coping with workplace stress is neither ongoing nor systematic, but is usually limited to short-term consultations or occasional meetings with specialists. The benefits of psychological support are also recognized, both for employees' emotional well-being and for problem-solving; the importance of consistent and regular support provided by qualified professionals to help employees cope with workplace stress is emphasized, as is the importance of having a long-term, permanent specialist within the organization. Thus, opportunities to receive qualified assistance in managing stressful situations at work and to gain knowledge about stress management techniques through training are limited. According to the study participants, professional assistance from specialists and training sessions on coping with workplace stress organized for employees would improve both employees' mental health and the quality of problem-solving in work situations, as well as contribute to the creation of a positive work environment within the team. Therefore, in order to manage workplace stress more effectively, there is no doubt that involving qualified specialists and seeking the help of a psychologist to resolve stressful situations at work is essential.

Table 6. **Assessment of the lack of support for stress management at the organizational level**

Category	Quote
Lack of Training and Education on Stress Management	<i>"Our organization has never provided training for employees on how to manage stress. We have training on various topics, but not on managing stress at work."; "There is a lack of training on stress management."; "It would be good to have training on how to cope with stress at work and how to manage it. Because you don't always have time to read up on it on your own. And a trainer could cover the essential points during the training."</i>
Lack of access to psychological support at work	<i>"There is no specialist, no psychologist in the organization, whom you could consult on how best to act in a given situation or what the best decision would be."; "We should have a psychologist at work so that, if necessary, an employee could receive the necessary professional help. Because right now, we don't have one <...>"</i>
Occasional and insufficient involvement of specialists in providing support to employees	<i>"<...> if they were available, it would be easier to have someone like that on hand at least a few days a week"; "A psychologist was called in a few times when there was a tense situation in the organization. But he only came a few times. He wrote some recommendations. And that was it."</i>
Recognizing the Importance of Professional Help	<i>"It would be good to have a psychologist in the organization. Because you can't always resolve a situation or manage your emotions on your own, especially in a stressful situation. In such cases, you need a qualified specialist."; "An employee who has talked to a psychologist would feel better. <...>"; "Sometimes there are cases where it seems like you really need a specialist, a psychologist. Because there are situations where, without a specialist's help, you might even make things worse, and then everything could end up being even worse."</i>
The Need for Stress Management Skills	<i>"<...> if a person had knowledge of stress management, it would actually be easier for them to solve the problem on their own and cope with stress."</i>
The use of personalized stress management techniques	<i>"<...> each of us tries to handle situations on our own."</i>

Mutual support among colleagues	<i>"We help each other. We ask our colleagues for help."</i>
Limited involvement of managers in stress management	<i>"My relationship with my manager is mostly about work matters. His help in dealing with stressful situations is minimal."</i>

A summary of the participants' comments revealed the pressing need for support for employees in managing workplace stress. The study results highlighted a lack of systematic training on stress management and a shortage of professional assistance in managing workplace stress. Meanwhile, an assessment of the study participants' experiences in managing stressful situations at work revealed that coping with workplace stress often becomes the individual responsibility of employees or is addressed through mutual support among colleagues. It also became clear that there is a need for a permanent qualified specialist (especially a psychologist) within the organization and for their regular assistance, as there is a perceived clear lack of professional support, since the involvement of specialists is sporadic. The report also emphasizes the need for organizations to provide training for employees on coping with workplace stress, focusing not only on providing support but also on the lack of knowledge and the need for skills to manage workplace stress. Thus, both the provision of professional help and the availability of a specialist (psychologist), as well as knowledge about managing workplace stress, could be among the ways to ensure better employee well-being at work and measures to reduce the risk of workplace stress.

In the scientific literature, the work environment and the creation of a supportive microclimate, as well as the quality of collaborative interpersonal relationships and internal communication, are identified as factors that contribute to employee well-being and, at the same time, reduce the risk of work-related stress. Meanwhile, strained relationships with supervisors and colleagues, as well as a lack of support when facing difficulties, can lead to the development of work-related stress. When discussing the factors that contribute to workplace stress, aspects of internal communication and the microclimate within the team were identified, with a focus on ensuring the quality of interpersonal relationships with the manager (see Table 7). When analyzing the specifics of a manager's communication with employees, the analysis of opinions revealed that social relationships with the manager are primarily based on professional communication and are most often limited to discussing job functions and delegating tasks. At the same time, the need for an informal relationship with the manager was identified, as was a lack of psychological safety, complicated and fear-based relationships with supervisors, where criticism dominates toward the employee, the employee is afraid to approach the supervisor, and communication is associated with negative evaluation — all of which were identified as factors contributing to workplace stress. Furthermore, an analysis of the survey results revealed instances of a disconnect between employees and managers, where employees are viewed solely as performing their duties, as well as a prevailing strict hierarchical management structure, where discussions are limited to work-related issues, which are perceived as potential causes of stress experienced at work. At the same time, the lack of effective communication, stemming from insufficient information, as well as a lack of clarity regarding tasks, a lack of meetings and interest in employees' work-related issues, and limited employee involvement in decision-making are identified as some of the factors causing stress at work. Furthermore, according to the study participants, instances of discrimination and competition may exacerbate the manifestation of work-related stress (see Table 7). The results of this study complement the findings of other researchers, such as Imran & Ayub (2017), Burba et al. (2014), who emphasize the employer's role in managing workplace stress situations, while Cranwell-Ward & Abbey (2005) point out that poor relationships with a supervisor and a lack of support and assistance from a supervisor can be among the causes of stress experienced at work. At the same time, according to other researchers, the failure to recognize an employee as a professional, the lack of appreciation for their efforts, and the limited opportunities for employees to participate in decision-making (Koszela, 2020), as well as the failure to recognize employees' achievements and contributions to the organization's activities (Dessler, 2001) may increase the risk of experiencing work-related stress.

Table 7. Assessment of the social-organizational environment as a determinant of work-related stress

Category	Quote
Formal relationship with the supervisor and maintaining a professional distance	<i>"My relationship with my supervisor is professional and work-related."; "I rarely interact with my supervisor; I only contact him when necessary, and only regarding work-related matters"; "<...> I don't have an overly friendly relationship with my supervisor. I simply maintain a professional relationship."; "Communication with my supervisor is limited to the delegation of work and tasks."</i>
Lack of psychological safety in the relationship with a supervisor	<i>"I'm afraid to walk into my supervisor's office to ask a question; I try to avoid any contact with him."; "<...> I'm afraid to ask my supervisor for help with any issue, or to walk in without announcing myself."; "My relationship with my boss is bad because he doesn't like me; he always picks on my mistakes. And if he calls me into his office, I</i>

	<i>immediately start thinking the worst—I get stressed and anxious."</i>
Lack of communication and information sharing by management	<i>"<...> sometimes the speed at which information was shared by management was insufficient. There were instances when information reached us when there was little time left to complete the task. <...>"; "<...> the manager's communication with employees is insufficient. Perhaps it would be sufficient if the manager shared information with all employees.<...>"; "There is often a lack of specific information about the task and its deadlines."</i>
Lack of employee involvement in decision-making	<i>"In many cases, I wished that employees' opinions would be heard and their suggestions taken into account. Not valuing an employee can cause stress."; "<...> there were too few meetings, not only because of the need to discuss issues with the programs, but also in a general sense, for example, to talk about how work is going <...>"</i>
A negative work environment (experiences of discrimination, a competitive and demeaning atmosphere, a culture dominated by criticism and control)	<i>"I understand that my responsibilities aren't that important in the organization's hierarchy, but it would be nice if communication were more straightforward <...>"; "In many cases, I felt discriminated against based on my position."; "<...> I've noticed that there's a lot of competition, and some employees are undervalued because of their age. I don't think it should be that way, because it can cause stress for an employee when they're constantly belittled, harassed, or disparaged because of their individual differences, such as their age. <...>"; "People are always trying to find fault or pick on someone. <...>"</i>

Based on a summary of the study's findings, it can be concluded that the lack of relationships based on respect and openness, a failure to recognize an individual's efforts, and instances of discrimination, as well as problems with communication and information dissemination—where there is a lack of clarity regarding assigned tasks and communication is limited to merely providing instructions for completing them—may be among the factors contributing to workplace stress. At the same time, this highlights the need to improve managers' communication with employees by creating opportunities to develop and ensure more frequent and intensive two-way communication, which is likely to lead to greater employee well-being within the organization and reduce the likelihood of experiencing stress at work.

5. Conclusions

1. The analysis of scientific literature and research related to the topic under investigation revealed that workplace stress is a complex phenomenon determined by organizational, social, and individual factors. The scientific literature suggests that unclear job roles, excessive workload, unrealistic deadlines, limited opportunities for professional development, lack of support, and problematic interpersonal relationships within the organization are among the main factors contributing to workplace stress.
2. Factors contributing to workplace stress, as empirically substantiated by the study:
 - 2.1. The study found that a lack of clearly defined job functions and roles, a lack of precise instructions for performing tasks, unclear responsibilities, as well as the absence of introductory training on job-specific topics and a lack of a mentor or support system (especially for new employees during the adaptation period) increase the risk of experiencing stress at work.
 - 2.2. The results of the study showed that a heavy workload and unrealistic deadlines, where insufficient time is allocated to complete tasks, are among the factors contributing to workplace stress.
 - 2.3. Limited opportunities for professional development and a lack of career prospects, as well as a lack of training on managing workplace stress within the organization and a shortage of professional support for managing workplace stress, are among the causes of workplace stress.
 - 2.4. It has been found that the risk of experiencing stress at work is increased by the absence of a motivation system, a failure to recognize employees' efforts, and a lack of incentives for good performance, as well as by tense relationships with supervisors and an unfavorable work environment within the team.
3. The empirical research findings allow the assumption that structured onboarding and adaptation processes for new employees, clearer task allocation, balanced workload organization, strengthening employee motivation systems, improving the effectiveness of internal communication, ensuring access to professional psychological support, and implementing stress management training could be significant organizational-level directions for the prevention and management of workplace stress. These directions could contribute to reducing workplace stress and strengthening employee well-being.

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