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# Demographic factors and emotional intelligence as correlates of perceived job stress

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of some demographic factors and emotional intelligence as correlates of perceived job stress. Emotional intelligence (EI) is seen as an individual's capacity to appropriately regulate his/her emotions, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and action. The workplace had become a high stress environment. Employees experience high level of stress due to various factors such as high workload, tight deadlines, high targets, type of work, among others. Stress in the workplace reduces productivity, increases management pressures, and makes people ill in many ways. Workplace stress affects the performance of the brain, including functions of work performance; memory, concentration, and learning. The study examined if there will be a significant positive correlation between EI, gender and age on perceived job stress. The study employed the use of a survey design by gathering data from a sample of two hundred and thirty-nine (239) respondents. Questionnaires were used to gather information. Three hypotheses were tested and the results showed that there was a significant relationship between EI and perceived job stress ( $r = .743^{**}$ ,  $N = 239$ ,  $P < .01$ ). Also, the t-test analysis revealed that there was a significant effect of gender on perceived job stress (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = .441,  $df = 237$ ,  $P < .05$ ). T-test findings also revealed that there was no significant effect of age on perceived job stress (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = -0.60,  $df = 237$ ;  $p > .05$ ). It was recommended among others that employers should take a serious effort to ensure that their employees are well trained on EI constructs, encourage a good team-working ability and cooperation, and involvement in task by every employee should be emphasised which will invariably reduce stress at work.

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### Introduction

Researchers have realized the need to emphasise on non-cognitive, emotional aspects of individuals. This has been labeled "Emotional Intelligence (EI). This has been viewed as undisputable and imperative against the backdrop of the various challenges faced by businesses, leaders, management etc. (Owoseni, 2012). Emotional intelligence (EI) may be defined as the ability to use one's awareness and sensitivity to discern the feelings underlying interpersonal communication, and to resist the temptation to respond impulsively and thoughtlessly, but instead to act from receptivity, authenticity and candor. It is also seen as an individual's capacity to appropriately regulate his/her emotions, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and action (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

The workplace had become a high stress environment. Employees were experiencing high level of stress due to various factors such as high workload, tight deadlines, high targets, type of work, lack of job satisfaction, long working hours, pressure to perform, etc. Interpersonal conflicts at the workplace, such as boss-subordinate relationships and relationships with peers, were also a source of stress. Experts believed that the dysfunctional aspects of stress could directly impact an organization's performance and also affect the well-being of its employees. Stress at the workplace was linked to absenteeism, higher attrition, and decreased productivity. Stress led to fatigue, irritability, poor communication, and quality problems/errors.

High stress levels also affected the morale and motivation of the employees. Prolonged exposure to stress without effective coping mechanisms could lead to a host of physical and mental problems. For instance, stress could lead to stress-induced gastrointestinal problems, irritable bowel syndrome, acidity, acid reflux, insomnia, depression, heart disease, etc. Moreover, stress could push the victim toward high risk behavior such as smoking, drinking, and substance abuse. Stress-related illness led to increase in absenteeism and attrition affecting the profitability of the organizations.

Stress in the workplace reduces productivity, increases management pressures, and makes people ill in many ways. Workplace stress affects the performance of the brain, including functions of work performance; memory, concentration, and learning. Stress at work also provides a serious risk of litigation for all employers and organisations, carrying significant liabilities for damages, bad publicity and loss of reputation. Stress does not have the same impact on every one. There are individual differences in coping with stressful situations. Some people go to pieces at the slightest provocation; while others seem unflappable even in extremely stressful conditions. EI becomes important and useful because it comes to our rescue and guides us to respond appropriately to different stressors. Some people thrive on stressful situations while others are overwhelmed by them. Stress management, therefore, largely

depends upon striking an emotional balance between a potential stress condition and one's reaction to it.

Goleman (1995) proposed that individuals possessing EI are emotionally stable and psychologically healthy. Men with high EI are described as poised, outgoing and cheerful, free of anxiety, committed to people or causes, ethical and sympathetic and caring. EI women are described as assertive and expressive, extraverted, positive and well adapted to stress (p. 45).

#### **Research Hypotheses**

- There will be a significant positive correlation between EI and perceived job stress.
- There will be a significant difference between gender and perceived job stress.
- There will be a significant difference between age and perceived job stress.

#### **Literature Review**

##### ***Emotional intelligence and job stress***

Darolia and Darolia (2005) studied the role of emotional intelligence in coping with stress and emotional control behaviour. The research clearly established that emotionally intelligent people who are able to understand and recognise their emotions, manage themselves appropriately so that their impulsiveness and aggression is kept under control in stressful situations.

Ismail, Suh-Suh, Ajis and Dollah (2009) conducted a study to examine the effect of emotional intelligence in the relationship between occupational stress and job performance. The outcome of the study clearly stated that relationship between occupational stress and emotional intelligence significantly correlated with job performance. Statistically, the results confirmed that the inclusion of emotional intelligence in the analysis mediated the effect of occupational stress on job performance.

Dasgupta and Kumar (2009) examined the sources of role stress among doctors and the stress levels among male and female doctors working in Indira Gandhi Medical College and Hospital, Shimla (India). The study revealed that role overload, self-role distance, role isolation, inter-role distance, role stagnation, role expectation conflict, role ambiguity and role inadequacy are the major sources of role stress. It further stated that there is no significant difference between the stress levels among male and female doctors except in cases of inter-role distance and role inadequacy, which was found more in male doctors.

Cluskey (1994) carried out a survey on management accountants and examined the relation between stress and job strains. The findings of the study identified the main causes of stress to be reporting to more than one boss; heavy workload under time constraints; work relations in the organisation and; a perceived lack of career progress. He also reported an additional source of stress which is a mismatch between personality and the task demands of the job.

Slaski and Cartwright (2002) investigated the relationship between measures of emotional quotient, subjective stress, distress, general health, and morale, quality of working life and management performance of a group of retail managers. Significant correlations in the expected direction were found, indicating that managers who scored higher in emotional quotient suffered less subjective stress, experienced better health and well-being, and demonstrated better management performance.

Chand and Sethi (1997) conducted a study to examine organisational factors as predictors of job related strain among

150 junior officers working in various banking institutions in the state of Himachal Pradesh. Role conflict, strenuous working conditions and role overload were found to be the dearest and most significant predictors of job related strain.

Abraham (2000) opined that the social skills component of EI is related to positive interpersonal relationships and it increases the feeling of job satisfaction and decreases occupational stress. She further stated that these social skills foster networks of social relationships which in turn increase an employee's commitment to the organization.

Spector and Goh (2001) in their theoretical paper examined the role of emotion in occupational stress. They employed a narrow definition of job stress as "any condition or situation that elicits a negative emotional response, such as anger/frustration or anxiety / tension" in an attempt to overcome the broadness of previous definitions and focus on negative emotional responses. The authors suggested that emotions influence how the work environment is perceived, that is, whether a particular condition is appraised as a job stressor or not. They further suggested that these appraising emotions may lead to psychological and physical strains. Psychological strain might result from continual negative emotional experiences and may lead to decreases in job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Physical strains (for example, suppression of immune system, heart disease) may result from the physiological components of experienced emotions that can adversely affect health. It was concluded that an individual's ability to manage and control their emotions (particularly negative emotions) in the workplace will influence the outcome of stress.

Sehgal (1997) assessed the effect of role stress on the level of involvement a person has in the job and alienation and the coping mechanism used to deal with stress. It was found that role erosion, resource inadequacy and inter-role distance were dominating contributors of role stress. Avoidance style of coping was used more frequently than approach styles of coping.

Aziz (2004) opined that organizational stress originates in organizational demands that are experienced by the individual. Stress is built up in the concept of role which is conceived as the position a person occupies in a system. The paper investigated the intensity of organizational role stress among women information technology professionals in the Indian private sector. Organizational role stress scale was used on a sample of 264 professionals to explore the level of role stress. Resource inadequacy emerged to be the most potent role stressor, followed by role overload and personal inadequacy. The research found differences in the level of stress between married and unmarried employees on several role stressors. However, level of education did not emerge as a significant differentiator of stressors.

Duran and Extremera (2004) in their study including professionals employed in institutions for people with intellectual disabilities, revealed a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout syndrome, and personal accomplishment in particular. The data clearly indicated that emotional intelligence expressed in the ability to recognize, express, and control emotions may have impact on the perceived job stress and the consequences of experienced stress.

Chabungban (2005) proposed that by developing emotional intelligence one can build a bridge between stress and better performance. The effects of stress are costly to both the organisation and the employee if left unattended within a given

timeframe. Regular administration of emotional intelligence abilities can help employees at workplace to control impulses and persist in the face of frustration and obstacles, prevent negative emotions from swamping the ability to think, feel motivated and confident and to accurately perceive emotions, to empathise and get along well with others.

Singh and Singh (2008) investigated the relationship as well as the impact of emotional intelligence on to the perception of role stress of medical professionals in their organizational lives. The study was conducted on a sample size of 312 medical professionals consisting of 174 male and 138 female doctors working for privately managed professional hospital organizations. The findings of the study indicated no significant difference in the level of emotional intelligence and perceived role stress between genders, but significantly negative relationships of emotional intelligence with organizational role stress for both the genders and the medical professionals as a whole.

Gohm, Corser and Dalsky (2005) led an investigation among 158 freshmen to find an association between emotional intelligence (emotion- relevant abilities) and stress (feelings of inability to control life events), considering personality (self-perception of the meta-emotional traits of clarity, intensity, and attention) as a moderating variable. The results suggested that emotional intelligence is potentially helpful in reducing stress for some individuals, but unnecessary or irrelevant for others. It may be because they have average emotional intelligence, but do not appear to use it, presumably because they lack confidence in their emotional ability.

Ogińska-Bulik (2005) explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress in the workplace and health-related consequences in human service workers. The results confirmed that employees reporting a higher emotional intelligence level perceived a lower level of occupational stress and suffered less from negative health consequences. The study confirmed that emotional intelligence plays a buffering role (but rather weak) in preventing the workers from negative health outcomes, especially from depression symptoms.

Shahu and Gole (2008) drew attention on occupational stress which they said is commonly acknowledged to be a critical issue for managers of private manufacturing companies. Their study examined the relationship between job stress, job satisfaction and performance among 100 managers of private manufacturing firms. The findings of the study suggest that higher stress levels are related to lower performance whereas higher job satisfaction indicates higher performance.

### Methodology

#### Research design

This study used a survey research design which measured two variables, independent and dependent variable. The independent variables consists of the demographic factors namely gender and age and EI, while the dependent variable is perceived job stress.

#### Samples

This study used about four (4) banks in Oyo town, Oyo State. Two hundred and fifty (250) questionnaires were administered to the employees in these banks. Two hundred and thirty nine (239) questionnaires were found usable and were subjected to further analysis. This gave a response rate of 96%. The respondents were males 142 (59.4%) and females 97 (40.6%) Their ages ranged between 18 and 55 years. Other demographic information is contained in Table 1.

### Instruments

The instrument for this study was a questionnaire which was used to measure the variables of the study. The scale measuring EI had three subscales namely perception, management, and emotional labour. The scale uses a seven point Likerttype scale ranging from extremely easy to extremely difficult (perception), completely failed to totally succeed (management) and always –never (emotional labour) which was developed by Mayer and Caruso (2000). The measurement of perceived job stress used a questionnaire developed by Parker and Decotiis(1983). The scale used a seven point Likerttype scale ranging from Strongly agree=7, Agree=6, Undecided=5, Neither agree=4, Slightly disagree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly disagree=1. The scales were revalidated and Cronbach alphas are perception 0.77, management 0.80, Emotional labour 0.89, and perceived job stress 0.91.

### Statistical Analyses

The data collected were analyzed using Pearson's correlation and independent t-test. The demographic information was subjected to simple percentages and frequency counts.

### Presentation of Demographic Data

**Table 1: Showing the descriptive statistics of demographics**

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	142	59.4
Female	97	40.6
Total	239	100.0
Age	Frequency	percentage
18-25 years	87	36.4
26-35 years	133	55.6
36-45 years	17	7.1
46-55 years	2	8
Total	239	100.0
Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	89	37.2
Married	146	61.1
Divorced	1	.4
Separated	3	1.3
Total	239	100.0
Educational Background	Frequency	Percentage
Postgraduate	24	10.0
B.Sc/HND	142	59.4
OND/NCE	69	28.9
SSCE	3	1.3
Primary School leaving certificate	1	.4
Total	239	100.0
Cadre	Frequency	Percentage
Management Staff	72	30.1
Senior Staff	112	46.9
Junior Staff	55	23.0
Total	239	100.0
Department	Frequency	Percentage
Sales	58	24.3
Marketing	57	23.8
Investment	29	12.1
Accounting	14	5.9
Loan	18	7.5
Others	63	26.4
Total	239	100.0

Table 1 shows that 142(59.4%) respondents were males and females 97(40.6%). Age distribution revealed that 87(36.4%) of the respondents were aged between 18-25 years, 133(55.6%), 26-35 years 17(7.1%) 36-45 years, and 2(8%) 46-55 years. The marital status revealed that 89(37.2%) were single, 146(61.1%) of them were married, 1(4%) of them had divorced, while 3(1.3%) of them were separated. 24(10.0%) of the respondents had Postgraduate degree, 142(59.4%) had B.Sc/HND,

69(28.9%) had OND/NCE, 3(1.3%) had SSCE, 1(0.4%) had Primary School Leaving certificate. 72(30.1%) of the respondents were management staff, 112(46.9%) were senior staff, and 55(23.0%) were junior staff. Department/Unit also revealed that 58(24.3%) of the respondents were in sales, 57(23.8%) were in marketing, 29(12.1%) were in investment, 14(5.9%) were in accounting, 18(7.5%) were in Loans, and 63(26.4%) were in other departments.

#### Testing of Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis one stated that there will be a significant positive correlation between EI and perceived job stress.

**Table 2: Summary of Pearson correlation showing significant positive correlation between EI and perceived job stress**

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Perceived Job Stress	30.3264	14.2210	239	.743**	.000	Sig.
Emotional Intelligence	84.2092	26.7399				

\*\* 0.01 level of Sig.

It is shown in the above table that there was a significant positive correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Job Stress ( $r = .743^{**}$ ,  $N = 239$ ,  $P < .01$ ). The hypothesis is accepted. Hence, EI had influenced perceived job stress.

Hypotheses two stated that there will be a significant difference between gender and perceived job stress.

**Table 3: Summary of independent t-test showing the significant difference between gender and perceived job stress**

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t	DF	P
Perceived Male	142	30.6620	14.7427	1.96	.441	237	.005
Job Stress Female	97	29.8351	13.4549				

Table 3 showed that gender significantly influenced perceived job stress (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal-t = .441,  $df = 237$ ,  $P < .05$ ). The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Hypothesis three stated that there will be a significant difference between age and perceived job stress.

**Table 4: Summary of independent t-test showing the difference between age and perceived job stress**

Age	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t	DF	P
Young	87	30.2529	13.7437	1.96	-0.60	237	.093
Old	152	30.3684	14.5163				

Table 4 showed that there was no significant difference between age and perceived job stress (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal-t = -0.60,  $df = 237$ ;  $p > .05$ ). The hypothesis is therefore rejected.

#### Conclusion

This study looked at gender, age and emotional intelligence as correlates of perceived stress. The findings revealed that there exists a relationship between EI and perceived job stress. Gender was also found to influence perceived job stress. Lastly, age does not have a significant influence on perceived job stress.

#### Recommendations

Employers should take a serious effort to ensure that their employees are well trained on EI constructs, encourage a good team-working ability and cooperation, and involvement in task by every employee should be emphasised which will invariably reduce stress at work. Gender and differences in emotional intelligence and stress management and coping should be

managed well by managers. Hence, human resource practitioners must understand the diversity surrounding these demographic factors among the employees and consider this before assigning them to tasks, roles and responsibilities.

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