

The effect of noise reduction on work-related stress: A quasi-experimental study on weaving workers exposed to high levels of noise

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The textile industry is one industry in the world with a high risk of noise exposure in its production process. The operation of weaving machines generates high levels of noise, which can cause various adverse effects on workers' health, one of the major non-auditory effects is work-related stress. Since 1975, one of the largest textile companies in Solo, Central Java Indonesia, has been struggling with high noise levels, particularly in the weaving production room.

Methods: This study aims to determine the effect of reducing noise exposure on work-related stress by installing sound-absorbing materials made from coconut fiber. The study was carried out in 2 phases. The first phase measured noise intensity and work-related stress before the intervention. The second phase was carried out for 12 measurements daily after installing sound-absorbing material made from coconut fiber.

Results: Installing sound-absorbing material made from the coconut fiber on the second to the thirteenth day positively reduced the average noise intensity and work-related stress score compared to the first day before the intervention.

Conclusion: The study showed a significant difference in the average noise intensity and work-related stress before and after installing the sound-absorbing materials on 13 days of measurement.

Keywords: Occupational Noise, Stress, Textiles, Workplace

Introduction

Industrial development with increasingly advanced materials and equipment will increase risks to worker safety. Identifying and controlling relevant hazard factors is necessary to prevent accidents and occupational diseases.¹ The textile industry is one industry in the world with a high risk of noise exposure in its production process.² One of the classic problems in the textile industry is the noise hazard from weaving machine operations. The operation of these machines generates noise intensity that exceeds the threshold value and causes various adverse effects on workers' health, both auditory and non-auditory effects.³

Exposure to high levels of noise can interfere with non-auditory functions, including work-related stress. Noise intensity can be considered a stressor, which causes disturbances in the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems, giving rise to psychological, physiological, and behavioral symptoms.^{4,5} To describe the physiological symptoms of stress, especially in disorders of the balance of human autonomic nervous activity, an indicator is used in the form of the Heart Rate Variability indicator, which has been found in modern stress detection devices.^{6,7}

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recommends a limit of 85 dB of

noise exposure for eight hours per day in the workplace.⁸ According to the Indonesian Minister of Manpower Regulation No. 5 of 2018, the maximum noise level for an 8-hour workday and 40-hour workweek is 85 dB.^{9,10} However, many textile industries experience difficulty in controlling noise below the recommended limits.^{11,12} The negative effect of noise has spawned several studies on noise control in the workplace. One of the studies to control workplace noise is installing sound-absorbing materials from natural and synthetic fiber materials.¹³ Coconut fiber is one of the best natural sound-absorbing materials compared to commercially available synthetic fiber.¹⁴ The availability of coconut fiber in tropical countries is abundant, and some places are considered waste. This waste is naturally available and inexpensive, can be used as an environmentally friendly sound-absorbing material, and supports international programs in environmental preservation.^{15,16}

The prevalence of work-related stress among textile workers varies in developing countries, from 25% in India, 27.5% in Thailand, 21.3% in Iran, and 28% in Congo.¹⁷ The prevalence of stress among textile weaving workers in Indonesia varies in each city, starting from 56.6-69.6%.^{18,19} IT Co. Ltd., for the sake of confidentiality these initials are given, one of the largest textile companies in Solo, Central Java, since 1975, has not been able to overcome the problem of the high noise intensity, especially in the weaving room.²⁰ Previous studies were limited to analyzing the relationship between noise and its impact on health without taking remedial steps so that noise can be reduced to a level close to safe limits based Indonesian standard of 85 dB. This research aims to determine the effect of reducing noise exposure on work-related stress resulting from installing sound-absorbing materials from coconut fiber.

This study is expected to be a breakthrough and a different way of overcoming the classic problem of noise that exceeds the standards required in the textile industry, which previously only focused on using personal protective equipment as a practical solution. Still, it can disturb comfort during work.^{21,22} This research is an answer to the assumption from the company regarding the installation of sound-absorbing material which requires a very high cost.²³ This study proposes innovative and cost-effective methods to address the issue of high noise intensity in weaving factories. The solution involves utilizing natural available inexpensive fiber as sound-absorbing materials, which can considerably reduce work-related stress on weaving workers. This noise

problem has been unresolved in the company since 1975 until this study was conducted.

Methods

The quasi-experimental study with a time series design was conducted among all the female weaving workers at IT Co., Ltd. Ethical approvals were obtained from The Research Ethics Committee. All the participants signed the informed consent form before participating in this study. To calculate the minimum sample size, we use the minimum sample formula which is as follows:²⁴

$$n_1 = n_2 = Y \left\{ 2 \left(\frac{[Z_\alpha + Z_\beta] s}{x_1 - x_2} \right)^2 \right\}$$

$$Y = \left[\frac{1 + (H-1)p}{H} - \frac{Gp^2}{1 + (G-1)p} \right]$$

- n_1 = Sample size for weaving worker participants in the noise intensity measurement
- n_2 = Sample size for weaving worker participants in work-related stress measurement
- α = Type 1 error, the value is the researcher's judgment or determination ($\alpha=5\%$)
- Z_α = Standard value of α obtained from the z value of the normal curve ($Z_\alpha=1.64$)
- β = Type 2 error, the value is the researcher's judgment or determination ($\beta=20\%$)
- Z_β = Standard value of β obtained from the z value of the normal curve ($Z_\beta=0.84$)
- S = Combined standard deviation between groups at the point of interest whose value comes from literature or previous research ($s= 5.22+3.58 = 8.8$)
- $x_1 - x_2$ = Minimum mean difference in points of interest that are considered meaningful between group one and group two, the value of which is the researcher's judgment or determination based on logical and ethical provisions ($12.58 - 9.58 = 3$)
- Y = Correction factor due to repeated measurements
- G = Number of measurements before randomization, the number of which is determined by the researcher (set 1 time, $G=1$)
- H = Number of measurements after randomization, the number of which is determined by the researcher (set 3 times, $H=3$)
- P = Intra-class correlation which is the

correlation between measurements whose value is determined by the researcher

According to the calculation formula provided, the sample size for the study was determined to be 47 female workers in the weaving section of IT Co. Ltd., Surakarta, Indonesia, who meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria. These criteria include being willing to be a respondent for 13 days of data collection, being a permanent worker in the weaving section, operating a weaving machine 8 hours/day, not experiencing illness during data collection, having a working period of more than two years, and having a salary above the regional minimum wage.

Previous studies on stress interventions have only used one pre-test and one post-test, which is insufficient to describe the day-to-day trend of decreasing stress caused by interventions to reduce noise. This research provides an overview of decreasing work-related stress which could also be attributed to the trend of lowering noise intensity. This research measured exposure to noise intensity and work-related stress during 13 days of data collection in August 2021. This study was carried out in 2 phases. The first phase measured noise intensity and work-related stress before the intervention on day 1 (pre). The second phase involved 12 days of measuring noise intensity after installing coconut fiber sound-absorbing material in the weaving room, starting from day 2 (post) until day 13 (post).

Data was collected for measurements for one day prior to the instillation of sound absorbing material to 12 days post instillation while employees were operating the weaving machine. Each participant operates two weaving machines,

with 4 points measuring noise intensity in their work area. The first point is in front of the first machine, the second is in front of the second machine, the third is behind the first machine, and the fourth is behind the second machine. Each measurement point is taken, recording noise intensity for 60 seconds, then calculating Leq of environmental noise intensity for each worker according to SNI 7231-2009 with a reference time of 8 hours working and 1 hour resting. Similar recording were noted on all the days of measurement.

Sound-absorbing material was made from coconut fiber; the fiber is extracted using a machine that decomposes coconut coir and then compressed for an hour. The dimensions are 30 cm long, 30 cm wide, and 3 cm thick. The surface is flat and fibrous to maximize the surface area for sound absorption. This sound-absorbing substance has a latex blend to boost its heat, water, and humidity resilience.

Noise intensity measurement using sound level meter EXTECH 407750 with units of measurement decibels (dB). The measure of work-related stress using Mi Band 5 Fitness Tracker with stress scores ranging from 1 to 100. Stress can be categorized into four criteria based on the total score, including mild (1-25), moderate (26-50), severe (51-75), and very severe (76-100). Pre- and post-series data were analyzed using the Friedman test with SPSS 23.

Results

The study was conducted in IT Co. Ltd., especially in the weaving section. Total of 13 measurements were taken, one pre intervention and 12 post intervention during the morning shift. Table 1 shows the noise intensity measurement pre- and post-intervention.

Table 1: Friedman's test of noise intensity before and after installation of sound-absorbing material in the weaving section

Measurement Day	Noise Intensity (dB)					Sig.(p)	N
	Mean	SD	Min	Max			
1(pre)	103.58	2.20	100.60	108.60	<0.001	47	
2(post)	92.46	1.52	90.10	95.80			
3(post)	92.47	1.53	89.50	96.00			
4(post)	92.41	1.59	89.60	95.90			
5(post)	93.70	1.79	89.90	97.40			
6(post)	93.37	1.79	90.00	97.70			
7(post)	93.58	1.57	90.20	96.20			
8(post)	93.18	1.97	87.80	96.10			
9(post)	92.36	1.24	90.00	95.40			
10(post)	92.29	1.30	89.50	95.60			
11(post)	92.38	1.28	90.00	95.30			

12(post)	92.48	1.45	89.90	95.90
13(post)	92.43	1.63	89.80	96.20

Table 2: Friedman's test of work-related stress before and after installation of sound-absorbing material in the weaving section

Measurement Day	Work-related stress					Sig.(p)	N
	Mean	SD	Min	Max			
1(pre)	72.83	17.00	41	99	0.022	47	
2(post)	65.81	14.60	28	98			
3(post)	65.28	11.97	30	84			
4(post)	64.62	11.04	40	89			
5(post)	67.06	12.81	40	88			
6(post)	67.21	12.25	39	89			
7(post)	65.21	13.42	40	89			
8(post)	63.49	12.96	39	86			
9(post)	68.72	12.67	37	90			
10(post)	64.57	11.44	47	93			
11(post)	65.45	14.36	39	89			
12(post)	65.85	11.04	48	92			
13(post)	65.79	13.39	44	95			

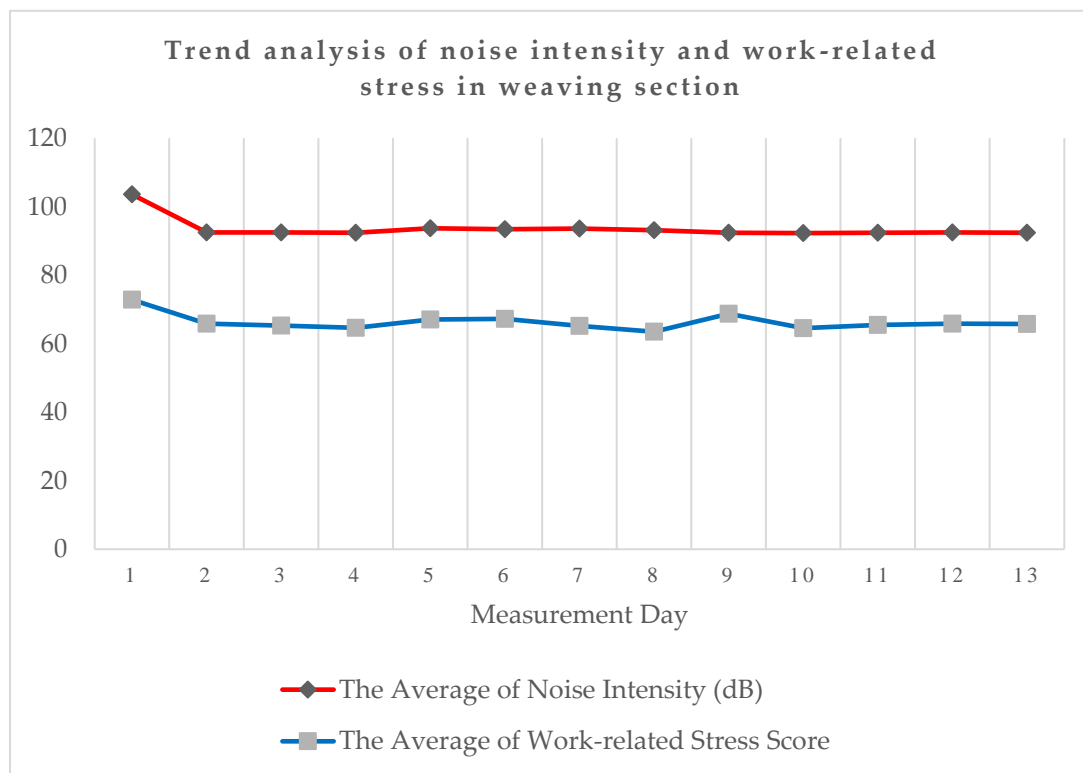


Figure 1: The Trend Analysis of Noise Intensity and Work-related Stress in Weaving Section IT Co. Ltd

Based on Table 2, on day one before the installation of sound-absorbing material, the average work-related stress score on day one pre-intervention, the work-related stress score reached 72.83; after the intervention, there was a significant decrease in work-related stress scores ($p=0.022$). The lowest average work-related stress was on day 8 (post), with the lowest average

reduction of 9.34. Figure 1 shows the trend analysis of noise intensity and work-related stress for 13 days of measurement.

Based on Figure 1, the intervention of installing sound-absorbing material on the second to thirteenth day had a positive trend in reducing the average noise intensity and work-related stress score compared to the first day before the

intervention.

Discussion

Noise is an unwelcome sound that bothers workers in the workplace.²⁵ It can come from machinery, manufacturing processes, assembly lines, and building sites. At some levels, noise can harm people's physical and psychological well-being.²⁶ Due to the spinning and weaving processes, the textile sector can produce a high level of noise.²⁷ One of Surakarta's leading textile companies, IT Co. Ltd, has noise issues that affect the health of its employees.²⁸ The weaving room has a lot of noise, particularly with the weaving machine in operation.²⁹ As a result of sound waves reflecting off the floor and walls and creating echoes, which can magnify the original sound, the noise level in the space can increase.³⁰ Forming a constructive interference noise pattern by reflecting sound waves with a similar medium and frequency will raise the sound intensity level.³¹ In an effort to minimize noise, sound-absorbing materials can be applied to the walls. It can absorb sound energy and turn it into heat, and the effect of sound reflecting through the wall can be lessened.³²

The installation of sound-absorbing material from coconut fiber can reduce noise intensity, but it cannot lower noise levels to an acceptable level of 85 dB. The lowest average reduction of 11.29 dB was recorded on day 10 (post), with the lowest average noise level. Numerous studies have shown natural fiber as a valuable material for sound absorption.³³ As a result of the benefit of preserving ecologically friendly conditions and the risk of these materials being lower than synthetic fibers already marketed on the market, using natural fibers as an industrial sound absorption material is now a new research trend.^{15,34} One of the natural fibers that have demonstrated its capacity to absorb sound at high frequencies in numerous experiments is coconut fiber.¹⁵ Coconut fiber has a high lignin concentration (40.5–45.8%),¹⁴ making it more robust, elastic, and denser than other natural fibers. As a result, it has a sound absorption coefficient that can reach 0.7 at high frequencies.³⁵

The Friedman's test showed a significant decrease in noise intensity ($p < 0.001$) and work-related stress scores ($p = 0.022$) from day 1 to day 13. The installation of sound-absorbing material as part of engineering control, in the form of adjustments to environmental conditions, especially to reduce environmental stressors. In a previous study, noise can cause stress after continuous exposure for 3 hours. This exposure felt by workers will

interfere with communication, psychological pressure, and assessment of external stimuli. If the adjustment or adaptation of workers is not going well, it will trigger stress.³⁶ These studies align with research in Turkey that reducing noise can reduce psychological disorders and stress for workers and visitors.³⁷

Prolonged stressful conditions without corrective or countermeasures will increase the risk of various physiological and psychological disorders.³⁸ Pressure and stressors that individuals receive will be processed at the psychological level first; then, they will be processed physiologically. These physiological changes will disrupt homeostatic processes due to the cortisol hormone, causing the body to prepare or run to face threats.^{39,40}

The secretion of cortisol hormones can cause an increase in blood pressure and decrease the body's immune. In addition, this condition also triggers the adrenocortical system to be activated, causing Corticotropin Releasing Factor (CRF) to be secreted into the pituitary gland, thus triggering the secretion of serotonin and melatonin. Serotonin secretion can affect changes in the feelings, behavior levels, and depression levels of an individual, while melatonin secretion can also cause sleep disturbances, awareness, and mood in individuals.⁴¹

Preventing accidents and work-related diseases in the workplace is very important and must be a priority for leaders and workers. Company management must provide efforts to prevent this from happening to its employees.^{42–44}

Conclusions

Installing sound-absorbing material made from coconut fiber on the second to thirteenth day positively reduced the average noise intensity and work-related stress score compared to the first day before the intervention. The study also showed a significant difference in the average noise intensity and work-related stress before and after installing the sound-absorbing materials. Sound-absorbing materials from coconut fiber can be used as an alternative in overcoming noise problems and their effects on health at a lower cost and easier to install. This study has certain limitations, as it's only possible to install sound-absorbing materials on wall surfaces. The installation on floor and roof surfaces is not feasible as it may interfere with weaving operations. However, it's recommended to consider installing sound absorbers as engine covers in future studies, which could be an

additional control to reduce noise exposure to a safe limit of 85 dB.

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