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## **Prediction of Occupational Stress on the Basis of Personality Traits and Irrational Beliefs: A Case Study of Employees at Shiraz Airport**

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### **Abstract**

The present study was aimed at predicting occupational stress on the basis of the personality traits and irrational beliefs of the employees at Shiraz Airport. With respect to the methodology and results, the present study was of correlation and applied nature, respectively. Population of the present study included 400 employees of Shiraz Airport in 2017 out of which a number of 174 employees (108 males and 66 females) were selected through non-random availability sampling method as the sample population of the study. Three questionnaires were employed in the study: Wolfgang Job Stress Questionnaire, Neo Personality Questionnaire, and Jones Irrational Beliefs Questionnaire. The results of the study indicated that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between personality traits and occupational stress. Furthermore, the findings of the study were indicative of the fact that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between irrational beliefs and occupational stress. To be more concise, from among the aspects of the personality traits, merely the aspect of extraversion has a statistically significant relationship with occupational stress. On the other hand, with respect to the irrational beliefs, only the aspect of prostration against change has a statistically significant relationship with occupational stress.

**Keywords:** occupational stress; personality traits; irrational beliefs.

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## **1. Introduction**

Occupational stress is one of the significant subject matters related to the human behavior which has affected the occupational performance of the human resources due to several reasons. Stress can be observed in a massive and complex level of the human activities, and is regarded as a problem which can help to analyze the human psych as well as the reasons behind occurrence of behavioral and mental disorders in the society.

Occupational stress refers to the unpleasant physical and emotional reactions resulted from the interaction between employees and the respective work atmosphere in such a way that the occupational requirements are more than the employees' capacities and potentials [1]. Occupational stress can result in such disorders as creating mental pressures and its increasing level, decreasing the level of concentration, distraction, memory disorders, doubt in doing works and decreasing the decision-making power, and mental diseases in different persons [2].

Personality is a set of mental characteristics based on which different persons can be categorized. Viewpoint of a person regarding himself has a high effect on the other beliefs as well as his way of treating with other people [3]. Beliefs are rules by which a person interprets his experiences [4]. Beliefs include facts which guide us to react to the life in a specific way [5]. Each person includes a set of general viewpoints which are called central or fundamental beliefs. Generally, these beliefs are semiconscious and make it evident how each person reacts to the life. When an event triggers thoughts and beliefs, then what is consciously contemplated by a person is subject to the fundamental beliefs applied semiconsciously concerning that event. The fact that some specific facts are meaningful to the persons is subject to the respective person's beliefs [6].

Generally speaking, it can be claimed that the personality traits and irrational beliefs can affect the occupational stress together with the environmental factors. Accordingly, the present study aim at predicting the occupational stress on the basis of personality traits and irrational beliefs.

## **2. Theoretical Bases & Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Theoretical Bases***

In today's world, organizations tend to employ persons who have the most efficiency for them. Several different characteristics have been pointed out concerning this issue. In this respect, one of the variables which is very significant is the occupational stress. Stress may be the most common problem of the human life, and it can affect different aspects of a person's life such as cognitive, emotional, physical and mental aspects. Stress may disturb one's act in the social, cognitive, physical and family realms, and can result in occupational dissatisfaction, increase of failure during work, and slowness of reaction time duration. To be more concise, it can be stated that stress is a type of physical and mental vulnerability displayed by a person, and is the result of contradiction or challenging situations on the respective job [7]. Stress is a reaction being created under the effect of different tension factors in the organism; therefore, they threaten the psychological and physical welfare of the respective person [8]. One of the most significant stress-making resources in everybody's life is his job. Nowadays, occupational stress has become a common and costly subject matter in the work place in

such a way that the United Nations has named it as the disease of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the World Health Organization has called it as the universal problem during the recent years [8]. Occupational stress is a kind of emotional, cognitive, behavioral and mental reaction to the harmful aspects of work and work atmosphere [9]. Generally speaking, occupational stress can be regarded as the response to the pressures resulted from the work atmosphere, and it occurs when the employer's expectations is above the potentials and capacities of the employee [10]. Albeit occupational stress exists in all occupations, it is of more significance in those occupations which deal with the human health [11].

Different factors affect the occupational stress of the employees. Personality traits can be one of those factors. Differences in individual traits like personality is one of the most significant factors resulting in occupational stress. In other words, a subject matter which is stressing to someone may not be important for another person [12]. Therefore, personality can play an important role in the employee's occupational performance. This is due to the fact that personality determines the employee's motivation and attitude concerning the respective occupation as well as the way the employee responds to the occupational requirements. Previously, there was a conflict among researchers concerning personality traits in research projects on personality; however, nowadays, it has been agreed by the researchers that the five-factor personality model can be used for describing most of the prominent personality aspects of the individuals. According to the five-factor personality model, personality of each person is divided into five aspects named: neuroticism, extroversion, flexibility, adaptability, and loyalty. Any individual can have a specific attitude towards different aspects of his service place according to his own personality traits [13]. During the recent years, organizations and counselling psychologists have made it mandatory to utilize precise and satisfactory methods in order to assess the personality traits of the job applicants at the time of employment interview. According to the research project carried out by the scholars [14], familiarity with the individuals' personality traits can help the manager of the respective organization to appoint the qualified persons at different positions of the organization which in turn will lead to decreasing the degree of employees' substitution, and increasing their occupational satisfaction [15]. Parallel to the personality traits, another factor which can affect the employee's understanding of the respective occupation as well as the occupational stress is the employee's irrational beliefs.

Belief means acceptance of a rule, a religion, or a fact. Belief refers to faith and opinion [16]. Belief is something whose authenticity has been accepted by the respective individual without testing its authenticity. Beliefs are divided into two categories of logical and illogical beliefs [17]. Irrational beliefs are those beliefs which are not real, spoil the individual's balance, and avoid the individual to successfully face the stimulating events [18]. Irrational beliefs are referred to as any thought, excitement or behavior leading to spoiling one's ego, and its prominent consequences is disturbing the maintenance of happiness [19]. In other words, irrational beliefs are referred to as those thoughts and opinions in which there are such factors as force, obligation, duty and absolutism, and result in emotional and behavioral disorders [20]. When a person ignores the limit of his priorities, expectations and demands with respect to the happened event, and reaches a level of definite and obligatory absolutism, this thought will result in three types of irrational beliefs named fearful-making, self-destroying, and not tolerating failure. While the person who contemplates rationally, constructs his thoughts on the basis of concrete facts but not the mental beliefs, and helps himself to determine his private aims sooner. Such a person tries to create the least degree of private conflict for himself [21]. The origin of human's emotions

is his thoughts; however, it does not mean that we can, or shall control all our emotions by contemplation. In fact, rational belief usually leads to appropriate excitements (for instance, sense of regret due to not reaching the respective aims), while the irrational beliefs usually result in inappropriate excitements [22].

Considering the fact that the personnel of the airport have several different problems such as using radio systems in order to decrease the noise at work place, being exposed to emergency situations, and problems of air traffic control which all result in stress in the employees, the present study has aimed at finding the answer to the question whether occupational stress can be predicted on the basis of the personality traits and irrational beliefs.

## **2.2 Literature Review**

### **2.2.1 Studies Conducted in Abroad**

In their study, the researchers in [23] investigated the aspects of personality traits and their effect on the occupational stress, and came to this conclusion that there is a negative statistically significant relationship between stress, on the one hand, and extroversion, loyalty, adaptability, and flexibility, on the other. Furthermore, the findings of their study indicated that there is a direct coefficient (but statistically not significant) between neuroticism and stress.

In another study, the researchers in [24] carried out a study on the analysis of the relationship between personality traits and occupational stress among academic managers in higher education levels. In terms of methodology, their study included a qualitative and quantitative nature. In order to conduct their study, the simple random selection method was applied to a sample population of 120 academic managers. To collect the respective required data, the questionnaire of personality traits was utilized together with the questionnaire of occupational stress. In the end, the respective aggregated data were analyzed through the respective descriptive and inferential statistical data analysis methods. The findings of their study were indicative of the fact that there is a positive statistically significant relationship between different aspects of the personality traits (extroversion, sensing, contemplating, and judging) and occupational stress of the academic managers.

The researchers in [25] conducted a study on the relationship between irrational beliefs and occupational stress among the military officers. In their study, the variable of personality traits was utilized as the moderating variable. The sample population included 90 military officers of different ranks. The results of their study indicated that there is a direct statistically significant relationship between the irrational beliefs and occupational stress of the military officers; however, the degree of this relationship was variable according to the type of personality traits in each person.

### **2.2.2 Studies Conducted in Iran**

In their study, the researchers in [26] investigated the relationship between personality traits and contrastive styles, on the one hand, and occupational stress of the nurses, on the other. The findings of their study indicated that contrastive strategies can play different intermediate role in the relationship between the personality traits of the nurses and their occupational stress.

The researchers in [27] investigated the relationship between personality traits and occupational stress in nurses. The findings of their study indicated that there is a relationship between neuroticism and occupational stress. Therefore, neuroticism shall be mandatorily taken into account as a factor predicting occupational stress among nurses.

In his study, the researcher in [28] investigated the relationship between irrational beliefs and occupational stress of the teachers at High Schools of Dist. 1 of Education Department of City of Khorramabad. The findings of his study were indicative of the fact that 46% of the variance of the occupational stress of the teachers were predicted and justified through independent variables (frustration for changing, expectation of others approvals, prevention from emotional problem and irresponsibility). Furthermore, from among the demographic variables, the variables of sex, age and years of service had a positive statistically significant relationship with the irrational beliefs. According to the abovementioned findings, it could be concluded that the occupational stress of the teachers is more under the effect of the irrational beliefs.

In another study, the researchers in [29] investigated the relationship between the personality traits and occupational stress, on the one hand, and mental health of the managers of financial affairs of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, on the other. The findings of their study indicated that there is a statistically significant relationship between the personality traits and occupational stress, on the one hand, and mental health of the managers of financial affairs of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, on the other.

### **3. Hypotheses of the Study**

1. Personal traits of the airport employees can significantly predict their occupational stress.
2. Irrational beliefs of the airport employees can significantly predict their occupational stress.

### **4. Methodology**

With respect to the objective and methodology, the present study was of applied and coefficient nature, respectively. In order to analyze the aggregated data of the study, both descriptive and inferential statistical method were utilized. As to the descriptive statistics, such statistical measures as mean, standard deviation, and frequency were utilized. As to the inferential statistics, the statistical measures of correlation coefficient and regression were employed to test the hypotheses of the study. In order to facilitate and increase the preciseness of the data analysis procedure, the aggregated data were analyzed through SPSS Software.

#### **4.1 Sample Population**

The primary population of the present study included the whole personnel of Shiraz Airport (amounted to a number of 400 employees). According to Morgan Table, a number of 200 employees were elected through availability method from among the mentioned primary population. Then, the importance of the respective questionnaires was explained for them, and the final number of aggregated filled-in questionnaires was 174 (including 108 males and 66 females).

## 4.2 Variables of the Study

In order to measure the variables of the study (including personality traits, occupational stress, and irrational beliefs), three questionnaires related to the personality traits, occupational stress, and irrational beliefs were utilized in the study. In order to distribute the respective questionnaires among the abovementioned employees, an introduction letter was issued by the Islamic Azad University of Marvdasht to obtain the respective permission. All of the mentioned three questionnaires were filled in simultaneously. In order to motivate the subjects of the study before filling in the mentioned questionnaires, the research objectives and importance were explained to them.

### 4.2.1 Personality Traits

In order measure this variable, NEPI-R Questionnaire (which is one of the newest tools of personality assessment) was utilized in the study. The modified version of the mentioned questionnaire (proposed by the scholars in [30]) includes 60 statements. This questionnaire includes another form named NEO-FFI which is a questionnaire with 60 items to assess 5 main personality factors (each factor is assessed with 12 items). The 5 factors are including neurosis, extroversion, flexibility, agreeableness, and responsibility. The method of grading the respective items includes a five-option Likert style: completely disagree (0), disagree (1), undecided (2), agree (3), and completely agree (4).

### 4.2.2 Occupational Stress

In order to assess this variable, Wolfgang [31] questionnaire was employed in the study. This questionnaire includes 29 statements. The respective replies to the items of the mentioned questionnaire include a cline from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5). Furthermore, in this questionnaire, items (1-4-6-12-13-18-23-24) are scored reversely.

**Table 1:** Dimensions of occupational stress questionnaire

Dimensions of Occupational Stress	Items	Number of Items
Work Volume	1-2-3-4-5-6	6
Control	7-8-9	3
Bonus	10-11-12-13	4
Society	14-15-16-17-18	5
Justice	19-20-21-22-23-24	6
Value	25-26-27-28-29	5

### 4.2.3 Irrational Beliefs

In order to measure this variable, Jones's Questionnaire of Irrational Beliefs [32] which included 40 items was

utilized in the study. This questionnaire is one of the most frequent tools to measure irrational beliefs. In effect, this questionnaire measures different types of irrational thoughts. The original version of the mentioned questionnaire includes 100 items comprised of 10 factors, and each factor measures one type of irrational belief. The mentioned ten factors are including: expecting others' approval, expecting too much of your own, reprimand yourself or others, reacting to frustration together with failure, emotional irresponsibility, anxious attention, problem avoidance, dependency, insolvency against change, and perfectionism. Short form of the mentioned questionnaire has been provided in Iran by researchers in [33]. After analyzing the answer sheets related to the respective items, they omitted 60 items out of 100 items of the mentioned questionnaire and achieved a four-factor structure. The respective four factors included: insolvency against change, expecting others' approval, problem avoidance, and emotional irresponsibility. In order to score this questionnaire, a 5-item Likert style continuum was used according to what follows:

Completely disagree (1), Relatively Disagree (2), Undecided (3), Relatively Agree (4), and Completely Agree (5). This questionnaire included 4 sub-scales which have been presented in Table 2 below together with the respective number of items.

**Table 2:** Dimensions of irrational beliefs

Sub-Scales	Items
Insolvency against Change	1-15
Expecting others' Approval	16-25
Problem Avoidance	26-30
Emotional Irresponsibility	31-40

It should be noted that a high grade in this test indicates high level of irrational beliefs, and a low grade is indicative of a low level of irrational beliefs.

## 5. Findings of the Study

### 5.1 Descriptive Statistics

In order to provide a primary description for the respective data, such indexes as mean and standard deviation were utilized in the present study and the respective results are presented in Tables (3), (4) and (5) below.

**Table 3:** Mean and standard deviation related to personal traits

	Neuroticism	Extroversion	Flexibility	Adaptability	Responsibility
Mean	36.79	37.79	38.39	38.23	43.02
Standard Deviation	6.02	4.31	5.06	4.26	6.80

According to Table (3), the descriptive findings of the study are indicative of the fact that among personal traits, the highest mean is related to Responsibility, while the lowest mean is related to the Neuroticism.

**Table 4:** Mean and standard deviation related to irrational beliefs

	Insolvency against Change	Expecting others' Approval	Problem Avoidance	Emotional Irresponsibility
<b>Mean</b>	48.94	33.40	15.36	30.89
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	8.17	5.03	3.39	5.76

According to Table (4), the descriptive findings of the study are indicative of the fact that among irrational beliefs, the highest mean is related to Insolvency against Change, while the lowest mean is related to the Problem Avoidance.

**Table 5:** Mean and standard deviation related to occupational stress

	Occupational Stress
<b>Mean</b>	95.21
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	10.62

## 5.2 Inferential Statistics

In order to test the abovementioned hypothesis, the statistical measure of Pearson Correlation Coefficient as well as Stepwise Regression were utilized in the study. The respective results are presented in the following Tables.

*Hypothesis 1:* Personal traits of the airport employees can significantly predict their occupational stress.

**Table 6:** Correlation matrix of personality traits and occupational stress

	Neuroticism	Extroversion	Flexibility	Adaptability	Responsibility
<b>Occupational Stress</b>	-0.061	0.235**	0.174*	-0.066	0.090

\*: Meaningfulness at 0.05 level & \*\*: Meaningfulness at 0.01 level

According to Table (6), the findings of the inferential statistics are indicative of the fact that there is a positive statistically significant relationship between two factors of personality traits including Extroversion ( $r=0.235$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and Flexibility ( $r=0.174$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and occupational stress. More specifically, the more the airport's employees' extroversion and flexibility, the more their occupational stress would be. The other personality traits



have no statistically significant relationship with occupational stress.

*Hypothesis 2:* Irrational beliefs of the airport employees can significantly predict their occupational stress.

**Table 7:** Correlation matrix of irrational beliefs and occupational stress

	Insolvency against Change	Expecting others' Approval	Problem Avoidance	Emotional Irresponsibility
<b>Occupational Stress</b>	0.267**	0.167*	0.143	0.156*

\*: Meaningfulness at 0.05 level & \*\*: Meaningfulness at 0.01 level

According to Table (7), the findings of the inferential statistics are indicative of the fact that there is a positive statistically significant relationship between three factors of irrational beliefs including Insolvency against Change ( $r=0.267$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), Expecting others' Approval ( $r=0.167$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), and Emotional Irresponsibility ( $r=0.156$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and occupational stress. More specifically, the more the airport's employees' Insolvency against Change, Expecting others' Approval, and Emotional Irresponsibility, the more their occupational stress would be. However, there is no statistically significant relationship between Problem Avoidance and occupational stress.

The findings of the statistical measure of Stepwise Regression concerning Hypothesis (1) of the study are presented in Table (8) below.

**Table 8:** Results related to Stepwise Regression Analysis of occupational stress based on personality traits

Step	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Beta	t	p	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	df	p
<b>One</b>	<b>Occupational Stress</b>	<b>Extroversion</b>	0.23	3.174	0.002	0.23	0.05	10.07	1.172	0.002

According to Table (8), from the results of the Variance Analysis statistical measure in Step 1 [ $F(1.172)=10.07$ ,  $p<0.01$ ], it can be concluded that there is a linear and statistically significant relationship between the independent variable (Extroversion) and dependent variable (Occupational Stress), and thus the employees' personality trait of extroversion can significantly and positively predict their occupational stress.  $R^2$  of the multivariate correlation coefficient equals to 0.05 which means that about 5% of the employees' occupational stress can be predicted by their personality trait of extroversion.

The findings of the statistical measure of Stepwise Regression concerning Hypothesis (2) of the study are presented in Table (9) below.

**Table 9:** Results related to Stepwise Regression Analysis of occupational stress based on irrational beliefs

Step	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Beta	t	p	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	df	p
One	Occupational Stress	Insolvency against Change	0.27	3.64	0.000	0.27	0.07	13.23	1.172	0.000

According to Table (9), from the results of the Variance Analysis statistical measure in Step 1 [ $F(1.172)=13.23$ ,  $p<0.01$ ], it can be concluded that there is a linear and statistically significant relationship between the independent variable (Insolvency against Change) and dependent variable (Occupational Stress), and thus the employees' irrational belief of Insolvency against Change can significantly and positively predict their occupational stress.  $R^2$  of the multivariate correlation coefficient equals to 0.07 which means that about 7% of the employees' occupational stress can be predicted by their irrational belief of Insolvency against Change.

## 6. Conclusions & Discussion

The findings of the present study indicated that the variable of Insolvency against Change can predict the occupational stress. To be more concise, those employees who face the problem of Insolvency against Change are more exposed to the problem of occupational stress. When employees severely feel an occupational safety, they resist against any occupational change due to the fact that any change may threaten their occupational safety. For instance, when a competent expert is employed at a service place, the old employees may feel danger. Another reason which results in an employee's resistance against any change is the financial factors; to be more concise, the employee worries about any salary decrease resulted from the respective change. Such feelings would affect the employee and the respective atmosphere of the service place. Mental tension or the stress resulted from such beliefs are among such feelings which inevitably affect the other employees. If the employees experience and tolerate a severe stress for a long time (resulted from such beliefs), they will gradually suffer from diseases resulted from stress (acquired insolvency).

## 7. Limitations of the Study

Due to the fact that the sample population of the study included the employees of Shiraz Airport, the results of the study shall be cautiously generalized the whole population. Moreover, to gather the required data of the study, merely the tools of interview and questionnaire were utilized.

## 8. Applied Suggestions

According to the results obtained from testing the hypotheses of the study, the following suggestions can be presented:

1. Considering the findings of the present study, it is suggested to consider the personality traits of the employment applicants as one of the factors involved in employment procedures.
2. Considering the role of the irrational beliefs in occupational stress, it is suggested to hold training workshops in the realm of irrational beliefs of the employees of different organizations, especially airports, and the methods of eliminating such beliefs.

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