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Job Stress Among Hispanic Professionals

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This study explores job stress among a random sample of 219 Hispanic professionals. Participants complete the Job Stress Survey by Spielberger and Vagg and a demographic questionnaire. Responses are analyzed using descriptive statistics, a factorial analysis of variance, and coefficients of determination. Results indicate that Hispanic professionals participating in this study experience higher levels of job stress than do individuals in a normative group. Furthermore, female participants report significantly higher levels of job stress than male participants do. Lack of organizational support contributes more to the variability of job stress among participants than job pressure does. Results from this study add to the body of knowledge on job stress and to the body of knowledge on work-related outcomes for Hispanic employees.

Keywords: *job stress; Hispanic; professionals; perceptions*

Hispanics in the Workplace

Blau (1977) defined demographic diversity as the degree of dispersion of a population in terms of nominal demographic attributes, such as gender, age, and race or ethnic characteristics. Lau and Murnighan (1998) pointed out that, in addition to demographic composition, analyses concerning diversity in the workplace should consider the potential dynamics that certain demographic distributions could activate.

Demographic changes occurring in the United States have influenced modifications in the workforce and the work environment, a trend expected to continue throughout this century (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Lau & Murnighan, 1998). The Hispanic population in 2000 increased 58% compared to the Hispanic population in 1990, representing 12.5% of the overall population of the United States and surpassing African Americans as the largest ethnic minority in this country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

The increase in overall population among Hispanics has had ramifications for the American workforce as well. The Hudson Institute estimated that the

number of ethnic minority employees in the American workforce would increase from 24% in 1995 to 31% in 2020 (Judy & D'Amico, 1997); furthermore, approximately 14% of those ethnic minority employees would be individuals of Hispanic origin (Judy & D'Amico, 1997).

Despite the increasing ethnic diversification of the American workplace, effects of this diversification on both working conditions and workers' health have not been studied sufficiently. In 1998, The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health recognized the need to focus on ethnic minority groups as part of its research agenda and proposed researching the role of ethnicity in employees' safety and health. The study of job-related outcomes relative to ethnic diversity has become imperative (Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Harrison et al., 1998; Judy & D'Amico, 1997; Marsella, 1994).

Job Stress and Hispanic Employees

The relationship between ethnic origin and stress has been the least studied among all of the individual differences that may moderate job stress responses (Matteson & Ivancevich, 1987). Ford (1985) noted that ethnic minorities have been ignored in job stress studies. Other researchers also have recognized the need for such studies (Allen, Amason, & Holmes, 1998; Gutierrez, Saenz, & Green, 1994; Marsella, 1994; Perez, 1998). Marsella observed, "Anecdotal commentaries abound, the majority studies either have focused on members of majority cultures or have failed to consider ethnocultural minority status as a research variable" (p. 150). Sanchez and Brock (1996) pointed out that previous research has investigated only self-reported ethnicity and observed that few job stress studies have examined effects of ethnic minority status.

Because the phenomenon appears so specific, Comas-Diaz (1997) introduced a new term, "ethnocultural occupational stress" (p. 143), to refer to situations in which ethnic minority workers face stressful working conditions that are directly related to their minority ethnic status. Gutierrez et al. (1994) posited, "[To the] extent that such stressors are prevalent, it is doubtful that interventions developed on the basis of research conducted with White male managers will show parallel benefits for ethnic minority workers" (p. 109). James (1994) observed that among ethnic minority employees, job stress appears to be specifically influenced by (a) cultural conflicts, (b) lack of social support, and (c) prejudice and discrimination.

Cultural background appears to influence such work perceptions as commitment, importance, relationships, and communication patterns (Marsella, 1994). Hofstede (1984) developed the four cross-cultural categories of work-

related values to explain how people of different cultural backgrounds have different work-related attitudes and behaviors. Hofstede's research showed that work-related values are influenced by culture. The four categories identified by Hofstede are (a) power-distance, (b) uncertainty-avoidance, (c) individualism-collectivism, and (d) masculinity-femininity. Whereas employees in the United States tend to behave under distance, uncertainty, individualism, and masculinity values, employees in Latin American subsidiaries behave under power, avoidance, and collectivism. Regarding masculinity and femininity, the trend is that in some cases, such as in Chile and Peru, employees favor femininity, but in other cases, as in Venezuela, Mexico, and Colombia, employees favor masculinity. Hofstede found that employees working for Latin American subsidiaries who scored high in avoidance presented high levels of job stress.

Hofstede's (1984) categories might explain how certain organizational cultures have a stressful effect on Hispanic employees if organizational work-related values are contrary to those of the employee. That is, if Hispanic employees have a tendency to perceive the work environment as powerful, avoidant, and collective, they might feel pressured by an organizational culture that emphasizes power, uncertainty, and individualism.

James (1994) suggested that lack of social support influences job stress among Hispanic employees. Studies have shown that supportive relationships reduce stress (Amason, Allen, & Holmes, 1999; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Brewer & McMahan-Landers, 2003a, 2003b; Brewer & Shapard, 2004; Burlison, Albrecht, & Pierce, 1994; Schabracq & Cooper, 1998). Cultural aspects can influence Hispanic employees' perceptions of support received from peers and supervisors (James, 1994). Whereas Latin work cultures have been identified as being collectivistic, American work culture has been found to be individualistic (Hofstede, 1984). These two opposite cultural aspects could activate a mismatch between perceived and expected social support. That is, Hispanic employees might perceive that they are not receiving enough support from supervisors and peers.

Additionally, James (1994) also found that the presence of prejudice and discrimination in the workplace is a possible source of job stress among Hispanic workers. Prejudice and discrimination might affect organizational outcomes because "interpersonal trust is an important ingredient of effective human relations and performance in organizations. Although many factors influence trust, the existence of prejudice and discrimination takes a heavy toll" (Cox, 1993, p. 81). Authors researching job stress among ethnic minority workers have identified that perceptions of prejudice and discrimination have a direct relationship with work-related stress (Gutierrez et al., 1994;

James, 1994; James, Lovato, & Khoo, 1994; Morgan, Beale, Mattis, Stovall, & White, 2000; Perez, 1998; Sanchez & Brock, 1996).

Other research has focused on the effects of immigrant status on job stress among specific ethnic groups (Brown & James, 2000; Cervantes, 1992; Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Young, 1987). Differences that could have an impact on job stress appear to point in three directions. First, because non-immigrants have not had to adapt to a new culture, they might experience minimal cultural conflicts and, subsequently, less job stress than immigrants who must go through the process of adapting to a new culture. Second, immigrants might have a striving attitude that "provides an impetus to succeed within the host culture through work and education" (Comas-Diaz, 1997, p. 144). This attitude might buffer work-related stress. Third, immigrants also might harbor a desire to return to their homeland. This desire might inhibit the acculturation process and, consequently, increase levels of job stress.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore job stress among Hispanic professionals. To do this, we made comparisons between job stress levels of participants in this study and normative data for managerial and professional occupations provided by Spielberger and Vagg (1999). In addition, we examined differences in job stress levels as predicted by demographic factors, and we explored which dimension of job stress accounted for more variability among the participants. Four research questions guided the study:

1. Do participants in the study exhibit higher levels of job stress than individuals in the normative group do?
2. Are there differences in job stress levels between participants and individuals in the normative group based on gender?
3. Are there significant differences in job stress levels among participants based on age, gender, tenure, and place of birth (i.e., in or outside the United States)?
4. Which job stress dimension—job pressure or lack of organizational support—accounts for more variability in job stress levels among participants in the study?

Method

Sample and Data Collection

Participants in the study were members of the Professional Chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Masters in Business Administrators. A

random sample of 400 individuals was drawn from a membership list. Survey materials (i.e., instruments, a cover letter, and a self-addressed, stamped return envelope) were sent via mail to each individual whose name was drawn. The survey followed Dillman's (2000) suggested procedures for conducting mail surveys. An advance electronic mail was sent to individuals in the sampled group. It informed them that they would be receiving an envelope containing the survey's instruments along with a demographic questionnaire. The electronic mail had the purpose of preventing the discarding of what participants might have considered as unsolicited or unexpected mail.

The mailed-out package included a cover letter that assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity. The survey package included a dollar bill as a token for thanking individuals for their participation in the study. The inclusion of the dollar bill had the purpose of encouraging potential participants to respond to the survey (Dillman, 2000). A second follow-up electronic mail had a similar purpose to the first follow-up electronic mail.

Out of the 400 surveys mailed, 219 were returned, which represented a 54.75% response rate. Of the 181 nonrespondents, 20 could not be contacted either because the U.S. Postal Service returned their envelopes marked as incorrect addresses or because they clearly expressed by electronic mail that they were excluding themselves from participation.

Instrumentation and Demographic Questionnaire

We reviewed different instruments for assessing job stress. The selected instrument offered an advantage over other instruments in that it could be completed in a relatively short amount of time. Because we knew that potential participants in the study likely held executive positions, we assumed that answering time would be a critical factor influencing their willingness to participate in the study.

Job stress, job pressure, and lack of organizational support. To assess job stress, we employed the Job Stress Survey (JSS) developed by Spielberger and Vagg (1999). The JSS was developed "[to] assess generic sources of occupational stress encountered by men and women in a wide variety of work settings" (Spielberger & Vagg, p. 5). The JSS considers two dimensions of occupational stress: severity and frequency. Spielberger and Vagg identified 30 events as possible sources of job stress; events perceived both as highly severe and frequent are the ones most likely to produce strain. Samples of stressful job-related events in the JSS included "working overtime," "fellow workers not doing their job," "difficulty getting along with supervisor," "inadequate salary," "poorly motivated coworkers," "lack of opportunity for

advancement," and "assignment of disagreeable duties." Respondents rate the severity of each stressor on a 9-point scale by comparing it to an event perceived as producing an average amount of stress (i.e., "assignment of disagreeable duties"), which has been assigned the midpoint value of 5. Then, respondents report on a scale of 0 to 9 or more days how often each stressor has occurred in the past 6 months.

Three scales and six subscales comprise the JSS. Of these nine scales, only three considered both frequency and severity dimensions. Scales not considering either one of these two dimensions were not included in the statistical analysis. The three JSS scales of interest were the following:

1. **Job Stress Index:** Provides an estimate of the overall level of occupational stress. It combines severity and frequency ratings for all 30 JSS items.
2. **Job Pressure Index:** Assesses job stress experienced by respondents that could be attributed directly to pressures of their work. It combines the severity and frequency ratings for 10 JSS items identified as events that reflect "stressful aspects of the job's structure, design, or duties" (Spielberger & Vagg, 1999, p. 6).
3. **Lack of Organizational Support:** Assesses job stress experienced by respondents that can be attributed directly to lack of support on behalf of their supervisor, coworkers, or the organization. It combines the severity and frequency ratings for all the 10 JSS items identified as events involving supervisors or coworkers or organizational policies that reflect lack of support.

Spielberger and Vagg (1999) reported reliability coefficients of .87 for job stress, .80 for job pressure, and .80 for lack of organizational support. Regarding validity, the authors indicated that several studies have verified the construct validity of the JSS (see Spielberger & Reheiser, 1994; Turnage & Spielberger, 1991).

Demographic variables. A demographic questionnaire, specifically designed for the study, served the purpose of obtaining demographic profiles of the participants. We analyzed the following demographic variables: age, gender, tenure, and place of birth (i.e., inside or outside the United States).

Data Analysis

We scored responses to the JSS according to the directions provided by Spielberger and Vagg (1999) in the instrument's user manual. Demographic data were coded. A database containing job stress scores and demographic data was generated for conducting statistical analyses to respond to the research questions. Job stress scores were compared to national norms reported by Spielberger and Vagg. We conducted descriptive analysis for comparing

Table 1. Comparison Between Participants and Normative Group

Measure	Participants			Normative group		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Job stress	24.13	10.59	219	20.19	10.06	983
Job pressure	28.13	13.10	219	22.62	12.40	955
Lack of organizational support	23.63	15.42	219	20.15	14.37	950

means to answer the first and the second research questions. We conducted a factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) to answer the third research question. In this particular case, we were interested only in testing main effects; therefore, no interaction effects were determined. To answer the fourth research question, we obtained coefficients of determination for job stress and job pressure and for job stress and lack of organizational support. Obtained coefficients served to determine which of these two dimensions contributed in a higher degree to the variability of job stress.

Results

The average age of the participants was 36 years, and the average tenure was approximately 5 years. Gender distribution was 40% women and 60% men; 56% of the participants were born abroad, and 44% were born in the United States.

Comparison of Scores to Normative Data

The first research question inquired whether participants in the study exhibited higher levels of job stress than individuals in the normative group did. We answered the first research question by comparing national norms to participants' scores from the JSS. As shown by Table 1, respondents to the survey, on average, exhibited higher levels of job stress ($M = 24.13$) than individuals in the normative group did ($M = 20.19$). On average, participants also reported higher job pressure ($M = 28.12$) than individuals in the normative group did ($M = 22.62$), as well as greater lack of organizational support ($M = 23.63$) than individuals in the normative group did ($M = 20.15$).

Gender Comparisons

The second research question inquired about gender differences between respondents to the survey and individuals in the normative group. On aver-

Table 2. Comparison Between Participants and Normative Group by Gender

Measure	Participants			Normative group		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Men						
Job stress	23.07	9.91	132	20.09	9.90	643
Job pressure	27.44	12.94	132	22.40	12.07	621
Lack of organizational support	22.70	15.06	132	20.50	14.40	623
Women						
Job stress	25.75	11.43	87	20.37	10.37	340
Job pressure	29.17	13.35	87	23.01	13.00	334
Lack of organizational support	25.09	15.93	87	19.48	14.30	327

age, male participants reported higher levels of job stress, job pressure, and lack of organizational support than male individuals in the normative group did. Female participants, on average, also exhibited higher levels of job stress, job pressure, and lack of organizational support than female individuals in the normative group did. Table 2 presents comparisons between both groups by gender.

Demographic Differences Among Participants

We conducted ANOVAs to answer the third research question inquiring about demographic differences within the group of participants regarding the following demographic variables: age, gender, tenure, and place of birth. Table 3 presents results for the ANOVA for job stress. We found significant differences regarding gender; female participants reported significantly higher levels of job stress than did male participants. We did not find differences in job stress relative to age, tenure, or place of birth. The ANOVAs for job pressure and lack of organizational support showed no significant demographic differences.

Job Pressure and Lack of Organizational Support Effect on Job Stress

The last research question inquired whether job pressure or lack of organizational support would contribute greater to the variability of job stress among the participants in this study. To answer this question, we calculated coefficients of determination for job stress and job pressure and for job stress

Table 3. Job Stress Analysis of Variance

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Age	3	22.07	0.06	0.98
Gender	1	477.86	4.19	0.04*
Tenure	4	170.39	0.37	0.83
Place of birth	1	221.48	1.94	0.16
Within-group error	207	23,589.62		

**p* < .05.

and lack of organizational support. By assessing the degree of association between each pair of variables, we were able to find which of these two dimensions contributed to a higher variability of job stress. Among the participants, lack of organizational support contributed to higher variability of job stress ($R^2 = .67$) than did job pressure ($R^2 = .60$). That is, lack of organizational support contributed 7% more to job stress levels among participants in the study than did job pressure.

Discussion

Results of the study showed that participants exhibited higher levels of job stress than individuals in the managerial and professional normative group. Results are consistent with suggestions found in the literature that Hispanic employees might experience higher job stress than other individuals. This situation was identified by Comas-Diaz (1997) as ethnocultural occupational stress. This outcome points out the existence of factors influencing higher job stress, job pressures, and lack of organizational support among Hispanic professionals than individuals in the normative group.

Higher levels of job stress reported by participants in the study might be explained by factors suggested by James (1994): cultural conflicts, prejudice and discrimination, and lack of organizational support. We found that lack of organizational support accounted for more variability on job stress than did job pressure. That is, for Hispanic professionals who participated in the study, lack of support from their supervisor, their peers, and the organizations that they worked for accounted for higher levels of job stress than did situations related to such job pressures as meeting deadlines or dealing with crisis situations, among others. The extent to which job stress levels are related to cultural factors and perceptions of prejudice and discrimination needs further investigation.

Descriptive analyses by gender showed differences between the two groups. Mean values for job stress, job pressure, and lack of organizational

support were higher for male and female participants than those for individuals in the normative group. Male and female participants differed in their mean values for job stress, job pressure, and lack of organizational support. Female participants reported higher levels for these variables than did male participants. In contrast, male and female individuals in the normative group exhibited similar levels of job stress and job pressure. Male individuals in the normative group showed slightly higher levels for lack of organizational support than female individuals in the same group. Through the ANOVA, we determined that job stress levels were significantly higher for female participants than they were for male participants. We did not find significant differences regarding job pressure or lack of organizational support among the participants.

Similar to findings by Gardiner and Tiggemann (1998), job stress levels were significantly higher for female participants than they were for male participants. This result was also consistent with results obtained by Ford (1980), who found significant differences in job stress between Mexican American women and Mexican American men.

The analyses of additional demographic differences indicated no significant findings for age, tenure, or place of birth for job stress, job pressure, and lack of organizational support. We had expected additional significant differences in job stress based on the suggestion by Finegold, Mohrman, & Spreitzer (2002) that older workers might experience higher levels of stress associated with fears of job loss. We did not find differences in job stress between individuals born in the United States and individuals born abroad. This result was consistent with similar empirical findings (Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Young, 1987).

Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study are subject to two limitations. First, Spielberger and Vagg (1999) did not report the ethnic distribution of the normative group. We assumed that the normative group had an ethnic composition different than the group of participants and that the ethnic group with majority representation in the normative group was White, reflecting the ethnic national distribution. Comparisons between the normative group and respondents to the survey were made under such assumptions, and differences between the two groups were identified as the result of ethnocultural occupational stress, as suggested by Comas-Diaz (1997). Second, common in studies dealing with surveys, a major limitation was the conclusiveness of the results because of the response rate. There may have been differences in members of the sam-

ple who responded to the survey and those who did not. Those differences may have influenced the results of this study.

We recommend that the study be replicated focusing on other Hispanic professional groups, such as nurses, engineers, journalists, or federal employees. James (1994) suggested that job stress among Hispanic employees could be influenced particularly by cultural factors and perceptions of prejudice and discrimination. Future studies could investigate the relationship between job stress and prejudice and discrimination. Furthermore, future studies could analyze the relationship between job stress and Hofstede's (1984) cross-cultural categories of work-related values. A comprehensive study could be one that investigates relationships among job stress, cultural work-related values, and prejudice and discrimination among ethnic minorities in the workplace. Studies also could focus on the analysis of gender differences in levels of job stress among Hispanic employees. These studies could analyze whether such differences are similar to gender differences found in other ethnic or racial groups.

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