

# Association between Optimism and Perceived Stress among Working Adults: A Cross-Sectional Study

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**Abstract:** ***Background:** Occupational demands and work-life responsibilities frequently contribute to psychological stress among working adults. Individual psychological characteristics, such as optimism, may influence subjective appraisals of stress. **Objective:** This study examined the relationship between dispositional optimism and perceived stress among working adults aged 21–60 years and evaluated whether optimism statistically predicts perceived stress levels. **Methods:** A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was conducted with  $N = 102$  working adults recruited via convenience sampling. Participants completed demographic items, a 12-item optimism scale, and a 12-item perceived stress scale. Data were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha, Pearson's product-moment correlation, and simple linear regression. **Results:** The optimism measure demonstrated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .804$ ;  $M = 44.90$ ,  $SD = 6.79$ ), and the perceived stress measure demonstrated high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .923$ ;  $M = 22.00$ ,  $SD = 9.52$ ). Pearson's correlation revealed a statistically significant negative association between optimism and perceived stress,  $r(100) = -.229$ ,  $p = .021$ . Simple linear regression indicated that optimism significantly predicted perceived stress,  $\beta = -.229$ ,  $p = .021$ ,  $F(1, 100) = 5.542$ , accounting for 5.3% of the variance ( $R^2 = .053$ ). **Conclusion:** Higher optimism is associated with lower perceived stress in working adults. However, because optimism accounts for a modest proportion of variance, it represents one of several protective psychological correlates rather than a sole determinant. Workplace well-being initiatives should integrate individual resilience-building with organizational structural changes.*

**Keywords:** Optimism, Perceived Stress, Working Adults, Occupational Well-being, Positive Psychology, Coping

## 1. Introduction

Stress is a prevalent psychological concern in contemporary occupational environments. Evolving workplace dynamics, heavy workloads, rigid deadlines, technological integration, job insecurity, extended working hours, and work-life conflict contribute to psychological stress among working adults. However, exposure to workplace stressors does not yield uniform psychological outcomes across individuals. People differ substantially in how they cognitively appraise environmental demands, evaluate available coping resources, and anticipate future outcomes.

Perceived stress refers to the degree to which life situations are appraised as unpredictable, uncontrollable, or overwhelming (Cohen et al., 1983). Rather than measuring objective event frequency, perceived stress emphasizes subjective cognitive appraisal. For working adults, perceived stress emerges from the intersection of occupational stressors and personal responsibilities, including financial obligations, family dynamics, and interpersonal expectations.

Optimism is conceptualized within Carver and Scheier's expectancy-value framework as a generalized expectancy of favorable future outcomes (Carver & Scheier, 2014). Optimistic individuals tend to maintain positive expectations when encountering obstacles, viewing challenges as temporary and manageable. Research indicates that optimism promotes approach-oriented coping, persistence, and problem-solving strategies, whereas lower optimism is associated with avoidance coping and heightened stress vulnerability (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006).

Empirical evidence across diverse settings supports the inverse relationship between optimism and stress outcomes. Tuten and Neidermeyer (2004) observed that call-center employees with higher optimism reported lower perceived job stress and work-nonwork conflict. In the Indian context,

Banerjee (2012) identified optimism as a protective factor against stress-induced psychological distress among university staff. Similarly, studies by Rajan and Kiran Babu (2021) and Joshi and Joshi (2021) observed inverse correlations between optimism and stress in young adult samples. However, research focusing on broader working-adult populations across diverse sectors remains limited.

This study addresses this gap by assessing the inverse association between optimism and perceived stress among working adults aged 21–60 years in India and testing whether optimism statistically predicts perceived stress levels.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Study Design and Participants

A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was utilized. The target population comprised working adults aged 21–60 years across various occupational sectors. Convenience sampling was employed to recruit participants electronically. Eligibility criteria required participants to be currently employed (full-time or part-time), aged between 21 and 60 years, and capable of completing an online survey in English. Out of 105 total responses, 3 were excluded due to missing data or age criteria non-compliance, resulting in a final sample of  $N = 102$ .

### 2.2 Measures

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into three parts:

- **Demographic Profile:** Collected background details, including age, gender, marital status, education level, employment sector, work experience, and weekly working hours.
- **Optimism Scale:** A 12-item instrument assessing positive future expectations, persistence, and confidence on a 5-

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point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Three negatively worded items were reverse-scored. Total scores ranged from 12 to 60, with higher scores reflecting higher optimism. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency in this sample (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .804$ ).

- **Perceived Stress Scale:** A 12-item instrument assessing the frequency of stress-related experiences (e.g., emotional exhaustion, lack of control, work anxiety) over the past month on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = Never to 4 = Very Often). Total scores ranged from 0 to 48, with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .923$ ).

### 2.3 Procedure & Ethical Considerations

The survey was administered online via Google Forms. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all individuals. The consent form outlined the study purpose, guaranteed voluntary participation, assured data confidentiality, and confirmed that responses would be utilized strictly for academic research.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS. Frequencies and percentages were computed for demographic characteristics. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were calculated for primary variables. Cronbach's alpha evaluated scale reliability. Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) tested the relationship between optimism and perceived stress, and simple linear regression assessed the predictive capacity of optimism on perceived stress.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Demographic Characteristics

The participant demographic profile across key variables is detailed in Table 1.

| Demographic Variable | Category    | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| Age Group            | 21–25 years | 26            | 25.50%         |
|                      | 26–30 years | 60            | 58.80%         |
|                      | 31–60 years | 16            | 15.70%         |
| Gender               | Female      | 58            | 56.90%         |
|                      | Male        | 44            | 43.10%         |
| Marital Status       | Single      | 72            | 70.60%         |
|                      | Married     | 30            | 29.40%         |

### 3.2 Descriptive Statistics & Scale Reliability

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha reliability indices for optimism and perceived stress.

| Variable         | Number of Items | Mean | Std. Deviation | Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) |
|------------------|-----------------|------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Optimism         | 12              | 44.9 | 6.79           | 0.804                         |
| Perceived Stress | 12              | 22   | 9.52           | 0.923                         |

### 3.3 Correlation & Regression Analysis

Pearson's product-moment correlation revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between optimism and perceived stress,  $r(100) = -.229, p = .021$ . As optimism scores increased, perceived stress scores significantly decreased.

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate whether optimism significantly predicted perceived stress levels. The overall regression model was statistically significant,  $F(1, 100) = 5.542, p = .021$ , with an  $R^2$  of .053. Optimism accounted for 5.3% of the total variance in perceived stress.

| Model      | Unstandardized B | Std. Error | Standardized Beta ( $\beta$ ) | t-statistic | p-value |
|------------|------------------|------------|-------------------------------|-------------|---------|
| (Constant) | 36.421           | 6.182      | —                             | 5.891       | <.001   |
| Optimism   | -0.321           | 0.136      | -0.229                        | -2.354      | 0.021   |

## 4. Discussion

This study investigated the association between optimism and perceived stress among working adults aged 21–60 years. The results confirmed a statistically significant inverse correlation between the two constructs ( $r = -.229, p = .021$ ), indicating that individuals with higher dispositional optimism experience lower perceived stress. Linear regression further established optimism as a significant predictor of perceived stress, confirming that positive outcome expectations contribute to mitigating subjective stress appraisals.

These findings align with the expectancy-value theoretical model (Carver & Scheier, 2014) and empirical findings by Nes and Segerstrom (2006), which position optimism as an adaptive cognitive resource. Optimistic working adults are more likely to interpret work stressors as temporary challenges rather than insurmountable threats, thereby reducing psychological strain.

However, the modest variance explained ( $R^2 = 5.3\%$ ) indicates that while optimism is a statistically significant correlate, it is far from the sole determinant of stress. Workplace environmental factors—such as workload intensity, organizational support, job autonomy, role ambiguity, and work-life balance—explain substantial additional variance in perceived stress. Consequently, optimism should be viewed as one component within a broader multivariable workplace well-being framework.

### 4.1 Practical Implications

- **Individual Interventions:** Employee assistance programs (EAPs) can incorporate Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) modules and positive psychology exercises (e.g., cognitive reframing, goal-setting) to foster optimism and adaptive coping.
- **Organizational Policy:** Employers should avoid over-relying on individual resilience programs. Interventions must combine personal skill-building with structural workplace improvements, such as workload optimization, flexible scheduling, and clear role boundaries.

## 4.2 Limitations & Future Directions

Several limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences. Second, convenience sampling and reliance on self-report measures introduce potential selection and response biases. Third, true moderation ("buffering") hypotheses were not statistically tested using interaction models. Future research should utilize longitudinal designs, probabilistic sampling across specific industries, and moderation analyses (e.g., SPSS PROCESS Macro) to examine interaction effects with environmental stressors.

## 5. Conclusion

Optimism is significantly and inversely related to perceived stress among working adults, serving as a protective psychological resource. While promoting optimistic cognitive appraisals can aid stress management, organizational strategies must simultaneously address systemic workplace stressors to build comprehensive occupational health frameworks.

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