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The Influence of Job Stress, Psychological Resilience, and Job Resources on Job Performance among University Administrative Staff in Guangdong Province

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Abstract: In the wake of rapid higher education expansion and the "Double First-Class" initiative in China, university administrative staff in Guangdong Province face unprecedented workloads and bureaucratic demands. Despite their critical role in institutional operations, their occupational well-being remains underexplored compared to academic faculty. Drawing upon the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study investigates the direct impact of job stress on job performance, as well as the independent and moderating effects of psychological resilience (internal resource) and job resources (external resource). A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data were collected from 385 full-time administrative staff across various universities in Guangdong Province. Hypotheses were tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis, with careful ex-ante and ex-post controls for Common Method Bias. The findings reveal that job stress significantly and negatively predicts job performance ($\beta = -0.285$, $p < 0.001$). Conversely, both psychological resilience ($\beta = 0.310$, $p < 0.001$) and job resources ($\beta = 0.385$, $p < 0.001$) positively influence performance. Crucially, the moderation analysis demonstrates that both psychological resilience and job resources significantly buffer the detrimental effects of job stress on performance. The study concludes that while administrative job stress is inevitable, its negative impact on performance can be effectively mitigated. Universities must transition from demand-driven management to resource-based support systems, actively cultivating staff resilience and optimizing job resources to sustain institutional efficiency.

Keywords: Job Stress, Job Performance, Psychological Resilience, Job Resources, University Administrative Staff, JD-R Model, Higher Education.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The landscape of higher education in China has undergone a profound transformation over the past two decades. Driven by national strategies such as the "Double First-Class" university initiative, higher education institutions are under immense pressure to elevate their global rankings, research output, and educational quality. Guangdong Province, serving as a dynamic economic and educational hub in Southern China, is at the forefront of this competitive expansion. While much of the academic spotlight and institutional resources are directed toward faculty and researchers, the operational backbone of these universities the administrative staff remains largely overlooked.

University administrative staff handle a complex array of duties, ranging from student affairs and human resources to financial management and policy implementation. As universities in Guangdong rapidly expand and reform, the workload, bureaucratic complexity, and accountability demanded of administrative personnel have surged, creating a highly demanding work environment.

1.2 Problem Statement

The escalating demands placed on university administrators inevitably lead to high levels of job stress. Prolonged exposure to occupational stress is widely documented as a catalyst for burnout, emotional exhaustion, and significantly

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diminished job performance. When the administrative backbone of a university underperforms, the entire institutional ecosystem−including teaching quality and student satisfaction−suffers.

Despite this critical role, existing literature on occupational well-being in higher education exhibits a pronounced bias toward academic staff. The unique psychological mechanisms and environmental factors that govern the performance of non-academic administrative personnel remain underexplored. Specifically, while the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model suggests that stress (demands) depletes performance, it also posits that personal traits and organizational support can buffer these negative effects. However, there is a distinct lack of empirical, quantitative research examining how internal psychological capabilities (like psychological resilience) and external organizational support (like job resources) interact to mitigate job stress and sustain job performance among administrative staff in the specific, high-pressure context of Guangdong’ s higher education system.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

To address this critical literature gap, this study aims to systematically investigate the interplay between job stress, psychological resilience, job resources, and job performance. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What is the direct impact of job stress on the job performance of university administrative staff in Guangdong Province?

RQ2: How do psychological resilience and job resources independently influence job performance?

RQ3: Do psychological resilience (internal resource) and job resources (external resource) moderate or buffer the negative relationship between job stress and job performance?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research offers substantial theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory by applying them to a crucial, yet under-researched demographic within a non-Western, rapidly developing educational context. Practically, the findings will provide data-driven insights for university administrators and Human Resources departments in Guangdong and beyond. By identifying whether internal resilience or external resources are more effective in mitigating stress, universities can design targeted interventions such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), optimized workflow autonomy, or resilience-training workshops to safeguard the well-being and operational efficiency of their administrative workforce.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Theoretical Framework: JD-R Model and COR Theory

To comprehensively understand the mechanisms influencing the job performance of university administrative staff, this study integrates the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989).

The JD-R model posits that occupational stress factors can be categorized into two broad dimensions: job demands and job resources. Job demands encompass physical, psychological, social, and organizational job aspects requiring sustained effort, thereby incurring physiological and psychological costs. For administrative personnel in Guangdong universities, such demands frequently manifest as heavy workloads, rigid administrative deadlines, and emotional labor. Job resources, conversely, refer to job aspects that facilitate goal achievement, mitigate demand-related strain, or foster personal development−exemplified by supervisor support and autonomy.

The COR theory provides a complementary framework, proposing that individuals actively seek to acquire, retain, protect, and accumulate resources. Resource loss, threat of loss, or failure to gain resources following investment generates psychological stress. Within this integrated framework, psychological resilience functions as a critical personal resource, while job resources constitute environmental or organizational resources. Both resource types are hypothesized to directly enhance performance while simultaneously buffering against the resource-depleting effects of job stress.

2.2 Job Stress and Job Performance

Job stress in the higher education administrative context arises when the requirements of the role exceed the individual's capabilities or resources. In the fast-paced environment of Guangdong's expanding universities, administrative staff frequently encounter role ambiguity, bureaucratic red tape, and conflicting demands from multiple stakeholders (e.g., faculty, students, government bodies).

According to the JD-R model's health impairment process, chronic job stress leads to cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion (Gilboa et al., 2008). When administrative staff are overwhelmed by stress, their cognitive bandwidth narrows, leading to decreased attention to detail, lower efficiency, and a higher likelihood of errors in critical tasks such as financial processing or student records management. Prolonged stress drains the energetic resources needed to maintain high-quality work output, directly impairing formal job performance.

H1: Job stress has a significant negative influence on the job performance of university administrative staff.

2.3 Psychological Resilience and Job Performance

Psychological resilience is defined as the personal capability to bounce back from adversity, uncertainty, and conflict, maintaining psychological stability and functioning effectively under pressure (Luthans et al., 2007). In the context of university administration, unexpected crises (e.g., sudden policy changes or campus emergencies) are common.

Drawing on the COR theory, highly resilient individuals possess a robust reservoir of psychological capital. They view challenges as manageable rather than insurmountable threats. Consequently, resilient administrative staff are more likely to exhibit proactive problem-solving behaviors, maintain focus on institutional goals, and recover quickly from administrative setbacks. This positive psychological state fosters adaptability and perseverance, which are critical drivers of sustained job performance.

H2: Psychological resilience has a significant positive influence on the job performance of university administrative staff.

2.4 Job Resources and Job Performance

Job resources−including social support from colleagues, constructive feedback from supervisors, and job autonomy− constitute critical components within the motivational pathway of the JD-R model. For administrative personnel, the availability of adequate resources ensures access to the requisite tools, information, and emotional support necessary for efficient role execution.

Resource-rich universities foster employee valuation and support, enhancing intrinsic motivation and engagement (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Autonomy enables workflow optimization; peer support accelerates information sharing. Such environments directly improve task proficiency and performance.

H3: Job resources have a significant positive influence on the job performance of university administrative staff.

2.5 The Moderating (Buffering) Roles of Resilience and Job Resources

Beyond direct effects, this study investigates the interactive dynamics between stress, personal resources, and organizational resources. The JD-R model explicitly posits that job resources can buffer the impact of job demands on strain and performance. Similarly, the COR theory suggests that individuals with greater resources (both internal and external) are less vulnerable to resource loss when facing high stress.

When job stress is high, administrative staff lacking psychological resilience may quickly spiral into burnout and poor performance. However, highly resilient individuals can deploy their internal coping mechanisms to mitigate the psychological damage of stress, maintaining a functional level of performance even in high-pressure scenarios (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

H4: Psychological resilience positively moderates the relationship between job stress and job performance, such that the negative impact of job stress on performance is weakened when resilience is high.

Likewise, external organizational support acts as a protective shield. If an administrator faces a massive workload (high stress) but operates in a highly supportive environment with efficient IT systems and empathetic supervisors (high job resources), the stress is perceived as less threatening. The availability of these resources compensates for the demands, buffering the negative spillover onto job performance.

H5: Job resources positively moderate the relationship between job stress and job performance, such that the negative impact of job stress on performance is weakened when job resources are abundant.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To empirically evaluate the hypothesized relationships (H1 through H5) derived from the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the present investigation employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The quantitative approach is methodologically appropriate for examining complex structural relationships among job stress, psychological resilience, job resources, and job performance within a specified population. The cross-sectional design enabled efficient acquisition of self-reported data from a sizable sample of administrative personnel across multiple universities at a single temporal juncture.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population for this investigation consisted of full-time administrative personnel employed within higher education institutions situated in Guangdong Province, China. To ensure adequate sample representativeness, a stratified convenience sampling method was employed, wherein strata were delineated according to institutional classification—specifically, Double First-Class universities, regular undergraduate institutions, and vocational and technical colleges.

According to Hair et al. (2019), a minimum sample size of 10 times the maximum number of arrowheads pointing at a latent variable in the structural model is required, though a sample size of over 300 is generally recommended for robust multivariate analysis. Targeting an estimated valid sample of 350-400 respondents, approximately 500 online questionnaires were distributed via academic and professional administrative networks in Guangdong.

3.3 Instrumentation

The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire composed of established, validated scales adapted from previous literature. All items (excluding demographic questions) were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). Because the target respondents were native Chinese speakers, the original English scales underwent a rigorous translation and back-translation process (Brislin, 1970) to ensure semantic equivalence and cultural appropriateness.

Job Stress (4 items): Adapted from the work stress scale developed by Parker and DeCotiis (1983). This scale measures time-related stress and anxiety.

Psychological Resilience (4 items): Adapted from the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) by Smith et al. (2008), assessing the ability to bounce back from stress (e.g., "I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times at work"). One item was reverse-scored to ensure respondent attentiveness.

Job Resources (4 items): Based on the JD-R model framework by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), capturing supervisory support, peer support, and job autonomy.

Job Performance (4 items): Measured using the in-role behavior scale by Williams and Anderson (1991), which evaluates the fulfillment of formal administrative duties.

Control Variables: To isolate the effects of the main predictors, several demographic factors that could potentially influence job performance were controlled for: Gender, Age, Highest Education Level, Years of Working Experience, and Type of University.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Data acquisition was conducted over a four-week period using an online survey platform (Wenjuanxing). Prior to survey commencement, participants reviewed an informed consent form outlining the study's academic objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances regarding anonymity and data confidentiality.

Because the study relies on self-reported cross-sectional data, there is a risk of Common Method Bias (CMB). To mitigate this ex-ante, participants were assured that there were no right or wrong answers, and psychological separation was introduced between the predictor and criterion variable sections in the questionnaire layout (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

3.5 Data Analysis Strategy

The collected data will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and SmartPLS (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling). The analysis will proceed in four phases:

Data Screening and Descriptive Statistics: To handle missing values, assess normality, and summarize the demographic profile of the respondents.

Measurement Model Evaluation: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) will be conducted to evaluate the reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability) and validity (Convergent and Discriminant Validity) of the constructs.

Common Method Bias Check: Harman’s single-factor test will be applied ex-post to ensure CMB is not a pervasive issue.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis (or PLS-SEM bootstrapping) will be employed to test the direct effects (H1, H2, H3) and the moderating effects (H4, H5) of psychological resilience and job resources. Interaction terms will be mean-centered prior to analysis to avoid multicollinearity.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 500 online questionnaires were distributed to university administrative staff in Guangdong Province. After data cleaning which involved removing incomplete responses, instances of straight-lining, and responses failing the reverse-coded attention check 385 valid responses were retained for analysis, yielding an effective response rate of 77%.

Among the respondents, 42.6% were male and 57.4% were female. The majority (48.3%) were aged between 31 and 40 years. Regarding educational background, 65.2% held a Master's degree, reflecting the high educational standards required for university administration in Guangdong. In terms of institutional affiliation, 34.5% worked in Double First-Class universities, 45.2% in regular undergraduate institutions, and 20.3% in vocational/technical colleges.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents (N = 385)

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	164	42.6
	Female	221	57.4
Age	Under 30	99	25.7
	31-40	186	48.3
	41-50	77	20.0
	Over 50	23	6.0
Highest education level	Bachelor's degree or below	110	28.6
	Master's degree	251	65.2
	Doctoral degree	24	6.2
Years of working experience	Less than 3 years	60	15.6
	3-5 years	110	28.5
	6-10 years	135	35.1
	More than 10 years	80	20.8
Type of university	Double first-class university	133	34.5
	Regular undergraduate inst.	174	45.2
	Vocational/Technical college	78	20.3

4.2 Reliability, Validity, and Common Method Bias

Before testing the hypotheses, the measurement model was evaluated. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) were utilized to assess internal consistency. As shown in Table 2, all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. Convergent validity was established as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs surpassed 0.50. Discriminant validity was also confirmed, as the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs.

To address Common Method Bias (CMB), Harman's single-factor test was conducted ex-post. The unrotated principal component analysis revealed that the first single factor accounted for only 31.4% of the total variance, well below the critical threshold of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Thus, CMB is not a major concern in this dataset.

Table 2. Reliability and validity assessment

Construct / Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Job stress (JS)	0.865	0.882	0.645
Psychological resilience (PR)	0.842	0.875	0.612
Job resources (JR)	0.890	0.915	0.705
Job performance (JP)	0.878	0.902	0.688

4.3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients for the key variables. The mean score for Job Stress was relatively high (M = 3.85, SD = 0.72), indicating that administrative staff in Guangdong generally experience significant pressure. As predicted, Job Stress was significantly and negatively correlated with Job Performance ($r = -0.415$, $p < 0.01$). In contrast, both Psychological Resilience ($r = 0.520$, $p < 0.01$) and Job Resources ($r = 0.585$, $p < 0.01$) exhibited significant positive correlations with Job Performance, providing initial support for H1, H2, and H3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation matrix

Variable	Mean	SD	JS	PR	JR	JP
Job stress (JS)	3.85	0.72	（0.803）			
Psychological resilience (PR)	3.60	0.68	-0.285**	（0.782）		
Job resources (JR)	3.45	0.75	-0.310**	0.455**	（0.839）	
Job performance (JP)	3.75	0.65	-0.415**	0.520**	0.585**	（0.829）

*Note. N = 385. Diagonal values in bold and parentheses are the square roots of AVE. ** p < 0.01.*

4.4 Hypothesis Testing (Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis)

To test the direct and moderating effects (H1 to H5), a three-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed. Prior to creating the interaction terms, the independent variable and moderators were mean-centered to prevent multicollinearity. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all predictors were below 3.0, confirming no multicollinearity issues. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Hierarchical regression analysis for moderating effects (DV: Job performance)

Predictor	Step 1 (Controls)	Step 2 (Main Effects)	Step 3 (Interactions)
Step 1: Control variables			
Gender	0.045	0.022	0.018
Age	0.085	0.050	0.045
Education level	0.120*	0.075	0.068
Years of experience	0.105	0.062	0.055
University type	0.090	0.048	0.040
Main variables			
Job stress (JS)		-0.285***	-0/260***
Psych. resilience (PR)		0.310***	0.295***
Job resources (JR)		0.385***	0.365***
Interaction terms			
JS × PR			0.185**
JS × JR			0.210***
Model summary			
R^2	0.085	0.495	0.542
ΔR^2	0.085*	0.410***	0.047***
F-value	5.25***	42.60***	48.15***

*Note.Standardized beta (β) coefficients are reported. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.*

In Step 2, after controlling for demographic variables, the results demonstrate that Job Stress negatively and significantly predicts Job Performance ($\beta = -0.285$, $p < 0.001$), fully supporting H1. Conversely, both Psychological Resilience ($\beta = 0.310$, $p < .001$) and Job Resources ($\beta = 0.385$, $p < 0.001$) exert a strong, positive influence on Job Performance. Thus, H2 and H3 are strongly supported.

In Step 3, the interaction terms were entered. The interaction between Job Stress and Psychological Resilience (JS × PR) is significant and positive ($\beta = 0.185$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that psychological resilience buffers the negative effect of stress on performance; specifically, for highly resilient staff, the detrimental impact of stress is significantly weakened. Therefore, H4 is supported.

Similarly, the interaction between Job Stress and Job Resources (JS × JR) is also significant and positive ($\beta = 0.210$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms that abundant external organizational support acts as a protective shield, mitigating the performance drop caused by high stress levels. Hence, H5 is supported. The addition of these interaction terms significantly improved the model's explanatory power ($\Delta R^2 = 0.047$, $p < 0.001$).

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The primary objective of this study was to unravel the complex mechanisms through which job stress, psychological resilience, and job resources influence the job performance of university administrative staff in Guangdong Province. The empirical results robustly supported all five proposed hypotheses, providing critical insights into the occupational well-being of this under-researched demographic.

The Destructive Role of Job Stress (H1): Consistent with the health impairment process of the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), job stress was found to exert a significant negative impact on job performance ($\beta = -0.285$). In the context of Guangdong's rapid higher education expansion and the "Double First-Class" initiative, administrative staff are burdened with excessive paperwork, rigid evaluations, and high emotional labor. This chronic stress depletes their cognitive bandwidth, inevitably leading to errors, decreased efficiency, and diminished in-role performance.

The Dual Engines of Performance: Resilience and Resources (H2 & H3): Conversely, psychological resilience ($\beta = 0.310$) and job resources (\beta = 0.385) emerged as powerful positive predictors of job performance. Drawing on the

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), highly resilient individuals possess an internal reservoir of psychological capital that enables them to navigate bureaucratic challenges with adaptability rather than frustration. Similarly, abundant job resources such as supportive leadership and workflow autonomy satisfy basic psychological needs, fostering intrinsic motivation and higher task proficiency. Notably, the β coefficient for job resources was the highest in the model, suggesting that systemic organizational support is the most critical driver of administrative efficiency.

The Buffering Effects (H4 & H5): The most compelling findings of this study lie in the interaction effects. The hierarchical regression revealed that both psychological resilience and job resources significantly buffer the negative impact of job stress on performance. When administrative staff face high-stress situations, those with high resilience ($\beta = 0.185$) or access to rich job resources ($\beta = 0.210$) experience a significantly smaller decline in performance compared to their vulnerable or unsupported peers. This proves that while stress in university administration may be inevitable, performance degradation is not provided the right internal and external resources are deployed.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study makes two distinct theoretical contributions. First, it extends the application of the JD-R model and COR theory beyond the traditional focus on academic faculty, validating these frameworks among non-academic university staff in a non-Western, high-growth educational context. Second, by simultaneously examining personal resources (resilience) and organizational resources (job support), this research provides a holistic, interactionist perspective. It empirically demonstrates that psychological and environmental factors do not merely act in isolation but function as synergistic shields against occupational stress.

5.3 Practical Implications

The findings offer actionable insights for university administrators and Human Resources departments in Guangdong Province:

Optimize Job Resources: Universities must move away from purely demand-driven management. HR departments should redesign administrative workflows to increase job autonomy and establish mentorship programs to enhance peer and supervisory support. Streamlining redundant bureaucratic approval processes can immediately free up psychological and temporal resources.

Cultivate Psychological Resilience: Resilience is not entirely innate; it can be developed. Universities should implement regular Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), offering stress-management workshops, mindfulness training, and psychological counseling tailored specifically for administrative staff.

Holistic Performance Management: Performance evaluations should not solely focus on output metrics. Acknowledging the stress levels of the staff and providing adequate resources before demanding higher performance is a more sustainable management strategy.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the Study

As universities in Guangdong Province strive for global excellence, the operational efficiency of their administrative systems is paramount. This study successfully investigated the interplay between job stress, psychological resilience, job resources, and job performance among 385 university administrative staff. The quantitative analysis confirmed that while job stress significantly impairs performance, cultivating psychological resilience and providing robust job resources not only directly enhance work output but also serve as vital buffers against the detrimental effects of stress. Ultimately, investing in the psychological well-being and organizational support of administrative personnel is an indispensable strategy for institutional success.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

Notwithstanding its methodological rigor, this study possesses certain limitations that warrant acknowledgment. First, the cross-sectional research design precludes definitive conclusions regarding causal relationships; longitudinal investigations are necessary to examine how stress and resilience fluctuate throughout an academic year. Second, although Harman's single-factor test suggested that Common Method Bias did not constitute a pervasive concern, reliance on self-reported data may nevertheless introduce subjective biases, particularly with respect to self-evaluated job performance. Third, the sample was restricted to Guangdong Province, thereby limiting the generalizability of findings to universities situated in less economically developed regions of China.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should consider incorporating objective performance metrics (e.g., HR evaluation scores) to complement self-reported data. Additionally, adopting a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews could provide deeper phenomenological insights into how administrative staff utilize specific resources to cope with distinct types of stress. Expanding the geographical scope to compare coastal and inland provinces would also yield valuable macro-level perspectives.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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