

Workplace Stress, Mental Health and Job Satisfaction among Entry-Level Managers in India: A Correlational Study

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Abstract: *Entry-level managers are usually promoted for their technical skills and are then expected to meet targets, lead teams and resolve conflicts with little preparation for the role. This study examined the relationship between workplace stress, mental health and job satisfaction among entry-level managers in Indian organizations. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected through an online questionnaire from 47 managers with up to five years of managerial experience across finance, manufacturing, IT/ITES, healthcare and service operations. Most participants reported moderate workplace stress (61.7%), while nearly half (46.8%) reported high job satisfaction. Workplace stress was positively correlated with mental health difficulty ($r = .641$) and negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($r = -.477$), and mental health difficulty was negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($r = -.536$), all at $p < .01$. Stress explained 41% of the variance in mental health difficulty, and mental health explained 29% of the variance in job satisfaction. When both were considered together, only mental health remained a significant predictor of satisfaction. The findings suggest that the mental health of new managers is central to their job satisfaction and point to the need for training, mentoring and psychological support early in a managerial career.*

Keywords: workplace stress, mental health, job satisfaction, entry-level managers, job demands-resources model

1. Introduction

In most Indian organizations, the first managerial job arrives as a reward for being good at something else. An analyst who consistently meets targets becomes a team leader; a skilled operator becomes a shift supervisor; a reliable executive becomes an assistant manager. The promotion is welcome, but it changes the nature of the job almost overnight. The new manager now answers to senior management for numbers and, at the same time, has to keep a group of frontline employees motivated, trained and working together. Very often this happens without any formal preparation for leading people.

Hill [1] described this transition as a change of identity rather than a change of designation. The new managers she followed for a year expected their authority to come from their title, and discovered instead that their teams did not automatically follow them, that their own bosses expected quick results, and that the technical skills which earned them the promotion were no longer enough. Anicich and Hirsh [2] have argued that people in the middle of the hierarchy face a particular kind of strain, because they keep switching between a subordinate role with their own manager and a leader role with their team. Entry-level managers live in this position every working day.

Recent survey data suggest that these pressures are widespread in India. In the ADP Research Institute's People at Work 2023 survey, 76% of Indian workers said that stress was hurting their work performance and 49% said it was affecting their mental health, both above the global average. The share of Indian workers who felt that their manager supported their mental health fell from 80% to 71% within a

year [3]. A Forrester Consulting report for Indeed found that only 24% of Indian employees were thriving at work, and that having a manager who helps them succeed was among the strongest drivers of well-being [4]. If managers matter this much for the well-being of their teams, the well-being of the managers themselves deserves attention.

Workplace stress, mental health and job satisfaction have each been studied extensively, but usually in general employee samples or in specific occupations such as nursing, teaching and banking. Entry-level managers in corporate settings are rarely studied as a group of their own, and Indian studies that look at all three variables together in this group are scarce. The present study was undertaken to address this gap. It examines how workplace stress relates to the mental health and job satisfaction of entry-level managers working in Indian organizations, and whether stress and mental health predict these outcomes.

2. Literature Survey

2.1 Theoretical background

Stress, in the transactional view of Lazarus and Folkman [5], is not a property of the situation alone but of the relationship between a person and the situation. People feel stressed when they appraise a demand as exceeding the resources they have to deal with it. This view is useful for understanding new managers, whose appraisal of their own resources is often low because they are not yet sure of their skills or of whom to ask for help.

Several models explain why some jobs are more stressful than others. Karasek's demand-control model holds that strain

is highest when high job demands are combined with low decision latitude [6]. Siegrist's effort-reward imbalance model emphasises the gap between the effort a person invests and the rewards, recognition and security received in return [7]. The job demands-resources (JD-R) model brings these ideas together: job demands drain energy and lead to exhaustion and health problems, while job resources such as support, feedback and autonomy sustain engagement and satisfaction [8, 9]. When demands are high and resources are low, both health and attitudes suffer. Hobfoll's conservation of resources theory adds that resource losses tend to spiral, so that an already tired manager has less energy for the next problem [10].

Mental health is understood here, following the World Health Organization, as a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, and learn and work well [11]. Burnout, described by Maslach and Jackson as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced sense of accomplishment [12], is one of the most common ways in which long-term work stress shows itself. Job satisfaction is commonly defined as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job [13], and can be measured overall or across facets such as the work itself, the work environment, recognition and growth [14].

2.2 Empirical Studies

Meta-analytic evidence shows a consistent link between the psychosocial work environment and mental health. Stansfeld and Candy found that job strain, low decision latitude, low social support, high demands and effort-reward imbalance all predicted later common mental disorders [15]. Theorell et al. reported that job strain, low support from supervisors and co-workers, and job insecurity were associated with subsequent depressive symptoms [16]. In a study of 196 employees of small and medium enterprises, Chen et al. found that work stress had a strong negative effect on mental health and that mental health fully mediated the effect of stress on performance [17].

Stress is also consistently related to lower job satisfaction. Jackson and Schuler's meta-analysis reported correlations of -.46 between role ambiguity and general job satisfaction and -.48 between role conflict and satisfaction [18]. Among Indian private bank managers, Kumar and Varma found a correlation of -.552 between occupational stress and job satisfaction [19], while Sharma and Tripathi reported a weaker negative relationship ($r = -.181$) in a general employee sample [20]. In a four-year study of first-line healthcare managers in Sweden, Svanström et al. found that high demands and strained relationships were consistently linked with lower satisfaction, while control and support were linked with higher satisfaction [21].

The relationship between job satisfaction and health has been summarised by Faragher, Cass and Cooper in a meta-analysis of 485 studies. Job satisfaction was clearly related to health, and the association was strongest for mental health outcomes: .478 with burnout, .428 with depression and .420 with anxiety [22]. Prins et al. further reported that supervisors and managers had higher rates of depression and anxiety than

both owners and ordinary workers, which suggests that the middle of the hierarchy may be a particularly vulnerable position [23].

2.3 The Indian Context

Indian workplaces add a few pressures of their own. Promotions are still frequently based on tenure and technical performance rather than leadership readiness, team sizes in sectors such as IT-enabled services, banking operations and manufacturing can be large, and long working hours are common. After the pandemic, the boundary between office time and personal time has also become thin for many employees. Indian studies have repeatedly found that stress and satisfaction move together even in well-paid professional jobs. Madhura, Subramanya and Balaram, for example, reported significant correlations among job satisfaction, job stress and psychosomatic health problems in software professionals [24], and Rao and Chandraiah found that employees lower in the hierarchy reported more job stress and poorer mental health than executives in the same organization [25]. These findings suggest that position in the hierarchy and the demands attached to it shape how stress is experienced, which makes the first managerial layer a meaningful group to study.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the JD-R model, the present study treats workplace stress (workload, deadlines, role clarity, team conflict and lack of support) as the main job demand. Following the health-impairment pathway, stress is expected to be associated with poorer mental health. Mental health, in turn, is expected to be associated with job satisfaction, and stress may also be directly associated with lower satisfaction. The study tests these relationships through correlation and regression analysis.

2.5 Research Gap

Most of these studies examined only two of the three variables at a time, and studies focusing specifically on entry-level managers are few and mostly from Western healthcare settings. Indian research on occupational stress has largely examined bank employees, IT professionals, teachers and nurses without separating those who have recently moved into managerial roles. A study that looks at workplace stress, mental health and job satisfaction together among entry-level managers across sectors in India is therefore needed.

3. Problem Definition

3.1 Statement of the problem

Entry-level managers carry the dual pressure of meeting targets set from above and leading teams below, often without training for the role. The problem addressed in this study is whether the stress these managers experience at work is associated with poorer mental health and lower job satisfaction, and whether stress and mental health can predict these outcomes.

3.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study were to assess the levels of workplace stress, mental health difficulty and job satisfaction among entry-level managers, and to examine the relationships among these three variables.

3.3 Hypotheses

- H1: There will be a significant relationship between workplace stress and mental health.
- H2: There will be a significant relationship between workplace stress and job satisfaction.
- H3: There will be a significant relationship between mental health and job satisfaction.
- H4: Workplace stress will significantly predict mental health.
- H5: Mental health will significantly predict job satisfaction.

4. Methodology / Approach

4.1 Research design

A quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional survey design was used. The variables were measured as they naturally occur, without any manipulation, and data were collected from each participant at a single point in time.

4.2 Participants

Entry-level managers, defined as employees in their first managerial or supervisory position with up to five years of managerial experience and directly supervising a team (for example team leaders, supervisors and assistant managers), were the target population. Purposive sampling was used to identify the group, and convenience sampling was used to reach participants through the researcher's professional network on WhatsApp. Of the 52 responses received, five were excluded because the respondents did not meet the inclusion criteria (four were from the teaching or education field and one reported being retired). The final sample consisted of 47 entry-level managers from finance, manufacturing, IT/ITES, healthcare, operations, customer support and banking operations.

4.3 Tool

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. Part A recorded age group, gender, industry and years of managerial experience. Part B contained 15 statements in three sections of five items each, rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The workplace stress section covered workload, tight deadlines, role clarity, team conflict and lack of training and support from senior management. The mental health section covered anxiety, emotional exhaustion, difficulty in concentrating, feeling overwhelmed and the ability to maintain emotional balance; the last item was reverse scored. The job satisfaction section covered satisfaction with the job role, work environment, feeling valued, career growth opportunities and sense of fulfilment. Each section score ranges from 5 to 25. For the mental health

section, a higher score indicates greater difficulty, that is, poorer mental health. For describing levels, scores of 5 to 11 were treated as low, 12 to 18 as moderate and 19 to 25 as high.

4.4 Procedure and ethical considerations

The questionnaire was administered as a Google Form between May and September 2026. The form opened with a short note explaining the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary, no names or contact details were collected, and the data were used only for academic purposes and reported only at the group level.

4.5 Statistical analysis

The data were analysed using GNU PSPP, an open-source statistical package. Frequencies and percentages described the sample; means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis described the scores; and Cronbach's alpha assessed reliability. Pearson's correlation was used to test H1 to H3 and simple linear regression to test H4 and H5. A multiple regression, an independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA with Tukey's post hoc test were carried out as additional analyses. A p value below .05 was taken as significant.

5. Results & Discussion

5.1 Sample profile

Table 1: Demographic profile of the sample (N = 47)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	36	76.6
	Female	11	23.4
Age	26–30 years	6	12.8
	31–40 years	41	87.2
Managerial experience	0–1 year	3	6.4
	2–3 years	9	19.1
	3–4 years	6	12.8
	4–5 years	29	61.7
Industry	Finance	14	29.8
	Manufacturing	14	29.8
	IT / ITES	7	14.9
	Others*	12	25.5

*Healthcare (3), operations/BPM (3), customer support (3), banking operations (2), not specified (1).

As Table 1 shows, the sample was predominantly male (76.6%) and in the 31 to 40 age group (87.2%). Most participants (61.7%) had four to five years of managerial experience. Finance and manufacturing together accounted for nearly 60% of the sample.

5.2 Descriptive statistics and reliability

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and reliability (N = 47)

Variable	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurt	α
Workplace stress	14.51	4.07	0.22	-0.42	0.64
Mental health difficulty	13.57	4.59	0.02	-0.36	0.79
Job satisfaction	17.3	4.88	-0.3	-0.49	0.9

Note: Score range 5–25 for each variable. Higher mental health score indicates poorer mental health.

The mean workplace stress score was close to the scale midpoint of 15, the mean mental health difficulty score was slightly below it, and the mean job satisfaction score was above it (Table 2). Skewness and kurtosis values were within ± 1 , indicating approximately normal distributions. Internal consistency was excellent for job satisfaction ($\alpha = .90$) and good for mental health ($\alpha = .79$). The workplace stress section showed an alpha of .64, which is acceptable for a short exploratory scale but below the conventional .70 standard [26].

5.3 Levels of the variables

Table 3: Levels of the study variables, f (%)

Level (score)	Stress	Mental health difficulty	Job satisfaction
Low (5–11)	9 (19.1)	15 (31.9)	5 (10.6)
Moderate (12–18)	29 (61.7)	27 (57.4)	20 (42.6)
High (19–25)	9 (19.1)	5 (10.6)	22 (46.8)

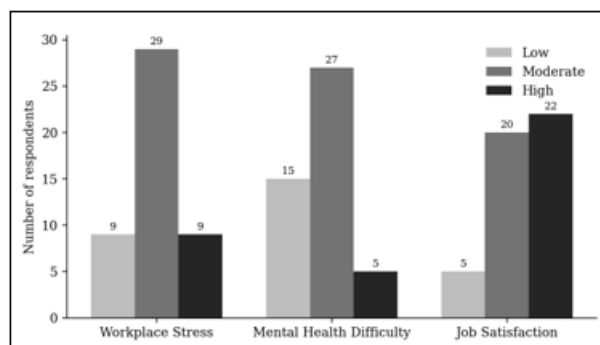


Figure 1: Levels of workplace stress, mental health difficulty and job satisfaction

About four in five managers experienced at least a moderate level of workplace stress, and 19.1% reported high stress (Table 3). Heavy workload and tight deadlines were the most strongly endorsed stressors, while lack of role clarity was the least. More than half the sample (57.4%) showed moderate mental health difficulty and 10.6% showed high difficulty, with feeling overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted being the most common complaints. Nearly half the managers (46.8%) reported high job satisfaction; satisfaction with career growth was the lowest-rated aspect.

5.4 Relationships among the variables

Table 4: Pearson correlations among the study variables (N = 47)

Variable	1	2	3
1. Workplace stress	1		
2. Mental health difficulty	.641**	1	
3. Job satisfaction	-.477**	-.536**	1

Note: ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Workplace stress showed a strong positive correlation with mental health difficulty ($r = .641$, $p < .01$), supporting H1. Stress was negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($r = -.477$, $p < .01$), supporting H2, and mental health difficulty was negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($r = -.536$, $p < .01$), supporting H3 (Table 4).

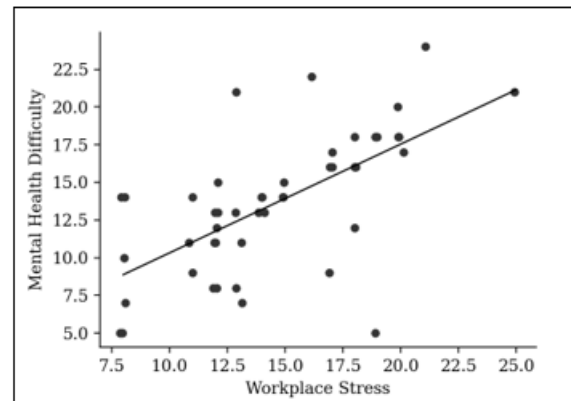


Figure 2: Scatter plot of workplace stress and mental health difficulty

5.5 Regression analysis

Table 5: Regression analysis

Predictor → Outcome	B	SE	β	t	R ²
Stress → Mental health difficulty	0.722	0.129	.641**	5.6	0.41
Mental health difficulty → Job satisfaction	-0.569	0.134	-.536**	-4.25	0.287
Combined model → Job satisfaction					0.317
Workplace stress	-0.272	0.194	-0.227	-1.4	
Mental health difficulty	-0.415	0.172	-.390*	-2.41	

Note: $p < .05$, * $p < .01$

Workplace stress significantly predicted mental health difficulty, $F(1, 45) = 31.32$, $p < .001$, explaining 41% of its variance (H4 supported). Mental health difficulty significantly predicted job satisfaction, $F(1, 45) = 18.10$, $p < .001$, explaining about 29% of its variance (H5 supported). When both stress and mental health were entered together ($R^2 = .317$, $F(2, 44) = 10.22$, $p < .001$), only mental health remained a significant predictor of job satisfaction ($\beta = -.390$, $p = .020$), while stress did not ($\beta = -.227$, $p = .169$).

5.6 Additional findings

Male managers reported higher workplace stress than female managers ($M = 15.25$ vs 12.09 ; $t(45) = 2.36$, $p = .023$), but the two groups did not differ in mental health or job satisfaction. Managers with four to five years of experience reported more mental health difficulty than those with two to three years ($F(3, 43) = 3.08$, $p = .037$; Tukey $p = .036$). Both findings are based on small subgroups and should be read with caution.

Table 6: Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Result	Decision
H1: Stress – mental health	$r = .641$, $p < .01$	Supported
H2: Stress – job satisfaction	$r = -.477$, $p < .01$	Supported
H3: Mental health – job satisfaction	$r = -.536$, $p < .01$	Supported
H4: Stress predicts mental health	$R^2 = .410$, $p < .001$	Supported
H5: Mental health predicts job satisfaction	$R^2 = .287$, $p < .001$	Supported

5.7 Discussion

All five hypotheses were supported. The strongest result was the link between workplace stress and mental health ($r =$

.641). This is consistent with meta-analytic evidence that job demands and job strain predict common mental health problems [15, 16] and with the strong effect of work stress on mental health reported by Chen et al. [17]. Part of this strength may come from measuring both variables with the same questionnaire at the same time. However, the researcher believes that the nature of the role also matters. As Hill [1] observed, the new manager faces demands from several directions before having the skills or the network to handle them, so pressure turns quickly into anxiety and exhaustion. The item-level pattern in this study, where feeling overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted were the most frequent difficulties, fits this explanation.

The correlation between stress and job satisfaction ($r = -.477$) is almost identical to the meta-analytic estimates of Jackson and Schuler for role ambiguity and role conflict [18], and close to the value reported by Kumar and Varma among Indian bank managers [19]. It is clearly stronger than the correlation found by Sharma and Tripathi in a general employee sample [20], which may indicate that for managers, stress at work is more closely tied to how they feel about the job itself. The finding also agrees with Svanström et al. [21], who found that high demands and strained relationships consistently lowered the satisfaction of first-line managers.

The relationship between mental health and job satisfaction ($r = -.536$) is in line with the values reported by Faragher et al. for burnout, depression and anxiety [22]. Taken together with the multiple regression result, the findings fit the health-impairment pathway of the JD-R model [9]: workload and deadlines act as job demands, they are associated with exhaustion and feeling overwhelmed, and through this with lower satisfaction. The fact that stress lost its significance once mental health was taken into account suggests that stress may reduce satisfaction largely through its effect on mental health. Since no formal mediation test was carried out, this should be treated as a possibility for future research rather than an established finding.

It is also worth noting what the data did not show. Most managers were not in crisis; only about one in five reported high stress and about one in ten reported high mental health difficulty or low satisfaction. Role ambiguity, which the researcher had expected to be a major concern, was the least endorsed stressor, possibly because most participants already had four to five years in the role. At the same time, this experienced group showed more mental health difficulty than managers with two to three years of experience. One possible explanation is that pressure which is not addressed in the early years accumulates over time, as the concepts of allostatic load [27] and resource loss spirals [10] would suggest.

The gender difference, with male managers reporting more stress than female managers, was not expected and was not part of the main hypotheses. With only eleven women in the sample, the result may reflect differences in the sectors and roles of the men and women who responded rather than a genuine gender effect, and it would need to be tested in a larger and more balanced sample before any conclusion is drawn.

5.8 Implications

Organizations should not assume that a strong individual performer will automatically become an effective manager. Structured training in delegation, feedback and conflict handling before or soon after promotion can reduce the demands new managers face. Since workload and deadlines were the main stressors, the workload and team size assigned to entry-level managers deserve review. Mentoring by experienced managers, regular check-ins and peer support groups can provide the job resources that the JD-R model identifies as protective. Because mental health was the strongest predictor of job satisfaction, employee assistance programmes, counselling and stress management workshops should be easily available to managers and not only to frontline staff, and this support should continue beyond the first year in the role. Clear career paths may also help, as career growth was the lowest-rated aspect of satisfaction.

For human resource practitioners, the results also suggest a simple monitoring approach. A short, periodic pulse survey covering workload, emotional exhaustion and satisfaction among new managers could help identify those who are struggling before the strain shows up as poor performance, absenteeism or resignation. Since managers shape the day-to-day experience of their teams, early support at this level is likely to benefit the wider workforce as well.

6. Conclusion

The study found that workplace stress, mental health and job satisfaction are closely and significantly related among entry-level managers in Indian organizations. Managers who experience more stress tend to have poorer mental health and lower job satisfaction, and mental health appears to play a central role in how satisfied they are with their work. Supporting the well-being of first-time managers is therefore not only a personal concern but also an organizational one, since these managers shape the daily experience of the teams they lead.

7. Future Scope

The present study has some limitations that also point to directions for future work. The sample of 47 managers was small and drawn through convenience sampling, and it was unbalanced in terms of gender, age and experience, so the results cannot be generalised to all entry-level managers in India. The questionnaire was self-developed and not standardised, and the stress section showed modest reliability. All data were self-reported at one point in time, which raises the possibility of common method bias and does not allow causal conclusions.

Future studies could use larger and more balanced samples drawn through random or stratified sampling, and standardised instruments for stress, mental health and job satisfaction. Longitudinal designs that follow managers from their first promotion over two or three years would show how stress and mental health change over time and which comes first. The possible mediating role of mental health between stress and job satisfaction, suggested by this study, can be tested formally through mediation analysis. Protective factors

such as social support, coping style, resilience and leadership training could also be included, and comparisons between entry-level managers, frontline employees and middle managers would show whether the first managerial role is in fact more demanding than others.

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