

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: THE MODERATING ROLE OF WORK STRESS

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### **Abstract**

*Employee performance is a critical determinant of organisational effectiveness. Psychological factors such as work stress and emotional intelligence (EI) have gained increasing attention in understanding variations in workplace performance. This study aimed to examine the relationship between EI and employee performance and to assess the role of work stress in influencing performance outcomes. A quantitative cross-sectional design was adopted. Data were collected from 80 full-time employees using a structured questionnaire consisting of 20 Likert-scale items measuring emotional intelligence, work stress, and employee performance. Reliability analysis, Descriptive statistics, multiple regression analysis and Pearson correlation were conducted using Microsoft Excel. The results revealed that EI was positively associated with employee performance, whereas work stress was negatively associated with performance. Regression analysis indicated that both EI and work stress significantly predicted employee performance, explaining a meaningful proportion of variance. The results suggest that employees with stronger emotional competencies tend to perform better, while higher levels of work stress reduce performance effectiveness. EI plays a vital role in enhancing employee performance, while work stress undermines it. Organisations should invest in EI development and stress management initiatives to promote sustainable workplace productivity and employee well-being.*

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Work Stress, Employee Performance, Organisational Behaviour, Occupational Stress

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The performance of employees is universally recognised as a major factor that defines organisational productivity, competitiveness and sustainability in the long run. Employers rely on employees to not only perform the formal job duties but also to provide innovative ideas, work effectively and to adjust to the quickly changing work requirements. The performance of high-performing employees improves the quality of services, efficiency in operations, and the image of the institution as a whole. This has led to the focus on the need to establish the psychological and behavioural drivers of performance in organisations in order to understand them. One of these factors is emotional intelligence (EI), which has been gaining increasing scholarly and management interest. The contemporary work setting is putting an increasing demand on employees to deal with interpersonal relations, control emotional responses, and act in a positive response to pressure. It has been proven that emotional competencies are especially applicable to jobs with a high level of emotional labour when controlling emotions is a part of the work (Herpertz et al., 2016). Furthermore, emotionally intelligent people are more likely to develop engagement and more positive work-related states, which may help them to be more effective and happier (Extremera et al., 2018). Simultaneously, work stress has emerged as the inevitable attribute of the modern organisational life. Job demands in different sectors have been heightened by the presence of more competition, expectations, and technological developments. Constant exposure to stressors may adversely impact the psychological well-being of employees and reduce their working life quality. It has been empirically indicated that psychosocial workplace characteristics are closely connected with burnout and low occupational well-being (Guerrero-Barona et al., 2020). Since EI and work stress are known to affect the functioning of employees, there is a need to investigate the interaction between the two constructs to determine the effects of the interaction on the results of performance. This paper will thus examine the relationship between EI and employee performance and examine whether work stress changes the strength or the direction of the relationship.

EI is the ability to experience, manage, understand, and apply emotions effectively in both oneself and other people. EI is characterised by two major approaches. The conceptualisation of the ability-based model is an intellectual capacity that has to do with the processing of emotional information, whilst that of the trait model is an emotional disposition that can be perceived as a set of self-oriented emotional dispositions in the personality. Empirical results suggest that ability-based EI accounts for specific variance in job performance over conventional indices of cognitive intelligence (Nguyen et al., 2019). There is also a similarity between trait EI and subjective satisfaction as well as physiological indicators of well-being, and this fact also promotes the applicability of this characteristic to adaptive functioning (Toyama, 2018). The EI in the workplace has a number of dimensions, and these are self-awareness, intrinsic motivation, emotional regulation, social skills and empathy. Workers who have a high level of emotional regulation are in a better position to handle interpersonal difficulties and work demands. There is evidence that EI has the ability to diminish the adverse effects of work stress and increase job performance results (Hatta and Abdullah, 2020). Also, research related to frontline service workers has discovered that increased EI has a positive impact on performance, especially regarding customer-oriented work and where emotional interplay is dominant (Othman and Syed Muhsin, 2020). Moreover, the fact that EI can reinforce its performance under the contribution of favourable organisational conditions shows that EI can combine with contextual variables to deliver the best results (Akhtar et al., 2017). The role of self-regulatory processes that are closely related to EI competencies is also emphasised by the progress in the area of performance assessment and cognitive-behavioural research (Wilder and Strachan, 2025). Taken together, these results indicate that EI is a useful individual asset that can be used to achieve successful working performance.

The term employee performance is especially used to refer to the extent to which a person can perform the delegated tasks and make a contribution to organisational goals. It is usually divided into task performance, which entails basic technical-related duties and contextual performance, which includes voluntary activities like cooperation, initiative, and organisational citizenship. The results of performance depend on various factors, such as skills, motivation, organisational support, and psychological resources. The psychological determinants are rather significant in influencing the way employees react to job demands. An example of this is emotional intelligence, which improves interpersonal effectiveness as well as coping adaptively, hence increasing productivity and the quality of work. When an employee has a high level of emotional abilities, the chances are that he or she will be able to handle conflicts positively and will not lose track when pressured. These attributes are associated with long-term performance even under challenging environments. But performance is not a stress-free process. Prolonged or high levels of stress by the employee can lead to impairment of cognitive functioning and emotional stability, which in the end impacts output and efficiency. Therefore, to have a comprehensive explanation of how performance among employees varies, it is important to determine the combined effect of EI and stress.

Work stress is the stress that prevails when job demands are beyond the capacities of an individual to manage. It can be caused by overworking, role confusion, time, interpersonal conflict or organisational changes. Stressors can be divided into challenge stressors and hindrance stressors; the former possibly lead to growth and success, whereas the latter impede personal and professional growth. Studies have shown that job stress correlates with lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction, which may compromise the performance of the profession and well-being (Naseem, 2018). Turnover intentions have also been associated with high levels of stress, especially when employees do not have sufficient emotional resources to deal with stress (Burki et al., 2020). These results indicate that stress does not equally impact all people; instead, its outcome is reliant on individual abilities to cope with it and emotional capabilities. Organizationally, stress can lead to a lack of focus, decision-making and decreased effectiveness in collaboration. However, workers who are more emotionally intelligent can react to stress more positively and be productive even in unfavourable circumstances.

Even though numerous studies have been done to control the direct association between EI and employee performance, relatively little researches have been done to determine work stress as a moderating factor. A considerable part of the literature takes stress as a predictor variable, not as a situational variable that could moderate the quality of the EI-performance relationship. Also, there is a paucity of empirical evidence that combines emotional intelligence, work stress and performance- especially with cross-sectional designs. This gap will help in improvement for better understanding of the role of emotional competencies under different stressful situations in the organisational setting.

### **Research objectives**

The present study aims to:

1. Examine the relationship between EI and employee performance
2. Assess the relationship between work stress and employee performance
3. Investigate whether work stress moderates the relationship between EI and employee performance

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1 Research Design**

In this research, the quantitative research design was used to investigate the correlation between emotional intelligence, work stress, and the performance of employees. A cross-sectional design was selected, according to which data were gathered on the participants at one time. This was deemed an appropriate design in establishing variable-variable relationships and also in determining the moderating role of work stress. A structured questionnaire-based survey was the means of collecting the data, which made it possible to measure all constructs in a standardised way and conduct statistical analysis.

### **2.2 Participants and Sample Size**

The sample used in the study consisted of 80 full-time employees who were selected in various sections of selected organisations. The respondents were recruited using a convenience sampling method and comprised individuals who were available and could take part in the study. Only employees with at least six months of organisational experience were eligible to ensure that there is sufficient exposure to the workplace. Probationary positions or those who were less than tenured had been excluded. The demographic data, including age, gender, education level, years of work experience, and the department where the workers were employed was gathered to present the sample description and give a background in which the analysis will take place.

### **2.3 Measurement Instruments**

Data were gathered with the help of standardised self-report instruments that assessed emotional intelligence, work stress, and employee performance. Everything was rated using a five-point Likert scale between 1 (Strongly Disagree) and 5 (Strongly Agree). The EI was evaluated on a scale of 16 items that measured four dimensions, namely self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, emotion use, and emotion regulation, with a higher score reflecting a stronger emotional competency. Measurement of work stress was based on a 10-item scale that assessed perceived stress in terms of workload and job demands, with a higher score indicating increased stress. The scale of measurement of employee performance was a self-report scale that was used to measure task performance and contextual performance, where a high score reflects better perceived job performance.

### **2.4 Data Collection Procedure**

Before data collection, the participating organisations were contacted, and their permission was sought. Participation in the study was informed, and employees were told the reason for the study. The survey questionnaires were carried out in self-administered form, in print and electronic versions, according to availability. There was anonymity, and it was guaranteed to the respondents that their responses would be kept confidential. The collection of the data was done over two to three weeks, then responses were screened and made ready to be analysed.

### **2.5 Ethical Considerations**

The research also observed ethical principles in the study process. The involvement was strictly voluntary, and the respondent could pull out at any time without any repercussions. No personally identifying information was made, and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. The data gathered were not used in any other way. Relevant institutional consent was sought where necessary before the study was done.

### **2.6 Data Analysis Plan**

All information was typed and calculated in Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise demographic characteristics and variables of interest in the study, and the means, standard deviation, frequency and percentage were computed. Categorical variables were tested using the chi-square test to measure associations, and the independent samples t-test was applied to test the mean difference between groups where necessary. Pearson correlation test was used to examine the association between emotional intelligence, work stress and employee performance. Moreover, the predictive effect of EI and work stress on performance was conducted by multiple regression analysis.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

This research was undertaken with the employees who represented different age groups, education levels, and organisational experience levels. Most of the respondents were in their early and middle career years, which portrays a relatively active and professionally involved sample. There was a balanced gender representation where the male and female employees were represented at almost equal proportions. The participants had diverse educational backgrounds with diploma-level education up to postgraduate levels, which made them a heterogeneous workforce. Regarding the organisational tenure, respondents have both long-term and short-term experience and their thoughts are based on different levels of organisational integration. Table 1 shows the respondents demographic profile.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 80)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20–29	28	35.0
	30–39	34	42.5
	40–49	11	13.8
	50+	7	8.8
Gender	Male	39	48.8
	Female	38	47.5
	Prefer not to say	3	3.8
Education	Diploma	16	20.0
	Bachelor	30	37.5
	Master	27	33.8
	Doctorate	7	8.8
Tenure	6m–2y	25	31.2
	3–5y	21	26.2
	6–10y	25	31.2
	10+y	9	11.2

Demographic factors of the respondents give a contextual understanding of what the study sample is composed of. To analyse and interpret the study results, it is crucial to understand the age distribution, gender representation of the participants, their educational background, and tenure period in an organisation. Figure 1 shows the graphic representation of these demographic variables.

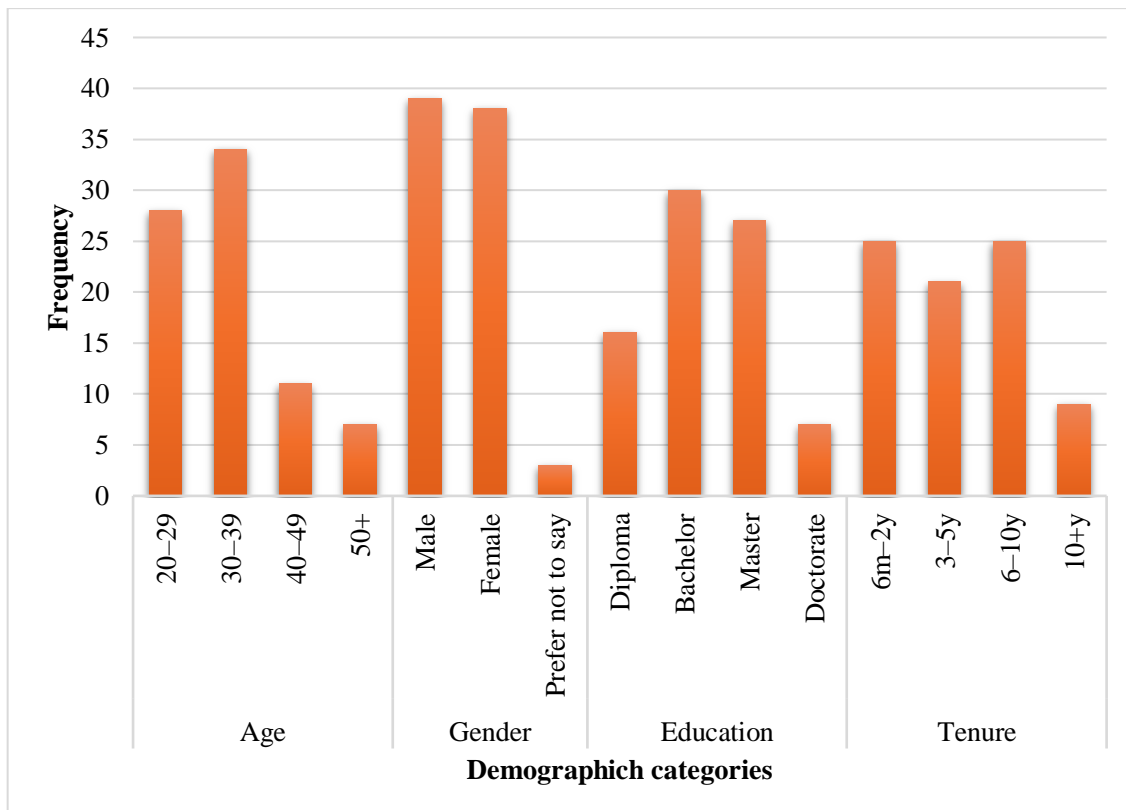


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents according to age, gender, educational qualification, and organisational tenure

Figure 1 showed that the most common age group of respondents is 30-39, followed by 20-29, meaning that the respondents were in their early and middle professional lives. There has been a relative balance in gender distribution where there is almost equal representation of employees of both genders. Most of the respondents were well-qualified in terms of educational attainment; therefore, most had bachelor's and master's degrees. In the area of tenure, employees with a short and moderate tenure took up the highest percentage of the sample, whereas the percentage of workers who had more than ten years of experience was low.

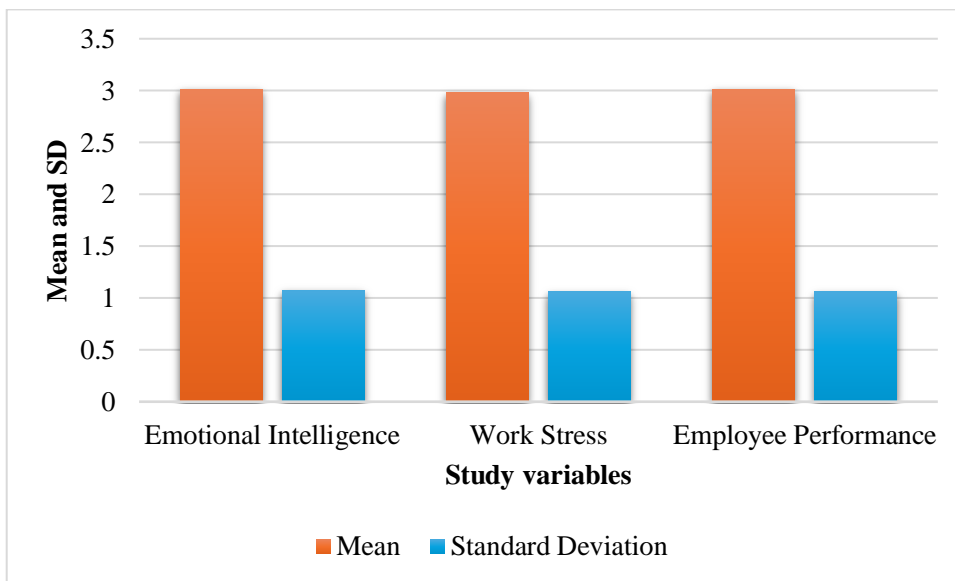
**3.2 Comparative Overview of Study Variables**

The descriptive analysis was done to establish the central tendency and the dispersion of the study variables. The results show that the respondents tended to record moderate EI levels and performance levels among employees. On the same note, the perceptions of work stress were also observed to be moderate. The comparatively similar mean scores of the variables indicate equal distribution of responses in the sample. The standard deviations express substantially acceptable variation, which depicts the disparity in personal perception of emotional capability, experience of stress, and self-reported output at work. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics in detail.

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence, Work Stress, and Employee Performance

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	3.01	1.07
Work Stress	2.98	1.06
Employee Performance	3.01	1.06

In order to gain more insight into the general tendency of answers, descriptive statistics were calculated for emotional intelligence, work stress, and performance of the employees. The visual inspection of the mean scores and standard deviation in the form of a graph gives a very clear comparison of the central tendency and the variability of the three most important variables of the study. Figure 2 shows this comparison.



**Figure 2.** Mean and standard deviation of emotional intelligence, work stress, and employee performance

As Figure 2 demonstrates, the descriptive findings reveal that the relationship between EI and employee performance is moderate, whereas the level of work stress among the sample is moderate, but not too high. The patterns give background information on how the further correlation and regression analysis in the work will be interpreted.

**3.3 Internal Consistency Reliability of the Measurement Scales**

An analysis of reliability was conducted to check the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The findings show that the three instruments were well internally reliable. EI evidenced high consistency in its items, implying that the statements all measured a consistent construct. On the same note, the work stress and the employee performance scale had high internal consistency levels. This indicates that the questions in the questionnaires were consistent and could be used to measure the constructs of interest in this sample. Table 3 summarises the reliability coefficients.

**Table 3.** Internal Consistency Reliability of Study Scales

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Emotional Intelligence	8	0.93

Work Stress	6	0.90
Employee Performance	6	0.89

### 3.4 Interrelationships Among Key Study Constructs

The Pearson correlation test was carried out to test the relationships between emotional intelligence, work stress and employee performance. The findings show there is a positive correlation between EI and employee performance, and that employees with high emotional competencies are more likely to report higher job performance. On the other hand, work stress had a negative relationship with the performance of the employees, which signifies that the higher the stress, the lower the performance consequences. None of the significant relationships was found between EI and work stress, and that means that they can be treated as relatively independent constructs in this sample. Table 4 represents the correlation matrix.

**Table 4: Pearson Correlation Matrix**

Variables	Emotional Intelligence	Work Stress	Employee Performance
Emotional Intelligence	1		
Work Stress	-0.015	1	
Employee Performance	0.322**	-0.400***	1

Note:  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.001$

### 3.5 Predictive Analysis of Employee Performance

To ascertain the predictive influence of EI and work stress on employee performance, multiple regression analysis was used to identify the behaviours. The entire regression model was found to be statistically significant, and this means that the combination of the independent variables significantly explained the variation in employee performance. The model explained a significant percentage of performance variation, which implies that EI and work stress are relevant in the formation of job outcomes. The regression findings indicated that EI was a significant and positive predictor of employee performance, which means that employees who have high levels of emotional awareness and regulation are likely to do better in their jobs. Table 5 summarises the regression coefficients.

**Table 5: Predictive Analysis Predicting Employee Performance**

Predictor	Standardized Beta	t-value	Significance
Emotional Intelligence	0.314	3.22	0.002
Work Stress	-0.395	-4.03	<0.001

## 4. DISCUSSION

The current research analysed emotional intelligence, work stress and employee performance as it relates to full-time employees. The results showed that EI had a positive correlation with the performance of employees, and work stress had a negative correlation with performance outcomes. Analytical Regression also established that emotional intelligence, as well as work stress, were significant predictors of employee performance. These findings imply that when employees have stronger emotional competencies, they will report more job effectiveness, but high stress levels are associated with reduced performance. The results are in line with other studies that EI is a key factor in determining conduct and performance at the workplace. As an illustration, EI is a critical parameter that improves the coping styles and job satisfaction of employees, which subsequently affects performance (Jung and Yoon, 2016). Likewise, it has been argued that employees with high levels of EI enjoy greater psychological health, which is also associated with high job performance (Devonish, 2016).

The fact that EI is positively correlated with the performance of employees points to the idea that people who can perceive, regulate and utilise emotions are in a better position to handle challenges in the workplace. EI seems to be a personal asset that increases adaptive responses, interpersonal effectiveness, and performance of tasks. This meaning is in line with the research that demonstrates that EI is a factor that promotes better creativity and productive work behaviour in conducive organisational environments (Jafri et al., 2016). The correlation between work stress and performance is negative, and it brings to light the negative effects of too much occupational strain. The workers with increased stress might be faced with diminished concentration, emotional depletion, and lack of motivation, which in the end impacts job performance. Past studies have also revealed that stress-related variables like burnout and role strain have a significant negative impact on job performance in different sectors (Wu et al., 2019). Besides, professional stress has also been associated with chronic exhaustion and reduced functional capacity of professionals, which further supports the negative effects of unmanaged stress (Huang et al., 2019). Notably, EI can serve as an intermediary that will alleviate the adverse outcomes of stress. It has also been found that EI could buffer the correlation between occupational stressors and organisational performance, meaning that employees with a high level of EI can resist workplace stressors (Aderibigbe and Mjoli, 2019). The same evidence of the contractor employees suggests that the strength of the relationship between stress and performance is

modified by emotional intelligence, which shows the moderating role (Siti et al., 2020). These results support the notion that EI has a positive direct performance effect and alleviates the stress-related performance deficits.

This research has several useful conclusions concerning organisations. First, the structured EI training programs can be utilised to improve the ability of workers to control their emotions, cope with stress, and manage interpersonal interactions. One of the studies indicates that EI enhances psychological resiliency and minimises maladaptive behaviours like burnout and misbehaviour at work (Shkoler and Tziner, 2017). Second, the introduction of specific stress management interventions, such as workload balancing, counselling as well as wellness, should be offered. Previous research has also pointed out that emotional work and workplace pressure are the key factors that contribute to well-being and performance, and organisational support systems are vital (Karimi et al., 2014). In addition, EI can decrease turnover intentions in case employees feel supportive work conditions, which means that a joint intervention that involves stress reduction and development of emotional skills can positively change retention and performance (Giao et al., 2020). In human resource (HR) perspective, emotional competencies should be factored in in recruitment, training, and performance evaluation processes. EI applied in hiring and leadership development can potentially result in a workforce that is more suited to working under strenuous circumstances. Also, stress can be minimised by the promotion of positive organisational climates, which can increase the general productivity. This paper will be a part of the general stress-buffering literature, as it empirically supports the importance of EI in putting into perspective the negative effects of work stress. It has been reported that past research revealed that EI moderates links between stressors and organisational behaviours, which reinforced adaptive outcomes in demanding circumstances (Aderibigbe and Mjoli, 2019). This view is supported by the results currently presented, which help to show that emotional competencies and stress have a combined effect on the performance outcomes.

Moreover, the findings provide evidence of one of the moderating models where EI interrelates with workplace stress to influence employee behaviour. The studies, which investigate teacher stress and job satisfaction, also revealed that emotional variables dictate the effects of stress on professional outcomes (Parveen and Bano, 2019). Also, the workplace stress and burnout models allow concentrating on the significance of individual resources in being able to sustain performance under pressure (Srivastava and Dey, 2020). Combining EI with stress into one predictive model, this paper contributes to the theoretical knowledge of the effects that individual emotional capabilities have on workplace operations. In spite of its contributions, this study has a number of limitations. To begin with, the cross-sectional design does not allow the possibility of making the causation between variables. Although it was found that associations exist, longitudinal research would be required to establish directionality. Second, the comparatively low sample size restricts the extrapolation of results to the larger population groups. The external validity would be improved with bigger samples of different industries. Third, the use of self-report measures can create common method and social desirability biases. Future research ought to take into account multi-source measures in order to minimise measurement biases.

The study should incorporate longitudinal research designs in the future to focus on the interaction of EI and stress in performance over a period. The sample size would be increased, and the employees working in various organisational settings would have been incorporated to enhance generalizability. Moreover, the inclusion of multi-source performance rating, including the ratings of the supervisors or objective performance measures, would enhance measurement accuracy. It is also possible that researchers consider other moderating or mediating factors, including organisational justice and work engagement, which have been demonstrated to influence the dynamics of performance in the context of stressful situations (Wang et al., 2015).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The current study explored the variables of emotional intelligence, work stress, and performance of workers. They found that EI was significantly linked to the performance of employees, whereas work stress had a negative relationship with performance results. Employees who were more emotionally aware and regulated were recorded to be more effective in their job positions, but increased perceived stress was associated with a reduced level of performance. The analysis of the regression analysis has confirmed that EI and work stress have a strong relationship with employee performance as well, which demonstrates the synergy between psychological resources and workplace stress. The findings highlight the importance of characterising performance as influenced by both technical and non-technical skills of employees, as well as their emotional management capabilities and stress-handling. In practice, the results indicate that companies should consider investing in EI development courses and stress management interventions to improve productivity and well-being. The study has its limitations, even though it has made some contributions; the design is cross-sectional, and it depends on self-reports. Longitudinal studies with multi-source performance measures are suggested as future research. On the whole, it is necessary to develop EI and reduce stress at the workplace in order to enhance the performance of the employees and the long-term organisational success.

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