

Fatigue in the Workplace: Causes, Consequences, and Strategies for Mitigation – A Study of Family-Owned Hospitality Businesses in London

Master's Dissertation Proposal

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1. Introduction

Workplace fatigue has emerged as a significant topic of concern within contemporary organisational and occupational health research. Historically, its recognition can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution, when long working hours and unsafe working conditions resulted in physical exhaustion and heightened accident rates. By the mid-twentieth century, developments in ergonomics and industrial psychology began to highlight the relationship between fatigue, performance decline, and workplace safety. In the modern era, technological advances, 24-hour economies, and intensifying job demands have reframed fatigue as both a psychological and organisational phenomenon, closely linked with stress, burnout, and presenteeism.

Fatigue is broadly defined as a state of physical and mental exhaustion resulting from prolonged work demands and insufficient recovery (Cunningham et al., 2022). It encompasses both acute and chronic dimensions, influencing cognitive performance, emotional regulation, and general wellbeing. The hospitality sector, characterised by irregular working hours, high emotional labour, and a strong customer service focus, represents an environment where fatigue is especially prevalent.

Family-owned hospitality businesses, which often depend on a small, closely knit workforce, may face unique challenges in managing fatigue due to limited resources, informal management structures, and the blurred boundaries between personal and professional responsibilities. This research therefore seeks to examine workplace fatigue within this context, exploring its causes, impacts, and the organisational strategies used to mitigate it.

Conceptually, there remains limited integration between psychological wellbeing theories and organisational fatigue management frameworks. Practically, there is a paucity of empirical research focusing specifically on small, family-owned hospitality businesses in urban contexts such as London. Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more holistic understanding of fatigue as a multidimensional construct with implications for employee wellbeing and organisational sustainability.

Research Aim: To examine the causes, consequences, and mitigation strategies of workplace fatigue in family-owned hospitality businesses in London.

Research Objectives:

1. To identify key psychological and organisational factors contributing to workplace fatigue.
2. To assess the relationship between fatigue, performance, and employee wellbeing.
3. To explore managerial perceptions and strategies for managing fatigue.
4. To propose practical recommendations to mitigate fatigue in small, family-owned hospitality businesses.

Structure of the Proposal: The remainder of this dissertation proposal is organized as follows. Section 2 presents a review of key academic literature on workplace fatigue, outlining major theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and gaps in current knowledge. Section 3 details the research methodology, including design, sampling, ethical considerations, and data analysis strategies. Section 4 outlines the expected outcomes and potential significance of the study for both theory and practice. Section 5 highlights the study's limitations and delimitations, while Section 6 presents a project timeline in the form of a Gantt chart. Section 7 outlines the study's conclusion and finally, Section 8 lists the references cited throughout the proposal.

2. Literature Review

Fatigue has been extensively explored across several academic disciplines, including psychology, ergonomics, and occupational health. Physiological and psychological factors such as sleep deprivation, extended work shifts, and cognitive overload are well-established contributors to fatigue (Åkerstedt et al., 2017). Organisational factors such as scheduling practices, workload intensity, and insufficient rest breaks have also been linked to higher levels of fatigue and reduced work performance (Demerouti et al., 2001). According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model, employee wellbeing is influenced by the interaction between job demands (e.g., time pressure, emotional labour) and job resources (e.g., autonomy, support). When demands exceed available resources, fatigue and burnout are likely outcomes. Williamson and Friswell (2013) argue that fatigue impairs attention and decision-making, significantly increasing the risk of workplace errors and accidents. In hospitality contexts, such risks can manifest as service quality deterioration, safety breaches, and turnover. Interventions such as fatigue risk management systems (FRMS) and flexible scheduling have demonstrated varying degrees of effectiveness (Dawson and McCulloch, 2005). However, few studies explicitly address how small, family-run hospitality organisations adapt such measures within resource constraints. This review reveals a lack of integration between psychological perspectives on employee wellbeing and organisational-level fatigue management practices. Consequently, this study contributes to bridging this conceptual gap by examining how both individual and organisational factors interact to shape fatigue experiences in London's family-owned hospitality sector.

3. Methodology

This research will adopt a mixed-methods design to provide a comprehensive understanding of workplace fatigue. The approach combines quantitative and qualitative data, aligning with a pragmatic research philosophy that values methodological flexibility (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). A structured survey will be distributed to employees across 2–3 family-owned hospitality businesses in London. The questionnaire will include validated instruments such as the Occupational Fatigue Exhaustion/Recovery Scale (OFER) and the Karolinska Sleepiness Scale (KSS). Data will be analysed using SPSS to produce descriptive and inferential statistics examining correlations between job demands, fatigue, and performance. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with business owners and managers to explore their perceptions of fatigue, its organisational implications, and management practices. Qualitative data will be examined through thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), identifying recurrent themes related to fatigue causes, coping strategies, and interventions. Purposive sampling will be used to select participants employed within small, family-owned hospitality settings. Ethical approval will be obtained prior to data collection, with participants providing informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained in compliance with institutional ethical standards and the UK GDPR framework. Reliability will be enhanced by using validated measurement tools and pilot testing the survey for clarity. For qualitative data, trustworthiness will be ensured through member checking, researcher reflexivity, and transparent documentation of analytical procedures (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Integration of both data types will strengthen validity through methodological triangulation.

4. Expected Outcomes and Significance

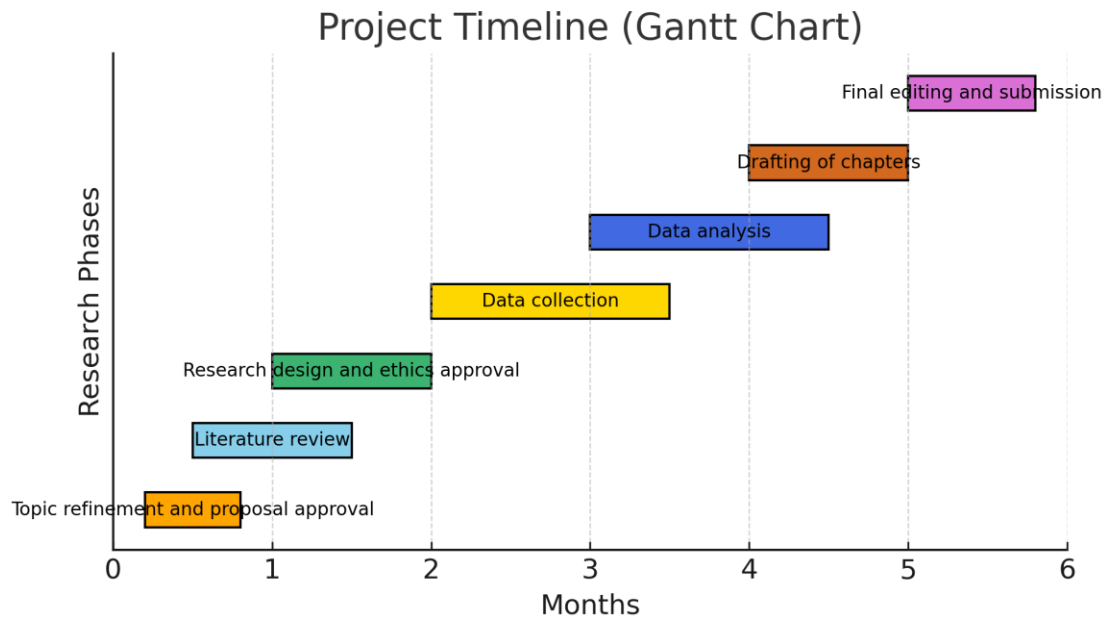
The research is expected to identify key organisational and psychological factors contributing to workplace fatigue within family-owned hospitality businesses. It will clarify the relationship between fatigue and outcomes such as performance, motivation, and wellbeing. Practically, the findings will inform evidence-based strategies that small business owners can implement to reduce fatigue and enhance productivity. Academically, the study contributes to bridging the gap between psychological and organisational perspectives on fatigue management, reinforcing the relevance of the JD–R model in small-enterprise contexts.

5. Limitations

The study will be limited to family-owned hospitality businesses in London, potentially restricting generalisability to larger or international organisations. Nonetheless, this focused scope allows for deeper contextual analysis. Time constraints and reliance on self-reported data may also influence results; however, the use of validated scales and methodological triangulation will mitigate these issues.

6. Project Timeline (Gantt Chart)

The following Gantt chart outlines the anticipated project schedule across a nine-month research period.



7. Conclusion

This dissertation proposal presents a structured plan to investigate workplace fatigue in family-owned hospitality businesses in London. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methods within a robust theoretical framework, the study aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of fatigue as both a psychological and organisational issue. The findings will have academic value and provide practical guidance for enhancing employee wellbeing and operational sustainability.

8. References

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