

# Job Stress-Performance in Academia: Role of Emotional Intelligence & Social Support

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**Abstract**— The phenomenon of job stress has been widely researched and its impact on performance, satisfaction, motivation, and other related aspects has been well established in various professions. The teaching profession too is no longer an exception. The aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between job stress and job performance among teaching faculty in higher education sector in New Delhi/NCR region and whether this relationship is moderated by emotional intelligence and social support at these work places. The study was conducted among 180 higher education teaching faculties working at various universities in New Delhi/NCR region. A multiple hierarchical regression was performed, and results confirmed about the existence of significant negative relationship between these two factors, establishing about the increased stress at work resulting in decreased teacher performance. However, emotional intelligence and presence of social support at workplace were found to mitigate the effects of stress indicating that these elements act as significant moderators. The findings of the study have deep implications for higher education system practices which contribute to stress on the teaching community. The results of the study suggest that job stress significantly impacts job performance in the field of academia as well, but these deleterious effects of job stress could be buffered through emotional intelligence and adequate social support system at work.

**Keywords**— *Job stressors, Emotional Intelligence, Social Support, Job Performance*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching is identified as one of the most interesting, challenging, yet stressful occupations by leading researchers [1-4] and thus the individuals placed in this profession are highly vulnerable to job stress. Teaching especially in the higher education today is not considered as easy as other professions and occupations due to problems such as time constraints, problems dealing with students, administrative work, incompatible policies, constant need to update one's knowledge on the subject matter, need for investing in research, and no clear criteria for promotion. It is observed that some amount of stress that arises is considered beneficial and acts as a catalyst in stimulating one's motivation to act but beyond this level it starts producing ill effects both in the internal sphere as well as the external sphere of an employee.

Various empirical studies in this context have well documented the fact that job stress leads to deleterious effects on productivity, performance [5], job satisfactions [6],

employee turnover [7] [8], and employee morale in the last three decades. The most common outcome of prolonged stress is felt in terms of burnout that may be expressed physically (health issues), emotionally or in terms of behavioral changes (absenteeism, intention to leave, etc.) [9]. But an intangible construct like job stress is a very subjective phenomenon as its effects depend on the cognitive appraisal of the environment by an individual, his/her ability to manage emotions, demographic characteristics (like experience in a particular job, age, and gender), etc. which ultimately tend to determine the quantum of impact created by stress.

Irrespective of socio-demographic variations among teachers and higher school educators in terms of age, gender, rank, tenure, etc. job stress tends to produce discernible effects on their performance. The study of Kyriacou & Sutcliffe [10] concluded that teacher stress is the result of culmination of individual and work place characteristics, actual factors related to a particular role, stress reactions/symptoms and well-being, person's coping mechanism, as well as other relevant factors leading to such situation.

However, research on job stress is primarily dominated by concepts and therefore, empirical investigation examining the contributors of job stress and their effects primarily on teacher's performance has been limited. Moreover, various studies carried out in this area have focused their attention on stress in the corporate work setting and little research pertains to stress arising out of a teacher's job.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Job stress*

The UK Health and Safety Executive [11] defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them". Thus, stress is presumed to be a negative and undesirable state of the mind which creates psychological strain on an individual, the effects of which may be positive or negative. The conception of job stress in 1970s was a result of the work of French & Caplan's [12] P-E fit theory which conceptualizes stress as an outcome of misfit between a person and his environment. Eventually a situation arises which forces the worker to change (i.e. disrupt or enhance) his or her psychological and/or physiological condition, distracting him from the

routine functioning [13]. Individuals in an organizational context are subject to conditions that may handicap their ability to meet their goals and thus result in psychological pressure.

Unlike other occupations, job stress among teachers at both lower and higher education has gained particular relevance in the light of constantly changing trends in the education system such as modification in the academic curriculum, changing workload, time pressures, increasing administrative work demands, and increased importance of career enhancement with more focus on research work and publications for postsecondary educators [14]. While some amount of stress can contribute to increased scholarly performance, extreme stress is known to have become a psychological disorder and thus needs immediate mitigation mechanism.

In a study by Blackburn & Bentley [15] to determine the impact of stress on research productivity based on the assumption that job related stress leads to job related strain further impacting research productivity among university faculty, it was found that faculties working in the central universities tend to suffer from higher amounts of stress than those in other institutions and this stress led to lower research productivity.

Moreover, studies on job stress in the higher education sector have also been conducted among large national samples taken from universities [16] and from a single institutional unit as well [14]. Thus, these researches have suggested that facets such as an individual's role in the organization, job structure, organization structure, pay and related rewards, autonomy and control over one's job and relationship with co-workers can all be considered as significant job stressors.

Job stressors not only include factors relating to role (role ambiguity and expectation conflict), task (autonomy, control, security, etc.), and job (pay and rewards, career progression) but also the external environment such as inadequate social support at the work place. The presence of any of these factors would force the individual to focus his attention on these rather than the task. Therefore, even though the job of a teacher is highly satisfying, stress at work may hinder the productivity of the teacher [14], his/her satisfaction [17] as well as the overall institutional performance [18]. It therefore becomes imperative to examine the nature and intrinsic aspects of the job of a teacher that cause stress.

Literature has evidenced that job stress-performance relationship is mitigated by variables that minimize the harmful effects of job stress on employee related outcomes. And these hypotheses have been tested in overwhelming amount of empirical studies restricting their focus on few moderators such as self-efficacy [5], perceived organizational support [19], trust in management [20], emotional intelligence [21], subjective fit to the organization's value system [22], or its culture [8]. A study conducted amongst 424 public sector employees in Istanbul found that while job stress produced adverse effect on job performance, this relationship was significantly moderated by emotional intelligence [23]. While another valuable

contribution in this regard is a study conducted by Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher [24], exploring the buffering effects of social support on the stress-strain relationship at work. The research evidenced that social support acts as a moderator reducing strain experienced as a result of stress.

#### *Limitations of literature*

Most of the research related to job stress has focused its attention more on stress in the corporate work setting and little research pertains to stress arising out of a teacher's job. Furthermore, the focal point of a number of studies is school education set up rather than high school/ university setting. Moreover, studies relating to this domain in the teaching arena have been undertaken in the western economies where the consequences of employee's continuous exposure to stress have been well established.

In this context, this research intends to assess the effects of job stress on job performance for higher education faculties in the Delhi-NCR region. It further aims to investigate the stress buffering effects of emotional intelligence and social support at workplace on the aforesaid relationship. The prima focus of this study is to advance the understanding of contributors of role stress for a university level educator as a mechanism that has the potential to alter his/her performance and efficiency at work.

#### *B. Job stress and Job Performance*

Job performance is a predominant construct as it provides a key basis for appraisal, promotions, and merit-based compensation [25]. Therefore, anything that hinders performance is sought to be alleviated. Therefore, the deleterious effect of prolonged stress on anyone's performance, as is evident in a number of researches, reaffirms that stress in the work setting is undesirable.

A study conducted by Kemery, Bedeian, Mossholder, & Touliatos [26] point out that role expectation conflict and role ambiguity act as most significant factors at work leading to increased job tension. Karasek, Brisson, Kawakami, Houtman, Bongers & Amick [27] too identified five such key elements that trigger stress for an employee in an organization: lack of decision latitude, work relationships, psychological demands related to the job, physical demands and job insecurity. However, minimal research has been carried out in the educational setting out of which a striking fact has emerged that as the level of education rises, the number of stressors also tend to increase [28].

The current study assumes job stress to encompass attributes like role ambiguity, role expectation conflict, work overload, inadequate rewards and recognitions and professional distress. In view of this, it is hypothesized that:

H1: A higher amount of job stress leads to lower job performance.

#### *C. Emotional intelligence and Job Performance*

The weightiness of a construct like emotional intelligence

has been realized by many researchers thus emphasizing a strong need for increasing interest [29] as it has direct and indirect implications for employee behavior and their performance at work. It is believed that emotional intelligence accounts for almost 85% of human success and is more important than the IQ (intelligence quotient) level [30].

EI vis-a-vis performance has been appealing to business organizations as it is believed that a higher EI is presumed to contribute positively to job performance. In a study by Lopes, Cote, & Salovey [31], it was also found that a higher EI among employees demonstrated lower occupational stress, thus improving emotional and psychological well-being of an employee. Emotional intelligence acts as a positive coping mechanism [32] enabling individuals to not hold on to the feeling of frustration created by stress and placing oneself in a positive affective state in a stress stimulated situation. Even after numerous studies, there is still no clear consensus if EI can be seen as a standard trait to be considered while recruiting candidates for a job or not.

Thus, the following hypotheses are postulated:

H2: Emotional Intelligence moderates the negative impact of job stress on job performance among higher education faculties.

H3: Emotional Intelligence positively impacts job performance among higher education faculties.

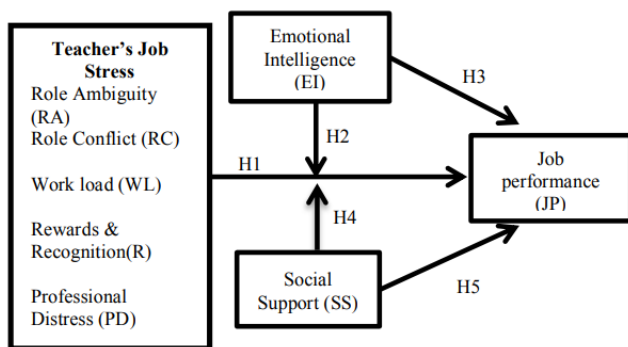


Fig. 1. Model of hypothesized relationships

#### D. Social Support and Job Performance

The second construct considered in the research is the influence of social support at the work place. Social support acts as a backup mechanism for individuals, whether at work place or in any environment setting [33]. A number of studies establish the premise that social support reduces the adverse impact of stress and rather effectively contribute to psychological well-being, job satisfaction and physical illness risk [34]. It is known to act as a coping mechanism [35].

Studies pertaining to teachers in the education sector too have been believed to produce similar repercussions. A strong social support system can immensely motivate and inspire an individual to overcome stress thereby improving his performance [34],[36]. Pierce & Molloy [37] in their study on teacher stress found that a lower social support led to high burnout and exhaustion among teachers, which are

common outcomes of stress.

The absence of social support is not realized in the teaching occupation since teachers and faculties are thought to be mostly engrossed in research work, teaching tasks, student related queries, etc. But its presence does make an impact in mitigating the negatives caused by a stressful situation at work. Since very few studies have advocated for a strong social support system at workplace and its favorable impact in creating a conducive work environment, the authors examine this dimension as a moderator in the current study.

We therefore hypothesize that:

H4: Social Support moderates the negative impact of job stress on job performance among higher education faculties.

H5: Social Support positively impacts job performance among higher education faculties.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is a quantitative study based on two major constructs: Job stress and Job performance. Secondary data is also used to complement the findings of this research. All constructs are measured from the higher education faculty's perspective using a self-administered questionnaire. The constructs used for the study are operationalized by using the measures used in previous researches related to job stress and validating them for the present study. Job stress is calculated as the sum of role expectation conflict, role ambiguity, workload pressure, rewards and recognition, and professional distress in the education sector.

The authors use correlation and multiple hierarchical regression to establish the negative effects job stress on job performance and the moderating effects of EI and Social Support.

#### A. Participants and Procedure

Responses were sought from faculties teaching in higher education universities in Delhi NCR region using a self-administered questionnaire. Data was collected based on simple random sampling. The sample size was determined using Cattell's [38] approach who recommended a ratio of three to six times the number of variables. A total of 180 responses were collected. A five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" was used for all items.

#### B. Measures

##### Job Stress:

Job stress was considered as a summation of a number of factors, the scales for which have been adapted from previous researches. Five factors were identified- role expectation conflict, role ambiguity, work overload, professional distress, and adequacy of rewards and recognition. Role expectation conflict and role ambiguity were measured on a scale consisting of a total of 11-items adapted from Rizzo and House [39], work overload measured through 9-items and adequate rewards and recognition was measured on a scale of 7-items adapted from Gmelch, Wilke, & Lovrich [16], and a

scale for professional distress was measured on a 4-item scale adapted from Fimian [40].

A sum of all the stressors (RA, RC, R, WL & PD) gave a total stress score. A higher score means soaring stress levels.

*Emotional Intelligence:*

The Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SREIT) developed by Schutte *et al.* [4] was used to measure EI. The original scale (33-item) was reduced to a 19-item scale. Respondents were asked to rate statements like, “I know when to speak about my personal problems to others”, “I am aware of my emotions as I experience them”, and “I have control over my emotions” were included. Cronbach alpha for this scale  $r=0.96$ .

*Job Performance:*

A modified version of this scale consisting of six statements was used [42]. The statement includes items like, “How would you rate yourself in terms of the quantity of work you achieve?”, “How do you rate yourself in terms of handling job pressure?” Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-point likert scale (1=poor to 5= excellent performance).

*Social Support:*

This scale consisted of 8-items and was adapted from Beehr (Beehr, KING, & KING, 1990). Items like “We discuss things that are happening in our personal lives”, “We talk about bad things about our work” and “We talk about how we dislike some parts of our work”, etc. were included.

The respondents were also required to fill demographic details: age, gender, experience and type of employment.

*C. Method of Data Analysis*

The software package SPSS 22.0 was used for the data analysis procedure. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to determine the significant factors that explain the constructs. Descriptive statistics and correlational analysis were utilized to determine the relationships among the main constructs of the study. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to establish causal relation between stress and performance. This was done in three stages. First, the model was controlled for various demographic variables (gender, age, and experience). This meant that they were the first ones to be entered in the equation. In the second stage, job stress and EI were entered in the regression equation as independent variables and their effects on job performance were ascertained. Further, to ascertain the moderating effects of EI, the interaction terms (Job Stress  $\times$  Emotional intelligence) was entered in the equation in the third stage. This process was repeated to determine the moderating effects of social support at workplace. The interaction terms (Job stress  $\times$  Social Support) was entered in the same way as above.

The F-change was estimated. The value of adjusted R-square and change in R-square were interpreted for significance to determine whether the product (Job stress\* EI & Job Stress\*SS) added significantly to the regression equation after the first predictor had done its work. The contribution and significance of each of the variables were

determined using beta weight and t-ratio. If the interaction terms were found to be significant, the hypothesis would be confirmed that emotional intelligence and presence of social support at work place played a moderating role in the relationship between job stress and job performance.

*D. Results*

*Demographic profile of respondents*

A total of 180 responses were received from the faculties working full time at various universities across the Delhi NCR region. No missing values were found in the data set. Out of 180 respondents who participating in the study, 59 or 32.8% of them were males while the remaining were females (67.2%). In terms of age, 65% of the respondents belonged to the age bracket of 30-50, followed by 24.4% who were below 30 years and 10.6% were above 50 years. As for teaching experience, 24.6% of respondents had an experience of less than 3 years, followed by 49.1% with experience of 3-10 years, 18.7% lying between 11- 20 years, and 7.6% above 20years of teaching experience. Table 1 depicts the descriptive statistics for all the demographic variables.

TABLE I. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

	Characteristics	N	Percent
Gender	Female	121	67.2
	Male	59	32.8
	Total	180	100
Age	<30	44	24.4
	30-50	117	65
	>50	19	10.6
	Total	180	100
Experience	<3	42	23.3
	10-Mar	86	47.8
	20-Oct	40	22.2
	>20	12	6.7
	Total	180	100

To determine whether the sample was adequate, Table 2 reports the KMO and Bartlett’s test of sphericity which was found to be significant.

TABLE II. KMO AND BARTLETT’S TEST OF SPHERICITY

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.855
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	12811.115
	df	2016
	Sig.	0

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis & Reliability Analysis*

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to bring about the structure of the factors. Based on this, factor loadings below 0.6 were ignored. The results obtained gave five individual stressors indices (role ambiguity, role

expectation conflict, work overload, rewards and recognition and professional distress), emotional intelligence, social support and job performance as separate construct.

Finally, the Cronbach alpha indicating the reliability for the overall reduced questionnaire was found to be  $r = 0.896$  [43].

### Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation coefficient revealed significant relationship of all the variables with job performance. A significant negative relationship between job stress and job performance was found with  $r(180) = -0.328, p < 0.01$ . Also, job performance was found to be positively associated with EI ( $r(180) = 0.228, p < 0.01$ ) and social support at workplace ( $r(180) = 0.464, p < 0.01$ ) (Table 3)

TABLE III. CORRELATIONS AMONG STUDY VARIABLES

		1	2	3	4
1	Job Stress	1			
2	SocialSupport_Sum	0.009	1		
3	EmotionalIntelligence_Sum	-0.032	.206**	1	
4	Performance_sum	-.328**	.464**	.228**	1
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

### Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

Results from hierarchical multiple regression to investigate the moderating effects of EI and presence of social support at workplace on the relationship between job stress and job performance, after controlling for demographic characteristics (gender, age and experience) are presented in table 4 and 5.

Table 4 reveals the role of emotional intelligence as a coping mechanism for the effects of job stress on job performance. The results demonstrate that the control variables (gender, age and experience) did not have significant impact on job performance among high school

teachers. However, in the second stage, when job stress was added to the model, it was found that job stress significantly impacts job performance among these higher educators with  $F(5,174) = 7.571, p < 0.001$  explaining about 17.9% of the variance in job performance. The beta coefficients for job stress and emotional intelligence as the predictors,  $\beta = -0.535, t = -4.595$  and  $\beta = 2.81, t = 3.099$  respective; were both found to be significant. These results were an evidence supporting hypothesis that job stress has a significant negative impact on job performance (H1) and emotional intelligence positively effects job performance (H3).

In the third stage, when interaction term (emotional intelligence \* job stress) was added to the equation, the variance explained by this model increased to 94% with change in  $R^2 = 0.763$ . And, the model was found to be significant at  $F(6,173) = 463.25, p < 0.001$ . Moreover, a positive significant beta value ( $\beta = 0.291, t = 47.455, p < 0.001$ ) indicated that the presence of emotional intelligence reduced the undesirable effects of job stress on job performance. Thus, the hypothesis (H2) about the moderating role of EI on the aforementioned relationship was henceforth verified.

Similarly, the same procedure was followed to ascertain the mitigating effect of social support at workplace on the stress-performance relationship, the results of which have been furnished in table 5. The results at the first two stages were found to be similar as in the previous case, wherein control variables did not significantly impact job performance. But the ill effects of job stress on job performance were clearly established. The presence of job stress could explain for 34.2% of the reduced job performance (H1) with a significant beta value ( $\beta = -0.559, t = -5.363, p < 0.001$ ). Also, the beta coefficient for social support at this stage was found to be  $\beta = 0.455, t = 7.431$  indicating that social support positively effects job performance (H5).

Further, when the interaction term (product of Job stress\*SS) was added in the third stage, the change in  $R^2$  was 7.8% explaining 42% of the variation. The model was found to be significant at  $F(6,173) = 20.837, p < 0.001$ . Also, the beta coefficients for job stress as the predictors of job performance was found to be  $\beta = -1.117, t = -7.367$ . The interaction term was also found to be significant ( $\beta = 0.167, t = 4.828$ ).

TABLE IV. HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION FOR MODERATING EFFECTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON JOB STRESS- PERFORMANCE

	R	R2	R2 Change	B	SE	P	t
Step 1	0.167	0.028					
Gender				-0.257	0.163	-0.118	-1.575
Age				0.01	0.007	0.104	1.379
Experience				-0.047	0.092	-0.038	-0.507
Step 2	0.423	0.179	0.151				
Gender				-0.207	0.151	-0.095	-1.373

<i>Age</i>				0.01	0.007	0.103	1.466
<i>Experience</i>				-0.07	0.086	-0.057	-0.814
<i>Job Stress</i>				-0.535	0.116	-0.319	-4.595***
<i>Emotional Intelligence_Sum</i>				0.281	0.091	0.214	3.099***
<i>Step 3</i>	0.97	0.941	0.763				
<i>Gender</i>				-0.05	0.041	-0.023	-1.225
<i>Age</i>				0.003	0.002	0.026	1.367
<i>Experience</i>				-0.014	0.023	-0.012	-0.617
<i>Job Stress</i>				-0.021	0.033	-0.013	-0.644
<i>Emotional Intelligence_Sum</i>				-0.737	0.032	-0.562	-22.739***
<i>Job Stress * Emotional Intelligence</i>				0.291	0.006	1.222	47.455***

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

TABLE V. HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION FOR MODERATING EFFECTS OF PRESENCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT ON JOB STRESS-PERFORMANCE

	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Change</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>Step 1</i>	0.167	0.028						
<i>Gender</i>					-0.257	0.163	-0.118	-1.575
<i>Age</i>					0.01	0.007	0.104	1.379
<i>Experience</i>					-0.047	0.092	-0.038	-0.507
<i>Step 2</i>	0.585	0.342		0.314				
<i>Gender</i>					-0.172	0.135	-0.079	-1.268
<i>Age</i>					0.007	0.006	0.075	1.193
<i>Experience</i>					-0.078	0.077	-0.064	-1.023
<i>Job Stress</i>					-0.559	0.104	-0.332	-5.363***
<i>Social Support_Sum</i>					0.455	0.061	0.458	7.431***
<i>Step 3</i>	0.648	0.42		0.078				
<i>Gender</i>					-0.091	0.129	-0.042	-0.706
<i>Age</i>					0.002	0.006	0.024	0.399
<i>Experience</i>					-0.062	0.072	-0.051	-0.862
<i>Job Stress</i>					-1.117	0.152	-0.665	-7.367***
<i>Social Support_Sum</i>					0.019	0.107	0.019	0.18
<i>Job Stress * Social Support</i>					0.167	0.035	0.624	4.828***

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

#### IV. DISCUSSIONS

The results found through this research have confirmed that job stress is a critical factor that negatively impacts job performance in higher education sector too. These findings have again strengthened the view established in previous studies concerning the deleterious effects of stress on performance at workplace. These findings hold immense significance for the teachers in the higher education field as well as regulator authorities that evaluate the performance of these institutions who need to realize that teacher stress could ultimately harm their own productivity, and this would indirectly impact the quality of students they produce.

Additionally, consideration for factors such as emotional intelligence and social support at workplace that buffer the effects created by this stressful profession should be given in the selection procedure for candidates. Also, taking into account the importance of social support at workplace in any profession, the behavior of a teacher with their co-workers should be regulated and feedback for the same must be accounted for at all times. Stress at work can be competently dealt with if it is necessarily recognized and a problem-solving approach is applied by way of counseling and mentoring for students as well as teachers equally.

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