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# Stress as a Catalyst: The Influence of Wellbeing and Emotional Intelligence on Employee Performance

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#### **ABSTRACT**

**Background of the study:** Recent World Health Organization (WHO) studies indicate that nearly 12 billion workdays lose value annually due to psychological burdens, resulting in a \$1 trillion loss in productivity. The study's primary objective is to evaluate the integrated model of employee job performance regarding job stress, well-being, and emotional intelligence within mediated and moderated settings, utilising the JD-R theory framework.

**Methodology:** The study used 379 respondents from the service sector of Pakistan who opted for a purposive sampling technique. Responses were recorded using a closed-ended questionnaire with partial least square path analysis to analyse the data.

**Results:** Job stress increases employees' performance with well-being as a mediator, according to this study. In contrast, emotional intelligence had no substantial moderating effect. However, previous studies indicate that emotional intelligence helps employees handle pressure in desperate situations, improving performance.

Conclusions: The study showed that workplace dynamics are strongly interconnected, allowing managers to view job stress as a catalyst for improving employee performance while keeping an eye on well-being. Although emotional intelligence is not moderate, it can drive employees to meet their goals. Thus, managers may have long-term organisational success by adopting these findings and creating a workplace that emphasises productivity and human experience.

#### ARTICLE HISTORY

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#### KEYWORDS

Job stress, emotional intelligence, job performance, well-being, work culture, environment.

## Introduction

Employee stress increases with the escalation of workload and organisational challenges (Jimmieson et al., 2021). As the recent trends unfold, employers' concerns are also on the rise as they fear the potential negative impacts of remote work on employee performance (Jaiswal et al., 2024). With this increasing adoption of remote work culture globally, not only has the rate of home working highly increased, but it has also created significant mental and physical discomfort for

employees of various organisations (Babapour Chafi et al., 2021). Mental health conditions heavily influence Employees' performance (Rosado-Solomon et al., 2023)

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The swift shift in work demands has heightened exhaustion rates and shaped distress among employees who may be unprepared for the latest automation processes, directly impacting their performance (Leo et al., 2023). Recent studies show that organisations are usually heterogeneous and have a turbulent environment where many stressors influence employees' work performance (Verlinden et al., 2023). Although stress is generally seen as something pessimistic (Schwarzer & Reuter, 2023), it can also enhance performance in some cases (Junça Silva & Lopes, 2023). As the remote work trend accelerated during the pandemic on the recommendation of the World Health Organization (WHO) (2019), it is continuing post-pandemic, and the proportion of employees working from home increased significantly (Barrero et al., 2023); this shift saw an increase in home working from 5% to over 30% across the globe.

In the past 2 years, many studies have been conducted to help identify the factors that may or may not influence the long-discussed association between an employee's performance and stress related to a job. Ning et al. (2023) presented their study, which discussed job satisfaction and presenteeism as mediators between job stress and turnover then Ungurean et al. (2024) showcased their point of view on this debate by addressing moderating roles of job security and financial dependency in the relationship between job stress, burnout, and turnover intentions. The most recent study has been conducted by Zhou et al. 2024 to mitigate factors for burnout through a stress mindset. Despite all this contribution, the mediated moderated role of worker well-being and emotional quotient upon work stress and employee conduct remained unaddressed, highlighted by Batool et al. 2023 in their study while discussing the case of the banking sector in Pakistan. So, the study fills the highlighted gap and offers new insights to understand stress management and employee performance better.

Whereas JD-R frameworks are limited in examining the interaction of job stress and performance, they lack the integration of employee well-being and emotional intelligence as mediators and/or moderators. This is a significant contribution towards the theory as emotional intelligence and well-being tend to significantly influence how an employee manages stress in a high-pressure work environment. The current literature review does not have sufficient evidence to support this dual influence within a single model. It leaves a theoretical gap, which is the aim of this study. While the focus remains on low-middle-income countries like Pakistan, this study also provides insights for supervisors and human resource scholars regarding the significance of welfare in organisations and the worth of employees having a high emotional quotient.

This study aims to investigate and explore the complex link between work-related stress and employee accomplishments and performance within dynamic work environments, laying stress on the impact of stress on productivity and decision-making across various work areas. We aim to explore how employee well-being aligns with the relationship between job stress and employee performance outcomes. Moreover, the research analyses the moderating role of emotional intelligence in this context, examining how it empowers employees to manage stress effectively while sustaining their performance. Ultimately, this study will provide thorough knowledge about the integrated impact of job stress, well-being, and emotional intelligence on an employee's performance in high-pressure workplaces, focusing more on interactions within digitally driven and hybrid work environments.

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# **Literature Review**

## **Relation of Job Stress with Well-being**

The affiliation between job stress and well-being was initially taken into notice and recorded by (Cooper and Marshall, 1976). whoted that work-related stress has a strong influence on the health and well-being of an employee. However, Karasek's model is taken into use by Luo, 1999 to affirm the study that opposes the hypothesis as compiled that mentioned four items of the scale of social conflict to affect the whole model proposed. Moreover, it is stated in a few other studies that there is an adverse connection between work tension or work-related stress and the welfare of an employee (Rabkin & Struening, 1976). Jamal, 1998 defines in his study that job stress is a crucial factor that impacts employee well-being and health in industrialised countries. However, the evidence is very low in low-middle-income countries like Pakistan due to less emphasis on empirical studies. In conclusion (Jamal, 1998) reported an adverse connection between employee well-being and work-related stress, adopted by two more known (Jain et al. 2009). Preceding studies lead us to propose the hypothesis below:

H1: There is an inverse correlation between job stress and employee well-being.

# **Relation of Job Stress with Employee Performance**

Numerous research papers around the globe have specifically mentioned job stress as one of the elementary reasons behind an organisation's underperformance. The study of Ramli, 2019 is part of the discussion in which the researchers expressed their immense concerns about the importance of job stress faced by the staff members in the health sector and categorically mentioned how adversely it affects their performance. Warm et al., 2018 indicate that the main reason behind job stress is that an individual, because of his less capacity or inexperience towards handling workload pressure, ends up bearing the workload and develops an uneasy feeling or attitude toward work within himself based upon similar situations (S. L. Dolan, 2023) concludes his study by stating that the person goes into an agitated frame of mind which is highly adverse for the targeted performance, physically as well as psychologically. Hence, work-related stress can be singled out as a frame of mind that disturbs employees' cognitive processes in response to the uneasiness they experience fueled by the agitated job environment. (Roman, 2023). The literature review endorsed the opinion that job stress is negatively linked with the performance of an employee, which leads us to suggest the hypothesis below:

H2: Job stress has a negative influence on employee performance.

# Well-being as a Mediator concerning Job Stress and Employee Performance

In earlier studies, investigators had considered the complete concept of happiness to recognise the highly composite structure of employees' well-being (Elsamani et al., 2023). Employee well-being is a straightforward concept about how an individual feels about mental and physical satisfaction (Khalid & Syed, 2024). Many studies have suggested that it comprises psychological elements such as emotions, anxiety, and depression (Park et al., 2023). Various research studies demonstrate that workplace stress has an adverse effect on employee well-being and organisational performance (J. Priya et al., 2023). While a substantial amount of research examines and supports the relationship between job stress and well-being, relatively few studies have explored the combined impact of job stress and well-being on job performance. As proposed earlier, job stress has a negative effect on an individual's ability to perform well. With well-being as a key factor, examining it as a mediating relationship would be essential.

H3: Well-being plays a positive mediation role between job stress and employee performance.



# Emotional Intelligence as Moderator in Relation with Job Stress, Well-being

In the present era, scholars are analysing how important emotional intelligence is in the workplace. They have suggested that emotionally intense individuals can outperform others and are more satisfied with their work (Mustafa et al., 2023). (Deb et al., 2023) explored the role of job satisfaction in the relationship between emotional intelligence, job performance, and work etiquette, finding an important connection between these factors. Acknowledging the various definitions of these concepts is pivotal to thoroughly ensuring emotional intelligence and well-being.

Ryff and Keyes., (1995) study reported that positive or negative effects cannot solely stipulate well-being; it also confines a comprehensive state of being stress-free and not encountering psychological challenges like anxiety. Additionally, research on well-being highlights various factual and impractical constructs (Ryff, 1989). The factors highlighted above are key in deciding overall psychological self-esteem. The embracement of Ryff's psychological self-esteem concept in this study is based on its multidimensional nature.

So, as emotional intelligence continues to catch the eye, scholars recognise its role in equipping individuals with the necessary skills to enhance their well-being (Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2016). This study focuses on emotional intelligence due to its ability to be measured using different instruments (Petrides et al., 2007). Based on the above literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Well-being plays a direct relation with job performance.

H5: Emotional intelligence is a significant moderator between job stress and well-being.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

Job stress has always been a topic of discussion amongst scholars in the management field. It is an interesting area for research within an organisation, as different scholars explore various factors that influence employee performance. Many key models and theories provide insight into how job characteristics shape employee experiences, stress levels, and outcomes. Herzberg F., 1968 underline the significant role of job features in influencing employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Herzberg categorises these characteristics into those that promote growth and ease discontent, such as social support and peer relations. (Oldham, 1976) further highlights that job features like job significance and feedback have the potential to drive employee motivation.

One of the most supporting frameworks for knowing how the attributes of a job affect stress and performance is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. The JD-R model organises job characteristics into two broad categories: job demands and resources. As described (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), job demands refer to emotional, conceptual, and physical aspects of work that need continuous and sustained effort, often resulting in stress. In contrast, job resources support employees in fulfilling work objectives, reducing the impact of demands, and fostering personal growth. The JD-R model operates through two key processes: the stress process, where high demands coupled with low resources lead to adverse outcomes such as exhaustion, and the motivational process, where an abundance of resources enhances well-being and commitment (Schaufeli et al., 2009).

This model is relevant in understanding job stress and performance, as it captures the dual impact of demand and resources. Job resources—such as supportive relationships, chances for professional development, and task variety—can counterbalance these demands, reducing stress and promoting employee well-being (Bakker et al., 2007).

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This study focuses on the well-being of employees, which emerges as a vital mediating element between job stress and job performance. Concerning the JD-R model, well-being plays a central role in determining employees' management of demands and use of available resources. High job demands with inadequate resources can erode well-being, leading to high levels of stress and lower performance (Mudrak et al., 2018). Contrarily, it is to be noted that when an employee receives maximum levels of well-being, they are more resilient, better able to cope with stress, and more likely to maintain or even improve their performance levels.

As defined by Daniel Goleman in 1995, emotional intelligence is the potential to identify, understand, and manage one's emotions and those of others. Employees with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to channel the emotional challenges of the workplace, manage stress effectively, and enhance their use of job resources (R. K. Cooper, 1997). Through effective communication, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation skills, individuals with high EI can better cope with demanding situations, resulting in enhanced well-being and improved job performance.

For instance, the JD-R theory provides an extensive framework for examining the complex interplay between job stress and job performance, with employee well-being serving as a negotiator and emotional intelligence as a moderator. The model acknowledges that while excessive job demands can lead to stress and reduce performance, job resources amplified by emotional intelligence can mitigate these adverse effects, enhance well-being, and improve performance outcomes. This makes the JD-R model the most suitable theory for analysing how job stress influences performance, particularly when considering the moderating role of emotional intelligence and the mediating role of employee well-being.

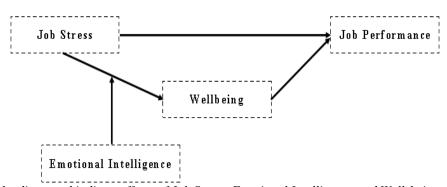


Figure 01: depicts the direct and indirect effects of Job Stress, Emotional Intelligence and Well-being on Job Performance.

# Methodology

This study follows a quantitative approach to examine the relationships; the data was collected by targeting 500 employees of different companies, resulting in 379 valid responses from 128 females and 251 males. This cross-sectional representation across job levels provides healthy data for examining job performance factors within hierarchical settings, adding depth to the analysis of job stress, well-being, emotional intelligence, and job performance in different roles.

Given the unknown population size, the study follows Sekaran's (2003) guideline, based on Roscoe's (1975) rule of thumb, which recommends sample sizes between 30 and 500. Sub-samples were created for gender and job level categories, providing more detailed insights. A convenient sampling technique was chosen to engage respondents who were most relevant and willing to share insights into workplace dynamics.

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The research instrument, a validated closed-ended questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale, was used where job stress was adopted from the questionnaire used by Frantz and Holmgren (2019). Job Performance questions have been adapted from the questionnaire used by Li et al. (2019). Moreover, the Well-being questions have been adopted from the questionnaire by Evangelicals & Alliance (2015). However, the questions of emotional intelligence have been adapted from the questionnaire used by Yin et al. (2016). Before proceeding with the primary analysis, the data was checked for normality, linearity, and multicollinearity. Partial Least Squares (PLS) path modelling was conducted using SmartPLS v.4.1. software, with a two-step model validation process. It involved assessing individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity to ensure a rigorous and reliable foundation for interpreting this study's findings.

# **Results and Data Analysis**

The Outer Loadings reported in this study should be analysed, the reliability of every item should be described, and the total contribution of individual items towards the entire construct should be described. Hair et al., 2014 have suggested that the external loadings of variables have to be equal to or more than 0.7; only then will it be considered consistent. The elements clear the soundness test against each element, reflecting more significant numbers than 0.7, as seen in Table 01. Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha are the predefined tests used to identify the inner steadiness reliability of the variables. The study by Bagozzi & Yi 1988 shows that Cronbach's Alpha and Composite reliability (CR) should be greater than 0.7. The results of this research also clarify the internal consistency element as Composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha of the variables used in this paper lie between 0.7 and 0.9. The average Variance Extracted (AVE) rating was used to check the convergent validity per the Chin 1998 study, which suggested the values of AVE for construction must be equal to or greater than 0.5. The average variance extracted is also reflected in Table 1, as it also cleared the mandatory criteria of 0.60 and 0.69.

Item	Outer Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach Alpha
EI 1	0.827	0.657	0.930	0.912
EI 2	0.854			
EI 3	0.775			
EI 4	0.792			
EI 5	0.891			
EI 6	0.840			
EI 7	0.679			
JP 1	0.717	0.604	0.820	0.701
JP 2	0.807			
JP 3	0.804			
JS 1	0.627	0.668	0.855	0.741
JS 2	0.900			
JS 3	0.896			
WB 1	0.800	0.658	0.920	0.898
WB 2	0.828			
WB 3	0.778			
WB 4	0.801			
WB 5	0.870			
WB 6	0.783			

Table 01: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), Outer Loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) results as per SmartPLS v.4.1

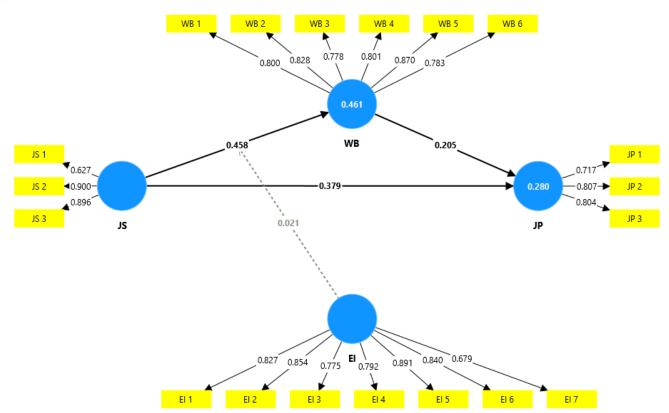


Figure 02: SmartPLS v.4.1 and Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), Outer Loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) results

It is vital to find the validity of the latent variables as they were developed in diverse geographical locations. The Heterotrait-Monotraits (HTMT) ratio is a measure designed to assess discriminant validity in structural equation modelling (SEM) and was introduced by Jorg Henseler, Christian M. Ringle, and Marko Sarstedt in 2015. This approach provides a more reliable discriminant validity measure than the older Fornell-Larcker criterion, which often lacked sensitivity in variance-based SEM frameworks. The study of Henseler et al. (2015) describes the values of HTMT in detail, which states that the values below 0.85 indicate acceptable discriminant validity between the constructs. A threshold of 0.90 may be applied when more rigorous differentiation is required. Thus, in table 02, it can satisfy the requirement of discriminant validity.

	EI	EP	JS	WB	DV Decision
<b>Emotional Intelligence</b>					
<b>Employee Performance</b>	0.526				"Supported"
Job Stress	0.512	0.665			"Supported"
Well-being	0.552	0.493	0.721		"Supported"

Table 02: Heterotrait-monotraits ratio (HTMT) – matrix (Discriminant Validity)

In Table 03, the results of the path analysis reflect that job stress positively supports employee performance since the p-value is 0.000 and the value of the statistics is more than 1.96.



Relationship	T Statistics	P - Value	Status
<b>Direct Effect</b>			
EI> WB	7.039	0.000	Significant
JS> JP	11.845	0.000	Significant
WB> JP	4.176	0.000	Significant
JS>WB	8,383	0.000	Significant

Table 03(a): Direct Effect Results

However, the results of mediating effects indicate that employee well-being is directly related to employee performance and job stress. However, no moderating effects of emotional intelligence have been found between Job stress and employee well-being.

Variables	T Statistics	P – Value	Status
JS> WB> JP	3.500	0.000	Significant
$EI \times JS \longrightarrow WB$	0.587	(0.557)	Not Significant

Table 03(b): Mediating/Moderating Effects

In table 04, the results highlight adequate predictive relevance as the value of  $Q^2$  is 0.15 and for mediation is 0.33, respectively.

Variable	Q <sup>2</sup> (=1-SSE/SSO)	R Square Adjusted
<b>Employee Performance</b>	0.159	0.276
Well-being	0.338	0.457

Table 04: Predictive Relevance (Q square) and Coefficient of Determination (R square)

The thumb rule of R square states that more than 0.67 is to be elevated, and the value between 0.33 and 0.67 is to be denoted as average following Chin's 1988 study. Chart number 5 identifies that major factors affecting employee performance are only 29% variation in the dependent variable and 54.1% in the intervening variable.

	Employee Performance	Well-being
Emotional Intelligence		0.311
Job Stress	0.143	0.194
Well-being	0.047	

Table 05: Results of F square

According to Cohen (1988), an  $F^2$  value of 0.02 indicates a small effect, 0.15 is a medium effect, and 0.35 is a significant effect. The result discloses that emotional intelligence affects well-being as the  $F^2$  value is 0.311, highlighting its crucial role in enhancing employee mental health. Job stress shows medium effects on employee performance; the  $F^2$  value is 0.143, and Well-being the well-being  $F^2$  value is 0.194, indicating that managing stress is essential for maintaining employee productivity and satisfaction. Finally, Well-being has a negligible effect on Emotional Intelligence. The  $F^2$  value is 0.047, suggesting a weaker reciprocal relationship.

# **Discussion and Conclusion**

The study's findings reveal a significant positive relation between job stress and employee performance, with well-being as a mediator. However, the moderating role of emotional intelligence in



this relationship was found to be insignificant. The Yerkes-Dodson Law, as utilised by (Hanoch and Vitouch, 2004), provides a theoretical basis for understanding these results, suggesting that optimal stress levels may improve employee performance. (Oakman et al., 2020) Further support these findings by showcasing how organisations benefit from such policies that effectively alleviate employee stress, especially when navigating the complexities of remote work expectations. However, balancing these policies is essential, as excessive demands, even with increased flexibility, can lead to heightened stress, undermining performance. Consistent with these findings, (Colligan Higgins, 2006) emphasises job stress as a cognitive burden triggered by workplace regulations that impede employee focus and efficiency. However, the findings of this study indicate that emotional intelligence holds no significant impact while moderating the relationship between job stress and well-being. On the other hand, studies suggest that individuals with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle job stress and workload pressures, ultimately enhancing their performance (Harry, 2021). Emotional intelligence incorporates skills that allow individuals to recognise, regulate, and express emotions constructively, reducing stress and fostering positive interpersonal interactions. This skill set is critical in promoting a supportive work environment and, as a result, enhancing employee engagement and motivation (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017).

# **Limitation & Future Directions**

This study is subject to certain limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the specimen size was relatively small. Hence, it may restrict the rationality and soundness of the findings. Additionally, the fragmentary nature of the collected data reflects a specific point in time, limiting insights into how job stress and well-being may evolve. Future research should focus on increasing the sample size to enhance the results' strength and reliability and broader general locations. Furthermore, exploring various variables, such as job burden and burnout, could give a more competitive interpretation of employee performance dynamics.

## **Author's Contribution**

Conception or Design: Aziz Ahmed, Dr Ghulam Muhammad, Farhad Jalali, Fahad Riaz

**Data Collection and processing, Analysis or Interpretation of Data:** Farhad Jalali, Fahad Riaz, Uzma Omer, Dr Aamir Feroz Shamsi, Dr Ghulam Muhammad

Manuscript Writing & Approval: Dr Aamir Feroz Shamsi, Dr Ghulam Muhammad, Aziz Ahmed, Farhad Jalali, Fahad Riaz

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