

## Perceived Stress as Mediator for Adjustment Problems and Job Satisfaction among Employees

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### Abstract

*The primary objective is to compare the level of perceived stress, adjustment issues such as depression, anxiety, and conduct problems, along with job satisfaction among employees working in various organizations. In this cross-sectional research, doctors, teachers, bankers, and soldiers were approached in hospitals, schools, banks, and army units, respectively, situated in Gujrat, Jhelum, and Kharian. A sample of 160 working individuals with the age range between 21 to 59 years (males=116 and females=44) were selected by purposive sampling. We used Urdu versions of the Perceived Stress Scale by Tahira and Kausar (2013), the Scale of Adjustment Problems for Adults (SAPA, Naz, Bano, & Laghari, 2018), and the Job Satisfaction Survey by Shahzad (2010) to collect the data. The results revealed a significant negative correlation between perceived stress, adjustment problems, and job satisfaction. However, a significant positive correlation was observed between perceived stress and employee adjustment problems. Hierarchical regression analysis revealed perceived stress as a complete mediator between adjustment problems and employee job satisfaction. Bankers have been found to suffer from high stress and adjustment problems, whereas teachers seem to have the lowest job satisfaction. Implications are discussed in the light of the research findings.*

**Keywords:** Anxiety, Mediator; Perceived Stress; Job Satisfaction; Analysis of a Moment Structures.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Previous research has empirically posited a firm correlation between organizational productivity and financial development with employees' psychological wellbeing and job satisfaction. The higher the level of job satisfaction and wellbeing in employees, the greater would be the productivity and revenue generation in the organization (Bhatti & Qureshi, 2007; Bianchi, 2012; Burton *et al.*, 2008; Drobnič *et al.*, 2010; Kahn & Langlieb, 2003; Kassenboehmer, & Schmidt, 2011). An inverse correlation is found between wellbeing and depression, anxiety, and conduct-related issues (Smith *et al.*, 2020; Fairchild *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, variables such as stress, depression,

anxiety, and conduct problems are crucial for study to peep into their impact on job satisfaction, thereby reciprocally affecting organizational performance and productivity. With the advancements in science and technology, people's lifestyles have changed. Stress has become inevitable, and individuals can suffer from stress due to any precipitating reasons (such as conflicts with others, being overwhelmed, and inability to cope effectively) present either at home or in occupation. Stress is defined as a threatening drive that upsets the person's equilibrium and leads to biochemical changes resulting in behaviour variations, thereby diminishing the person's coping resources (Bhargava & Trivedi, 2018; Shahsavarani *et al.*, 2015; Jehangir *et al.*, 2011). The perceived stress might lead to many outcomes, such as memory problems, focusing only on negative things and sadness or despondency, nervousness, mood swings, irritation, rage, speechlessness, solitude, and separation from others. There are specific physical issues encountered after stress, such as aches, discomfort, stomach problems, vomiting, shakiness, pain in the chest, increased heart rate, and lack of sexual motivation. Finally, behaviour-related problems such as reduced eating and sleeping patterns are evident (Help Guide, 2019).

The perceived stress, measured by the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen S, Kamarck T, Mermelstein R. A global measure of perceived stress. *J Health Soc Behav.* 1983; 24:385–96.) affect the job satisfaction of professionals (Vinothkumar M, Arathi A, Joseph M, Nayana P, Jishma EJ, Sahana U. Coping, perceived stress, and job satisfaction among medical interns: The mediating effect of mindfulness. *Industrial Psychiatry Journal.* 2016 Jul;25(2):195-201; Akyurt N. Job satisfaction and perceived stress among radiology technicians: a questionnaire survey about sociodemographic and occupational risk factors. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health.* 2021 Oct; 94:1617-26.). The high organizational performance is contingent on the workers' perceived job satisfaction, which in turn is linked to their mental health (internally) and stress-free environmental conditions (externally). Prior research has established an association between stress and job satisfaction. Stress can result in poor job performance, thereby causing low job satisfaction among working people (Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992; Babin & Boles, 1996; Jaramillo *et al.*, 2006).

Job satisfaction is conceptually considered to be the attitude, positive or negative, a person has about the job. The term also embraced the feeling and emotional component one experiences as liking or disliking the various aspects of one's work (Aziri, 2011; Singh & Jain, 2013; Thiagaraj & Thangaswamy, 2017). There are three main elements of job satisfaction. The first component is evaluative, which is a general response of a person towards his/her organization, for example, an employee's liking or disliking of the organization. The second element is cognitive, in which people's thinking patterns, perceptions, judgment, originated beliefs, and expectations towards the organization are measured. The last element is affective, which is linked with a

person's induced feelings about his/her organization. The positive feeling is induced by proper information and a response from the employer.

Further, organization situations that enhance a person's self-esteem and self-concept also originate positive feelings (IEduNote, 2019). According to Singh and Jain (2013), different factors associated with job satisfaction may include policies of compensation and advantages, job safeguards, working conditions, association with the manager, promotion and career development, leadership style, working group, and personal variables. Several researchers have found a negative correlation between job satisfaction and experiences of depression and anxiety among employees (Salma & Hasan, 2020; Poursadeghiyan *et al.*, 2016; Yilmaz, 2018).

Depression, anxiety, and conduct-related issues are expressed in the form of adjustment problems. These are changes related to the emotional and behavioural manifestations of an inability to cope with the stressors that occur three months after encountering the stressors. It can be defined as unusual reactions to stressful events or responses. Adjustment problems are specified with depression symptoms that may include low mood, feelings of hopelessness, or tearfulness. Further, it is specified with anxiety comprising symptoms of worry, jitteriness, or separation. Finally, the conduct disturbance specifier has incorporated conduct-related issues (American Psychiatric Association, 2023). Adjustment problems are explained as the group of conditions in which a person is unable to satisfy his psychological, social, and biological needs successfully and faces an imbalance between the expectation of society and personal needs, resulting in the disturbance of psycho-equilibrium and manifested in terms of depression, anxiety, and conduct problems (Srivastava, & Singha, 2017).

The previous research confirmed the role of stress in developing adjustment problems in terms of depression, anxiety, and psychoticism, thereby resulting in poor job satisfaction among police officers (Singleton & Teahan, 1977). The adjustment problems of rescue workers were studied about posttraumatic stress disorder and job satisfaction (North *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, few researchers have focused on exploring perceived stress in the context of the health of individuals and their adjustment that could result in the acquisition of inner dissatisfaction or, more particularly, job dissatisfaction (Watson *et al.*, 1987; Williams *et al.*, 2001). Adjustment mechanism is elucidated as a scheme by which a person reduces his anxiety and tension for adjustment which helps in regaining the mental health. Everyone encounters stress, but if a person feels difficulty in coping with these stressors, then adjustment problems take place. In this way, different types of adjustment strategies are used based on stressors that an individual faces. However, if the individual fails, these adjustment problems lead to serious psychological adjustment disorders in return. It is linked with the emergence of depression and anxiety (Carta *et al.*, 2009; Casey, 2009). Therefore, profound stress has

been found to pave the grounds for the emergence of depression (Yang *et al.*, 2015). High levels of stress are linked with hostility, anxiety, and depression (Mohammad, 2014).

Several researchers have found an empirical relationship between job satisfaction and individual adjustment. Adjustment and job satisfaction among 60 white-collar workers were found with the help of a Job Satisfaction Questionnaire and Saxena's Adjustment Inventory. The product-moment correlation of the two variables ( $r=.52$ ) indicated that workers who were satisfied tended to have better scores on adjustment, and those less satisfied were generally poorer in their adjustment (Sinha & Agarwala, 1970). Another study explored the relationship between adjustment and job satisfaction among 400 teachers (256 males and 144 females). It was found that there was a positive correlation (.404) between teacher adjustment and job satisfaction (Halder & Roy, 2018). Prior research has considered the positive aspect of adjustment as it is thought to be human resilience to adapt to given environmental conditions.

The current study foresees the role of perceived stress in mediating the relationship between adjustment problems and job satisfaction among employees. The implications of the study based on the investigation of relational significance among three variables would shed light on policymakers' development of strategic intervention plans accordingly, thereby increasing productivity and adding to per capita income. The hypotheses of the study are

1. The higher the perceived stress and adjustment problems, the lower employee job satisfaction.
2. Perceived stress will mediate the relationship between adjustment problems and employee job satisfaction.
3. There will be significant differences in stress, adjustment problems, and job satisfaction among different professionals.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Participants

A sample of 160 working individuals (males=116, 72.5%; females=44, 27.5%) was selected by purposive sampling from different organizations (hospitals, schools, banks, army units). Their age ranged from 21 to 59 years ( $M=32$ ,  $SD= 7.71$ ), and their monthly income ranged from 15,000 PKR to 200,000 PKR. The inclusion criteria for employees focused on qualification  $\geq$  intermediate and  $>$  one year of work experience. Exclusion criteria qualify as less than intermediate and have work experience of less than a year.

### 2.2. Instruments

Three standardized scales were used in addition to a demographic sheet.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was designed to evaluate individuals' stress levels. Tahira and Kausar (2013) have translated PSS into Urdu. The 14 items are rated on a Likert-type scale, ranging from "0-Never to 4-very often".

The PSS scores ranged from 0-56, with high scores indicating greater perceived stress (Cohen *et al.*, 1983). The findings show good internal consistency (0.83), test-retest reliability (0.73), Spearman-Brown (0.83), and Guttman Split-Half (0.83) reliability coefficient. Further, convergent validity (0.66) and discriminant validity (-0.03) are acceptable in the Pakistani population (Mushtaq & Ahmed, 2020).

Scale of Adjustment Problems for Adults (SAPA) was developed in Urdu to be used with Pakistanis. This scale consisted of 48 items with 8 subscales, namely Depression Physiological, Anxiety Physiological, Depression Cognition, Anxiety Cognition, Conduct Cognition, Depression Behaviour, Anxiety Behaviour, and Conduct Behaviour. The scores ranged from 48 to 144, with high scores indicating adjustment problems. The items are rated on a three-point Likert-type scale ranging from "1=not at all to 3=always". The reliability of the sub-scales was between 0.71 and 0.88 (Naz *et al.*, 2018).

Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) is developed by Spector (1994) with 36 items and 9 subscales: pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating procedure, coworker, nature of work, and communication. The rating is done on a Likert-type scale with "1=strongly disagree to agree" choices (Spector, 1997) and 6= strongly agree. JSS has Cronbach's alpha ( $r = .88, p < .01$ ), split-half ( $r = .87, p < .01$ ), and test-retest reliability after one-week interval ( $r = .80, p < .01$ ). Convergent validities of JSS with Organizational Commitment Questionnaire-Revised Version ( $r = .52, p < .01$ ), Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale ( $r = .55, p < .01$ ) and Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ) was satisfactory in Pakistani population (Abbas, & Khanam, 2020).

### 3.3. Procedure

The study was carried out after obtaining permission from the authors to use the tools. A permission letter was signed by the head of the department and supervisor to collect information from different schools, banks, hospitals, and army units. For the data collection, questionnaires were delivered to 160 respondents from different institutions such as banks, schools, army units, and hospitals of the public and private sectors of Gujrat, Jhelum, and Kharian. Informed consent was obtained from the respondents, and they were given instruments. The anonymity and discretion of the participants were maintained. Data was collected at the feasibility and ease of participants without creating a hindrance in their work. Ethical principles of informed consent and confidentiality were followed strictly during data collection.

### 3. RESULTS

Data was analysed using the SPSS 21 version. The data was screened to check for missing values, and no missing values were found. Cronbach's alpha, range, skewness, mean, standard deviation, and one-way ANOVA with LSD post-hoc analysis was performed to compare stress, adjustment problems, and job satisfaction among professionals. The mediating role of perceived stress between adjustment problems and job satisfaction is analysed in the Analysis of a Moment Structures (AMOS-24) version.

Table 1. Psychometric Properties of Major Scales of the Study(n=160)

Scales	k	Algha	Range		skew
			Potential	Actual	
Perceived Stress Scale	14	.70	0-56	9-52	.45
Scale of Adjustment Problems for Adults	48	.95	48-144	48-132	1.24
Job Satisfaction Survey	36	.85	36-216	84-206	.49

Table 1 shows that Cronbash’s Alpha reliability of the Perceived Stress scale is .70, SAPA's reliability is 0.95, and JSS's reliability is 0.85.

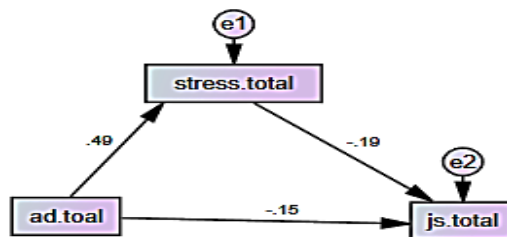
Table 2. Inter-correlation among Scales of the Study (n=160)

Sr.#	Variables	M	SD	2	3
1	Stress	23.20	6.92	.45**	-.27**
2	Adjustment problems	69.21	15.34	-	-.25**
3	Job satisfaction	145.96	24.92	-	-

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows the mean, standard deviation, and Pearson product Moment Correlation Coefficients for stress, adjustment problems, and job satisfaction.

Figure 1. The Mediating Role of Perceived Stress between Adjustment Problems and Job satisfaction among Professionals (n=160).



Note: P. S=Perceived Stress; J. S= Job satisfaction; A.d= Adjustment Problems.

Figure 1 shows that perceived stress served as a complete mediator between adjustment problems and job satisfaction among professionals.

Table 3. One Way ANOVA for Perceived Stress, Adjustment Problems, and Job Satisfaction among Professionals (n=160) df= (3,156).

Variables		N	M	S. D	F	p	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Perceived Stress	Teachers	40	22.97	5.76	3.01	.032	21.13	24.81
	Bankers	40	25.90	7.79			23.40	28.39
	Army	40	21.85	6.62			19.73	23.96
	Doctors	40	22.07	6.84			19.88	24.26
Adjustment Problems	Teachers	40	69.40	13.59	3.44	.018	65.05	73.74
	Bankers	40	74.87	17.97			69.12	80.62
	Army	40	68.42	11.71			64.67	72.17
	Doctors	40	64.17	15.96			59.06	69.28
Job Satisfaction	Teachers	40	139.60	23.41	3.56	.016	132.11	147.08
	Bankers	40	145.25	21.80			138.27	152.22
	Army	40	156.30	25.65			148.09	164.50
	Doctors	40	142.72	26.22			134.33	151.11

Table 4. Post Hoc Analysis (LSD) for Perceived Stress, Adjustment Problems, and Job satisfaction among Professionals (n=160)

Dependent Variable	(I) profession	(J) profession	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Perceived Stress	Teachers	Bankers	-2.92	1.51	.056	-5.92	.07
		Army	1.12	1.51	.460	-1.87	4.12
		Doctors	.90	1.51	.554	-2.10	3.90
	Banker	Army	4.05*	1.51	.008	1.04	7.05
		Doctors	3.82*	1.51	.013	.82	6.82
	Army	Doctors	-.22	1.51	.882	-3.22	2.77
Adjustment Problems	Teachers	Bankers	-5.47	3.35	.105	-12.10	1.15
		Army	.97	3.35	.772	-5.65	7.60
		Doctors	5.22	3.35	.121	-1.40	11.85
	Banker	Army	6.45	3.35	.056	-.17	13.07
		Doctors	10.70*	3.35	.002	4.07	17.32
	Army	Doctors	4.25	3.35	.207	-2.37	10.87
Job Satisfaction	Teachers	Bankers	-5.65	5.44	.301	-16.40	5.10
		Army	-16.70*	5.44	.003	-27.45	-5.94
		Doctors	-3.12	5.44	.567	-13.87	7.62
	Banker	Army	-11.05*	5.44	.044	-21.80	-.29
		Doctors	2.5	5.44	.643	-8.22	13.27
	Army	Doctors	13.57*	5.44	.014	2.82	24.32

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The obtained results of this study confirmed the research hypotheses: 1) the relationship among perceived stress, adjustment problems, and job satisfaction; 2) the mediating role of perceived stress between adjustment problems and job satisfaction; and 3) There will be significant differences

among stress, adjustment problems, and job satisfaction in different professionals. The Urdu versions of the PSS, SAPA, and JSS were highly reliable for use with the Pakistani sample of employees, with internal consistency of 0.70, 0.85, and 0.95, respectively (see Table 1). A value of 0.70 and above is an acceptable minimal value for Cronbach Alpha on a scale (DeVellis, 2003).

The study's first hypothesis is, "The higher the perceived stress and adjustment problems, the lower the job satisfaction among employees." Table 2 shows that there is a negative significant correlation between stress and job satisfaction ( $r = -.27, p < 0.01$ ). Also, there is a significant negative correlation between adjustment problems and job satisfaction ( $r = -.25, p < 0.01$ ). Several research supported the findings of the present study. A study found a negative correlation between stress and job satisfaction among university staff (Ahsan *et al.*, 2009). The impact of stress on job satisfaction in 122 Air Traffic Controllers of Pakistan was studied. The results indicated a negative correlation between stress and job satisfaction. Air traffic controllers with high levels of job stress showed low job satisfaction (Iqbal & Waseem, 2012). Among 200 pharmaceutical sales representatives, the relationship between stress and job satisfaction was negative (Vasan, 2018). Similarly, 200 municipality personnel in Iran had low job satisfaction due to high job stress (Bemana *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, adjustment problems in terms of depression, anxiety, and conduct disturbances were found to have a significant negative relationship with job satisfaction among workers of different occupations (Ferguson *et al.*, 2012; Newbury-Birch D & Kamali, 2001; Zeffane *et al.*, 2008). Hence, perceived stress negatively correlates with job satisfaction (Erdoğan *et al.*, 2020; Bansal *et al.*, 2021).

The results of Table 2 showed a significant positive relationship between perceived stress and adjustment problems of individuals ( $r = .45, p < 0.01$ ). The results are consistent with other empirical findings (Caspi *et al.*, 2003; Shin & Liberzon, 2010; Koenen *et al.*, 2005). This implied that in the presence of stress, depression, anxiety, and conduct disturbances naturally emerged in the employees and completed the comorbid syndrome in the individuals.

The second hypothesis, "Perceived stress will mediate the relationship between adjustment problems and job satisfaction among employees," was confirmed. Figure 1 showed that perceived stress entirely mediated between adjustment problems and job satisfaction in several other studies conducted on different samples (for example, patients with mental illness and ballet professionals (Tziner *et al.*, 2015; Nisar *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the results of the present study have supported the empirical findings already conducted on the fundamental variables of stress, adjustment, and job satisfaction.

The third hypothesis of the study is, "There will be significant differences among stress, adjustment problems, and job satisfaction in different



professionals. Significant differences were." present in the perceived stress of bankers with the army persons and doctors. It has been witnessed that the banking sector encounters various changes in its setup. The changes were linked to the introduction of new technology and organizational structure that affected the work and lives of employees. Employees in banking come across different disorders. Among all professionals (teachers, army, doctors), bankers experience work-related stress at a very high life-threatening point. It also directly affects their work, wellbeing, and the organization (Giorgi *et al.*, 2017).

Regarding job satisfaction, army personnel significantly differed from teachers, doctors, and bankers and showed the highest job satisfaction. The army persons often testified to problems related to their military practices, work-life equilibrium, health, and relationship issues. Further, they require proper instruction, psychotherapy, and emotive care from others (Sims *et al.*, 2017). Finally, regarding adjustment problems, bankers were significantly different from doctors. It has been witnessed that bankers experience anxiety and depression (Clarke, 2013). The teaching profession, particularly in school, is understood as a stressful occupation (Griffith *et al.*, 1999; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Olivier & Venter, 2003), which is why they have suffered from the lowest job satisfaction.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The workers in Gujrat, Jhelum, and Kharian have experienced adjustment problems, and the impact has been enhanced by the presence of perceived stress among employees. These psychological distresses have influenced their job satisfaction. Perceived stress has significantly and wholly mediated the relationship between stress and job satisfaction of the working class in banking, teaching, health, and the army.

This quantitative research has a small sample size (n=160) and has been selected only from four professionals. In the future, the same study can be more effective if other job-related factors are explored, like job citizenship, job commitment, job performance, worker management, job loyalty, turnover, workplace setting, rewards-recognition system, coaching, and development. Further, other professions can be explored for future consideration. A qualitative, in-depth study can also explore these variables in the indigenous culture.

There is a dire need to establish counselling units in various organizational settings in Pakistan and provide counselling to these personnel for the abolition of mental anguish. Counselling services must be provided in schools, banks, hospitals, and army institution personnel to boost adjustment, reduce stress, and enhance job satisfaction without interfering with organizational structural and managerial norms on the one hand. On the other hand, policymakers should focus on issues of employee equity and optimal flexible working conditions to provide a stress-free environment for their employees.

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