

**Original Research Article****THE INFLUENCE OF PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT ON JOB STRESS AMONG SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYEES IN NIGERIA****Abstract**

This study explored the influence of perceived organisational support on job stress among selected public and private sector employees in Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of three hundred and fifty four (354) participants ( $m = 181$ ;  $f = 173$ ) from both public and private organizations. Two psychological instruments, namely: Perceived Organisational Support Scale and the Job Stress Scale (JSS) were used for data collection. The data collected were used to test the three hypotheses proposed in this study using Pearson's product moment correlation, independent Samples t-tests, and simple linear regression at 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed a significant inverse relationship between perceived organisational support and job stress, meaning that an increase in perceived organisational support will lead to a decrease in the level of job stress and vice versa. It was found that perceived organisational support accounted for 6% variance in job stress and finally, there were no significant differences between participants who had high scores and low scores in perception of organisational support scales on their responses to job stress. Based on these findings, it was recommended that management should endeavour to provide supportive working environment in order to minimize employees' job stress.

**Keywords:** Perceived Organisational Support, Job Stress

**Introduction**

Employees are the most important asset of any organisation, they are the engine through which the organisation runs successfully and as such organizations should focus on those factors that directly and indirectly affect their employees' performance at work. According to Erkutlu and Chafra (2006), stress is one of the factors that can impede employees' performance at work. Stress is a term that is widely used in everyday life and it is globally acknowledged as a major challenge to workers' health, and the health of an organisation. Colquitt, Lepine, and Wesson (2011) defined stress as a psychological response to demands that possess certain stakes and that tax or exceed a person's capacity or resources. Among life situations, the workplace stands out as a potentially important source of stress purely because of the amount of time that is spent in this setting (Baker, Israel, and Schurman, 1996). Stress is an inevitable part of life which is a combination of physical and psychological reactions to events that threaten or challenge us. It has become popular to attribute unexplainable behaviour of people to the fact that they are under stress. The various demands that cause people to experience stress are referred to as stressors, while strains are the negative consequences of the stress response. The Nigerian society for example, is cumbered with a lot of daily stressors ranging from traffic jam, poor road safety regulation and maintenance, fuel scarcity, insecurity, poor working environment and so on. Consequently, every individual is susceptible to a certain degree of stress. Conversely, stress can either be good or bad (destructive) depending on the type of stressors (e.g hindrance or challenge stressors), the degree of stress, how it is perceived and managed by the individual or

49 employee. In other words, stress can stimulate creativity and productivity, energize  
50 employees to meet challenging goals, as well as overwhelm them and affect business  
51 performance. Work-related challenge stressors are perceived by employees as opportunities  
52 for learning, improvement, growth, and achievement, even though they can be exhausting.  
53 These kinds of challenge stressors, such as work complexity and work responsibility, often  
54 generate positive emotions such as pride and enthusiasm (Colquitt, et. al, 2011). According to  
55 Maxon (1999), no individual reaches peak performance without being stressed, whether an  
56 athlete, an office worker or a manager. The natural pattern of human behaviour is to  
57 experience a stress-causing event or situation, react to it with increased tension and then  
58 return to a normal, relaxed state, however, the problem occurs when stress becomes so  
59 overwhelming or constant to the extent of breaking normal human functioning.

60 Lazarus and Folkman (1984) hold that job stress otherwise known as work stress or  
61 occupational stress is a function of the relationship between the employee and his or her work  
62 environment. The environmental factors involved in the stress inducing processes are called  
63 job stressors and individual's reactions to these stressors are referred to as strains. According  
64 to Lazarus and Folkman, there are three types of strains namely: physiological strains such as  
65 high blood pressure and other cardiovascular diseases, or cause problems in the body's  
66 musculoskeletal system; second, psychological strains such as burnout, anxiety, anger,  
67 memory loss, and a loss of sense of humour; and third, behavioural strains such as overuse of  
68 alcohol, excessive smoking, drug abuse and other unhealthy behaviours. Generally, job stress  
69 is simply stress at work. Work-related stress is recognised globally as a major challenge to  
70 workers' health, and the health of an organisation. In fact, occupational stress has been  
71 defined as a "global epidemic" (United Nations' International Labour Organization). Job  
72 stress is something employees face daily and there is no getting around it. As stated earlier,  
73 not all stress is bad, and learning how to deal with and managing stress are critical for any  
74 organisation and employee in order to maximize productivity, reduce job accident as well as  
75 maintain physical and mental health of the employees. However, too much of job stress can  
76 be dysfunctional to organisational and individual outcomes (Baker, et.al, 1996).

77 Since job stress is an inevitable part of work, organisations can benefit positively through job  
78 stress by promoting other features of work, such as social support which enables employees  
79 to cope with stress at work. The benefits of providing support are most often considered in  
80 relation to preventing or alleviating stress and burnout (Skinner, 2005, Arogundade &  
81 Onabanjo, 2013). The sources of social support may be friends, agencies, families, co-  
82 workers and supervisors (Roohangiz and Farhad, 2011).

83 Providing support helps to address stress in three ways namely: enhancing coping capacity,  
84 reducing severity of stress and buffering the impact of work demands on stress. Cropanzano,  
85 Howes, Grandey and Toth (1997) noted that support by an organization is somewhat different  
86 in that it is more a general construct and not limited to a specific problem. Social support  
87 refers to the effort and endeavours that provide emotional and psychological ability for  
88 another (Carson, Tesluk and Marrone, 2007, Roohangiz and Farhad 2011). The support may  
89 be emotional or instrumental depending on whether it can satisfy employees' needs or not  
90 (Ben-Ari, 2004, Roohangiz and Farhad, 2011).

91 Studies reveal that social support, a form related to perceived organizational support stems  
92 from organizational support theory. Organizational support theory states that employees  
93 develop global beliefs regarding the extent to which the organization values their  
94 contributions and is concerned about their well-being (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).  
95 According to organizational support theory, perceived organisational support results from  
96 employees' tendency to assign humanlike characteristics to an organization, so the  
97 organization becomes personified (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa, 1986).

In stressful situations, perceived organisational support might reduce psychological strain by indicating the availability of emotional and tangible support (Robblee, 1998 as cited in Eisenberger, Jason, Justin and Ivan, 2004). A large body of evidence indicates that employees with high levels of perceived organisational support judge their jobs more favourably (e.g., increased job satisfaction, more positive mood, and reduced stress) and are more invested in their organization (e.g., increased affective organizational commitment, increased performance and reduced turnover (Chen, 2008).

Organizational support guarantees employees that the organization is behind them as they handle stressful situations and execute their jobs (David, Martha, Neil, 2007). The social support can be from either the supervisor or the organisation. Rhoades (2002) cited Levinson (1965) in stating that agents of the organization are usually viewed as indicators of the organization's intent. Employees receiving favourable treatment from a supervisor will most likely perceive their organization as supportive. Also, organisational support refers to the employees' commitment to their organisation when they feel that their organisation provides enough training and resources for their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Perceived organisational support can be viewed as the assurance that help will be available from the organization when such is necessary to complete one's job in stressful situations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Job stress is a widespread concern across all employment sectors and occupational levels, and is a commonly reported cause of occupational illness and associated organisational outcomes e.g., lost work days, turnover rates, workers' compensation claims (Health and Community Services Sector, 2006). There is a need to make job stress beneficial to employees. Hence, the need to study the influence of perceived organizational support on job stress among employees in both the private as well as the public sector of the economy in Nigeria. Also to raise awareness about the causes, consequences, and ways of avoiding job stress or reducing it to the barest minimum through support.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To find out the pattern of relationship that exists between perceived organisational support and job stress.
2. To determine if perceived organisational support account for differences in job stress.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses will be tested:

1. There will be a significant positive relationship between perceived organisational support and job stress.
2. Perceived organisational support will significantly predict job stress.
3. Participants classified as scoring high on perceived organisational support will manifest low job stress compared to participants classified as scoring low on perceived organisational support.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of the study comprised of one thousand nine hundred and seventy three (1,973) Lagos Internal Revenue Service (LIRS) employees in Ikeja, Lagos, and five hundred and forty two (542) staff of the Redeemer's University, Nigeria (RUN). A sample size of three hundred and fifty four (354) employees were randomly selected and used in this study.

## Instruments

The instruments used for the collection of data for this study were the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (SPOS) and the Job Stress Scale. The Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (SPOS) was developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) to measure employees' beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values the employee's contribution and cares about his or her well-being. The short form of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support containing seventeen (17) items was used in this study. The reliability of the Survey of Perceived Organisational Support was tested and a cronbach's alpha of 0.72 was obtained and this was considered to be significant.

The Job Stress Scale developed by Parker and Decotiis (1983) containing thirteen (13) items was used for measuring job stress along two dimensions namely: time stress and anxiety stress dimensions. The reliability of the Job Stress Scale was tested and a cronbach's alpha of 0.86 was obtained and this was considered to be high.

## Results

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant positive relationship between perceived organisational support and job stress

**Table 1: Correlation between perceived organisational support and job stress.**

Variables	N	r-value	P
Perceived Organisational Support	354	-0.24	<0.05
Job Stress			

Table 1 shows that there is a significant inverse relationship between perceived organizational support and job stress  $r = -0.24$ ,  $n = 354$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Thus hypothesis one is therefore accepted

Hypothesis 2: Perceived organisational support will significantly predict job stress.

**Table 2: Perceived organisational support will significantly predict job stress.**

Variable	r	$r^2$	P
Perceived Organisational Support	0.24	0.06	<0.05

Dependent variable: Job stress

Table 2 indicates that perceive organisational support significantly predict job stress ( $r^2: 0.06$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). This means that perceived organisational support accounted for 6% variance in job stress. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Participants classified as scoring high on perceived organisational support will manifest low job stress compared to participants classified as scoring low on perceived organisational support.

**Table 3: Independent-sample t-test of employees job stress level based on the level of perceived organisational support.**

POS Level	N	Mean	S.D	t	P
High POS	182	36.30	10.41	-2.29	>0.05
Low POS	172	38.80	10.14		

Table 3 shows there was no significant difference in the scores for high POS ( $M = 36.30$ ,  $SD = 10.41$ ) and Low POS ( $M = 38.80$ ,  $SD = 10.14$ ) levels;  $t = -2.29$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . Since  $p > 0.05$ , the alternate hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is rejected..

## Discussion

The objective of this study was to investigate the influence of perceived organisational support on job stress among selected public and private sector employees of Nigeria.

Hypothesis one which states that there will be a significant relationship between perceived organisational support and job stress showed an apparent statistically significant inverse relationship between the two variables. This implies that an increase in perceived organizational support will lead to a decrease in job stress. This finding was supported by Khurshid and Anjum (2012) who reported a negative correlation between perceived organisational support and occupational stress among secondary school teachers. According to Khurshid and Anjum (2012), stress is a negative variable while perceived organizational support is a positive variable. This means that the level of employees' stress is likely to be on the high side when they are not supported by their organizational management, co-workers or other staff members. Furthermore, Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, and Toth (1997) also corroborated this finding in their research work titled 'The Relationship of Organizational Politics and Support to Work Behaviours, Attitudes, and Stress'. They noted that if one perceives a supportive environment, stress levels are less intense. Consequently, when the supportive environment is more stable and predictable, it is easier for an employee to invest considerable effort with the confidence of a reasonable return. In general, when people feel that they have social support from others, they report less stress, less anxiety, greater life satisfaction, and more psychophysical health (Carver, Scheier and Weintraub, 1989; Clark, Bormann, Cropanzano and James, in press; Cohen, 1991; Diener, 1984; Folkman and Lazarus, 1991; Ganster, Fusilier and Mayes, 1986 as cited in Cropanzano et al., 1997). Furthermore, it seems reasonable to suspect that a supportive organization will reduce at least some kinds of stress (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, and Toth 1997). For instance, a supportive organization creates a more predictable environment and also provides employees with helpful co-workers to whom they can turn for assistance. These kinds of effects should reduce stress levels. From the aforementioned it is obvious that perceived organisational support and job stress are inversely related and organisations need to reduce job stress by increasing factors that increase employees' perceived organisational support.

Hypothesis 2 which states that perceived organisational support will predict job stress was accepted. It was observed that perceived organisational support does significantly predict job stress. This means that perceived organisational support accounted for 6% variance in job stress. This finding was consistent with Eisenberger et. al (2004) who noted that perceived organisational support has potentials of reducing psychological strain in stressful situations and Chen (2008) who found that high levels of perceived organisational support enhances employees' favourable disposition to their jobs which can be linked with increased job satisfaction, more positive mood, and reduced stress.

Findings from Hypothesis 3 which states that participants classified as high on perceived organisational support will manifest low job stress compared to participants classified as low on perceived organisational support revealed that there was no significant difference between those who perceived high organisational support and their counterparts who had low level of perceived organisational support on response to job stress. It was however noted that participants with low perceived organisational support were more susceptible to job stress than their counterparts with high organisational support. This finding is consistent with studies of Grandey, (1997) and Randall et al., (1999) who reported that low perceived organizational support is closely linked with high turnover and job stress.

Overall, findings from this study have shown that organizational support is very effective whenever employees face different job stressors. The potentials that perceived organisational support have on direct management and reduction of stress in the workplace is an important area of research that needs further investigation in Nigeria.



## Recommendations

This study explored the influence of perceived organisational support on job stress and findings from the study indicate that increase in perceived organisational support will lead to a decrease in job stress and vice-versa, hence it is advisable for organisations to adopt strategies that enhance employees' perceived organizational support, such as general practices that is considered to be free and fair, rewards that are adequate and secure work environment.

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