

PERCEPTIONS OF FAIRNESS AND THE WORK STRESS PROCESS

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For the last two decades, occupational stress research has focused on job demands, job control, and social support as major factors linked to employee health. Recently, organizational justice, or perceived fairness at work, has been shown to be an important predictor of employee health. Most studies examining fairness at work, however, have focused on additive effects of fairness and not on moderating or mediating effects. This paper examines moderating and mediating roles of perceived fairness at work in the relationships between traditional job stressors and work-related well-being.

Employees in manual material handling jobs at furniture distribution centers completed a self-administered questionnaire (n = 379). Fairness items developed for this study asked the employees to assess the extent to which the supervisor or management 1) treat employees in ways they do not deserve, 2) are receptive to employees' concerns, 3) show appreciation to employees, 4) treat employees' personal needs as important and valid, and 5) take employee well-being into account during decision-making. The fairness of wages was assessed as the extent to which management was concerned about paying employees what they deserve.

After four job stressors (work load, role conflict, role ambiguity, and mental demands), job control, and social support from the supervisor and coworkers were entered as independent variables in the regression model, perceived fairness at work explained a substantial amount of additional variance in job satisfaction (7.9%), perceived job stress (3.0%), and psychological well-being (2.4%). Fairness measures moderated the relationship between workload and perceived job stress, with high workload less likely to lead to high stress when employees perceived that management was fair. A mediating effect of fairness was observed between role stressors (role conflict, role ambiguity) and both job satisfaction and perceived job stress. The more conflicting demands or ambiguous expectations employees experienced, the lower perceived fairness at work, which was associated with lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of perceived job stress.

Since this was a cross-sectional study, the causal link implied in the analysis needs to be confirmed in longitudinal studies. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that fairness at work plays an important role in understanding occupational stress and enhancing employee well-being. By identifying moderating and mediating roles of fairness in the stressor-strain relationship, this study offers potential strategies for intervention.

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