

Job Stress and Mental Well-Being among University Employees: The Intervening Role of Social Support Across Genders

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: To examine the association between job stress, perceived social support, and mental well-being among employees of Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences (LUMHS), Jamshoro, and to evaluate the intervening role of social support across genders.

METHODOLOGY: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 150 academic and administrative employees at LUMHS, Jamshoro. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling and completed a structured self-administered questionnaire comprising demographic information, a Job Stress Scale, the WHO-5 Mental Well-Being Index, and a Social Support Scale. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, independent sample t-test, and hierarchical multiple regression were performed. A p-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS: The mean age of participants was 35.5±8.2 years, with females accounting for 60% of the sample. All instruments demonstrated satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's α =0.79–0.85). Job stress showed a significant negative correlation with mental well-being ($r=-0.45$, $p<0.001$), whereas perceived social support demonstrated a significant positive correlation ($r=0.52$, $p<0.001$). Social support explained an additional 15% of the variance in mental well-being ($\Delta R^2=0.15$, $p<0.001$) and attenuated the adverse effect of job stress, indicating partial mediation. Male employees reported significantly higher mental well-being than female employees ($p<0.001$), while no gender differences were observed for job stress or social support.

CONCLUSION: Higher job stress is associated with poorer mental well-being among university employees. Perceived social support partially buffers this relationship and may serve as an important workplace resource. Organizational strategies that strengthen supportive work environments and employee wellness programs are recommended, with particular attention to female staff.

KEYWORDS: Job stress, mental well-being, social support, university employees, occupational stress, gender differences

INTRODUCTION

The workplace is increasingly recognized as an important determinant of physical and psychological health. In universities, employees often manage multiple responsibilities including teaching, research, administration, and student mentoring. These competing demands may increase occupational stress and adversely affect mental well-being¹. Maintaining good psychological health among university employees is essential because it influences work performance, productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness. Job stress develops when workplace demands exceed an individual's ability or available resources to cope effectively². Persistent occupational stress has been associated with anxiety, burnout, depression, absenteeism, poor job performance, and reduced quality of life. Academic institutions present unique occupational challenges, including high workloads, administrative responsibilities, publication pressure, limited resources, and balancing professional and personal

commitments.

Mental well-being encompasses emotional, psychological, and social functioning³. Employees with better mental well-being generally demonstrate greater resilience, stronger interpersonal relationships, higher motivation, and improved professional performance. Consequently, identifying factors that influence mental well-being has become an important public health and organizational priority⁴.

Perceived social support is considered one of the strongest protective factors against occupational stress. Support from supervisors, colleagues, family members, and friends provides emotional encouragement, practical assistance, and guidance that improve coping capacity during stressful situations⁵. According to the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, social support modifies an individual's response to stress by reducing perceived threats and enhancing adaptive coping strategies.

Previous research also suggests that gender influences occupational stress experiences and psychological health. Female employees frequently encounter additional caregiving responsibilities and work-family conflicts, increasing their vulnerability to emotional distress and poorer mental well-being⁶.

Despite growing attention to workplace mental health,

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limited evidence is available regarding university employees in Pakistan. Understanding the interaction between job stress, social support, and mental well-being may help educational institutions design effective employee support programs. Therefore, this study examined the relationship between job stress, perceived social support, and mental well-being among university employees while evaluating the intervening role of social support and gender differences.

Rational of the study is to determine the association between job stress and mental well-being among university employees. To assess the relationship between perceived social support and mental well-being. To evaluate the intervening role of perceived social support in the association between job stress and mental well-being.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional study was conducted at Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences (LUMHS), Jamshoro, Pakistan, from June to August 2025. Full-time academic and administrative employees were eligible to participate. Using a convenience sampling technique, 150 employees were recruited after providing informed consent. Data were collected through a structured, anonymous, self-administered questionnaire comprising four sections: demographic characteristics, a five-item Job Stress Scale, the WHO -5 Mental Well-Being Index, and a five-item Social Support Scale. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Continuous variables are presented as mean±standard deviation, whereas categorical variables are expressed as frequencies and percentages. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Pearson's correlation examined relationships among study variables. Independent sample t-tests compared gender differences. Hierarchical multiple regression was used to determine the intervening role of social support. Statistical significance was considered at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

A total of 150 university employees participated in the study. The mean age was 35.5 ± 8.2 years. Female employees constituted 60% of participants, while males represented 40%.

The study instruments demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.79 to 0.85. Participants reported moderate-to-high levels of job stress, relatively high perceived social support, and moderate mental well-being.

Table I

Correlation analysis demonstrated a significant inverse relationship between job stress and mental well-being ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived social support was positively associated with mental well-being ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$), while its relationship with job stress was weakly negative. **Table II**

Male employees reported significantly better mental well-being than female employees ($t(148) = -5.10$, $p < 0.001$). No statistically significant gender differences were observed for job stress or perceived social support.

Hierarchical regression analysis showed that job stress independently explained 20% of the variance in mental well-being. After inclusion of social support, the explained variance increased to 35%, with an additional 15% contribution. The regression coefficient for job stress decreased substantially after adjustment for social support, confirming its partial mediating effect. **Table III**

Table I: Reliability and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Scale	Cronbach's α	Mean (M)	SD	Interpretation
Job Stress	0.81	2.85	0.75	Moderate–High Stress
Social Support	0.79	3.90	0.88	High Support
Mental Well-being	0.85	3.20	0.92	Moderate MW

Table II: Correlation Matrix of Job Stress, Social Support, and Mental Well-Being

Variables	JS	SS	MWB
Job Stress	1	-0.15	-0.45***
Social Support	-0.15	1	0.52***
Mental Well-being	-0.45***	0.52***	1

*** $p < 0.001$

Table III: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Mental Well-Being

Model	Predictor	β	t	P	R ²	ΔR^2	F
1	Constant	4.25	12.01	<0.001	0.20	–	36.95***
	Job Stress	-0.45	-6.08	<0.001			
2	Constant	1.50	3.01	0.003	0.35	0.15	40.01***
	Job Stress	-0.25	-3.55	0.001			
	Social Support	0.50	7.10	<0.001			

*** $p < 0.001$

DISCUSSION

The present study demonstrated that occupational stress is significantly associated with poorer mental well-being among university employees. Individuals experiencing higher levels of workplace stress reported lower psychological well-being, supporting previous evidence that prolonged occupational stress contributes to emotional exhaustion, burnout, and diminished quality of life⁷.

Perceived social support emerged as an important protective factor, showing a positive relationship with mental well-being and partially reducing the adverse

impact of job stress. These findings support the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which proposes that supportive interpersonal relationships improve resilience and facilitate effective stress management⁸. Emotional encouragement, guidance from supervisors, and positive workplace relationships may help employees adapt more effectively to occupational challenges⁹.

A notable finding was the significantly lower mental well-being among female employees despite comparable levels of job stress and social support. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, suggesting that additional family responsibilities, caregiving roles, and societal expectations may contribute to increased psychological burden among women¹⁰⁻¹².

The findings have practical implications for university administration. Institutions should promote healthy work environments by implementing employee assistance programs, mental health awareness initiatives, counseling services, stress management workshops, mentoring systems, and supportive organizational policies. Such interventions may improve employee well-being, job satisfaction, and institutional productivity.

Although this study provides useful evidence, its findings should be interpreted considering several limitations. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, convenience sampling limits generalizability, and self-reported data may introduce reporting bias. Future multicenter longitudinal studies involving larger and more diverse employee populations are recommended to validate these findings.

CONCLUSION

Job stress is significantly associated with reduced mental well-being among university employees. Perceived social support partially buffers this relationship, highlighting its importance as a protective workplace resource. Universities should prioritize strategies that reduce occupational stress, strengthen supportive work environments, and promote employee mental health. Targeted interventions addressing the needs of female employees may further improve psychological well-being and organizational performance.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

F.N.U. Saliha: Collection and acquisition of data & grammatical corrections

Samra Mushtaque: Concept, design of study & data analysis

Pardeep Kumar: Drafting the article and finalizing the manuscript

Sajjah: Revising critically and make it suitable for final format

Farhana Rajpar: Drafting the article and finalizing the manuscript

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