

# Perceived job stress and satisfaction among contractual humanitarian workers in Bangladesh: the role of demographic and work-related factors

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## Article info

Received : 22 Aug 2025  
Accepted : 04 Nov 2025  
Number of tabs : 03  
Number of figs : 00  
Number of refs : 22

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## Summary

Occupational stress and job satisfaction significantly impact employee well-being as well as organizational effectiveness, especially in humanitarian worker settings. Humanitarian workers providing mental health and psychosocial support services often face high workloads, emotional demands, and challenging working conditions, which may affect their level of job satisfaction. The parent study aimed to find out the relationship of job stress and job satisfaction among contractual humanitarian workers in Bangladesh. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 176 contractual staff working in national and international non-governmental organizations involved in mental health and psychosocial support services. The participants' age ranged from 17 to 47 ( $M = 28.72$ ,  $SD = 5.27$ ) and the average tenure was four years and eleven months ( $SD = 3.64$ ). Job Stress and Job Satisfaction were assessed by using the validated Bangla versions of the Occupational Stress Index and the Job Satisfaction Scale. In this study, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, independent samples t-test, and linear regression analyses were performed using Statistical package for the social sciences version 25. The findings showed that job stress had a significant negative correlation with job satisfaction. Management-level staff had significantly higher job stress than field-level staff ( $p < .001$ ), and participants fluent in the Rohingya dialect reported increased levels of stress ( $p = .038$ ). Regression analysis revealed that job stress was a significant predictor of job satisfaction, accounting for around 4% of variance in job satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of addressing occupational stress among humanitarian workers in order to improve job satisfaction and promote employee well-being. Implementing supportive supervision, stress management strategies, and organizational support systems may help enhance workforce sustainability and improve the quality of mental health services in humanitarian contexts.

Bang J Psychiatry 2025;39(2): 41-45

## Introduction

Job satisfaction and occupational stress are pivotal constructs in the realm of organizational psychology as they impact employee well-being, job performance, and retention at organizations.<sup>1,2</sup> Job stress, defined as the psychological strain emerging from the imbalance between work demands and an individual's ability to cope with them, is a process that can lead to outcomes such as burnout, decreased motivation and job satisfaction.<sup>3,4</sup> Job satisfaction is an indicator of the degree to which workers are satisfied about their wage and working conditions, relationships between coworkers and supervisors.<sup>5,6</sup> Persistent research indicates a negative association between Job Stress and job satisfaction.<sup>7</sup> Increased stress negatively impacts employees'

fulfillment, engagement and motivation, while lower levels of stress correlate with greater satisfaction, enhanced psychological well-being and increased commitment to the organization.<sup>1,3,8</sup>

Humanitarian workers, particularly contractual staff in national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs and INGOs), work under specific pressures.<sup>9</sup> High workloads, emotionally draining encounters, exposure to human sufferings and limited resources often add job stress to them, leading to low job satisfaction.<sup>10,11</sup> However, despite the multifaceted role of humanitarian workers in providing psychosocial support and mental health services there is limited research to date on perceived job stress-job satisfaction relationship among these

humanitarian employees especially those operating in low-resourced high-demanding South Asian countries particularly Bangladesh.

The majority of occupational stress and satisfaction studies have taken place in Western or corporate contexts, which limits their relevance to humanitarian contexts where stressors, coping resources, and organizational structures vary greatly.<sup>12–14</sup> Moreover, demographic and professional characteristics—like gender, marital status, work experience, local language proficiency—could moderate the relation between job stress and satisfaction but we lack evidence to prove those moderating effects. The study is rooted in transactional model of stress and coping, which views stress as an ongoing process through the interaction between environmental demands and individual evaluation of available resources for dealing with them.<sup>4</sup> According to this framework, stress is elicited by demands that surpass individual coping capacity, which can impact outcomes like job satisfaction.<sup>15</sup>

As one of the largest Rohingya humanitarian responses in the world, Bangladesh has put huge demands on humanitarian workers.<sup>16</sup> Low empirical evidence on the levels of job stress and satisfaction among these groups.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is important to explore this relationship because high levels of job stress and low levels of job satisfaction can lead to burnout, absenteeism, decreased productivity, and staff turnover that undermine the effectiveness and continuity of humanitarian programs.<sup>17</sup> Organizations also have ethical and practical responsibility to protect the well-being of staff who provide essential psychosocial support. This study is primarily concerned with contributing to knowledge that can be used to inform organizational policies that promote employee well-being and quality of service in humanitarian settings. The objective of this study was to assess the levels of job stress and job satisfaction among contractual humanitarian workers in Bangladesh.

### Materials and methods

This cross-sectional study was performed on contractual humanitarian workers working in both NGOs and INGOs that provided services in Bangladesh. The study was conducted between January 2025 to December 2025. In total, 180 responses were gathered via convenience sampling through paper-based questionnaire methods, and after data cleaning

regarding incomplete responses, we ended up with a final sample of 176 individuals. The study population included humanitarian workers from diverse programme and psychological support backgrounds. Data were collected based on a structured questionnaire that includes a socio-demographic information sheet and to measure job satisfaction the Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS) was used, while the Occupational Stress Index (OSI) measured job stress. Participants read and signed the informed consent prior to answering the questionnaire. The data collected were verified, coded and transferred to a computer database for analysis. Statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used for data processing and statistical analyses. The demographic characteristics and study variables were summarized with descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation, independent samples t-tests, and simple linear regression analyses were performed to assess the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction, as well as differences across demographic and work-related characteristics. The study was approved by the Institutional Ethical Review Board of Southern Medical College (Memo No. SMCH/Chairman (IERB)/03/26/32).

### Results

In this study, the relationship between job stress and job satisfaction was determined by Pearson correlation analysis. As shown in table 1, the findings revealed a significantly negative correlation between job stress and job satisfaction showing that higher levels of job stress were associated with lower level of job satisfaction among contractual humanitarian staff (see table 1).

Descriptive statistics were calculated on the study variables (see table 2). By inspecting skewness and kurtosis values, the data can be considered approximately normally distributed (see table 1). All fell within acceptable limits ( $\pm 2$ ).<sup>18</sup> For this reason, the assumption of normality was regarded as satisfied, and parametric analyses were carried out.

Differences in job stress and job satisfaction were analysed through independent samples t-test across the demographic and work-related groups (see Table 2). Results showed that management-level staff reported significantly higher job stress than field-level staff ( $M = 148.00$  vs.  $130.34$ ),  $t(174) = 5.88$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a large effect size. However, there was no significant

**Table 1: Pearson Correlation between job stress and job satisfaction (n = 176)**

| Variables           | 1 | 2      | Kurtosis | Skewness |
|---------------------|---|--------|----------|----------|
| 1. Job satisfaction | - | -.21** | 1.06     | 0.46     |
| 2. Job stress       |   | -      | 1.09     | -0.79    |

\*\* $p < .01$

**Table 2: Mean job stress and job satisfaction by group**

| Variable          | Group         | n   | Job stress<br>(M ± SD) | t    | p    | d    | Job satisfaction<br>(M ± SD) | t    | p    | d    |
|-------------------|---------------|-----|------------------------|------|------|------|------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Gender            | Female        | 115 | 132.25 ± 14.996        | 0.92 | .360 | 0.15 | 78.96 ± 11.240               | 1.10 | .270 | 0.18 |
|                   | Male          | 61  | 134.54 ± 16.904        |      |      |      | 76.90 ± 12.734               |      |      |      |
| Work level        | Field         | 149 | 130.34 ± 14.023        | 5.88 | .000 | 1.15 | 78.89 ± 10.665               | 1.71 | .090 | 0.35 |
|                   | Management    | 27  | 148.00 ± 16.120        |      |      |      | 74.70 ± 16.487               |      |      |      |
| Marital status    | Married       | 86  | 133.95 ± 14.982        | 0.75 | .454 | 0.11 | 79.05 ± 12.868               | 0.88 | .379 | 0.14 |
|                   | Unmarried     | 90  | 132.18 ± 16.344        |      |      |      | 77.48 ± 10.663               |      |      |      |
| Language          | Know Rohingya | 66  | 136.21 ± 15.225        | 2.10 | .038 | 0.33 | 77.00 ± 12.910               | 1.09 | .279 | 0.18 |
|                   | Do not know   | 110 | 131.15 ± 15.699        |      |      |      | 78.99 ± 11.047               |      |      |      |
| PFA/MHPSS service | Yes           | 153 | 132.68 ± 15.701        | 0.80 | .426 | 0.18 | 78.57 ± 10.601               | 0.94 | .348 | 0.19 |
|                   | No            | 23  | 135.48 ± 15.611        |      |      |      | 76.09 ± 17.959               |      |      |      |

*M ± SD = mean ± standard deviation; t = independent samples t-test; p = significance value; d = Cohen's d; PFA/MHPSS = Psychological First Aid / Mental Health and Psychosocial Support. For each variable, t, p, and d refer to the comparison between the two groups listed.*

**Table 3: Regression models predicting job satisfaction**

| Model   | Predictor       | β      | p    | R <sup>2</sup> |
|---------|-----------------|--------|------|----------------|
| Model 1 | Job stress      | -0.212 | .005 | .045           |
| Model 2 | Work experience | 0.031  | .689 | .001           |

*DV = Job Satisfaction; R<sup>2</sup> = proportion of variance explained*

difference in job satisfaction between these groups ( $p = .090$ ). Participants familiar with the Rohingya dialect, compared to those who did not know it, reported significantly higher job stress ( $M = 136.21$  vs.  $131.15$ ),  $t(174) = 2.10$ ,  $p = .038$ ), with a small effect size. There were no major differences in job satisfaction between the groups. Gender, marital status and PFA/MHPSS service provision were not significantly associated with job stress or job satisfaction ( $p > .05$ ).

Simple linear regression analysis was carried out to investigate whether job stress and work experience predicted job satisfaction among contractual humanitarian workers (see table 3). Job stress was a significant predictor of job satisfaction ( $\hat{\alpha} = -0.212$ ,  $p = .005$ ), which explained 4.5% of the variance: more job stress = less job satisfaction. In contrast, work experience was not a significant predictor of job satisfaction ( $\hat{\alpha} = .031$ ,  $p = .689$ ) and only explained 0.1% of the variance.

## Discussion

This study aimed to explore the relationship of job stress with job satisfaction among contractual humanitarian workers in Bangladesh. The results demonstrated a moderate adverse correlation between job pressure and satisfaction, suggesting a significant negative relationship where high-pressure jobs lead to decreased workplace satisfaction. The regression analysis further demonstrated that job stress was a significant predictor of job satisfaction. In contrast, work experience had

no significant relationship with job satisfaction. Field-level staff reported significantly less job stress than management-level staff. In addition, knowing Rohingya dialect was another factor that reported slightly more of their job stress. No job stress or job satisfaction differences were detected based on gender, marital status, or involvement in PFA/MHPSS services.

These results were in line with previous findings showing negative impacts of job stress on job satisfaction.<sup>19</sup> A number of studies in the field of organizational psychology had established that employees reporting high levels of occupation-related stress tend to provide lower ratings for their overall job satisfaction. As an example, the study by Hoboubi et al.<sup>20</sup> showed that work-related stress can lead to lower job satisfaction, with workload, role conflict and emotional demands being the main contributing factors. In line with this concept, the Job Demands–Resources model proposed by Demerouti et al.<sup>21</sup> argues that additional job demands increase stress and subsequently lower satisfying behaviors and engagement at work. Similar results were found in research within humanitarian and helping professions, indicating that employees working under high stress conditions often experience elevated levels of distress negatively impacting job satisfaction. Thus, these recent results align with the wider literature highlighting the negative contribution of occupational stressors to employee well-being.

While there is a negative association of job stress and level of job satisfaction as seen in the existing literature, some results from this study differed from previous research. In particular, whereas work experience exhibited no significant predictive relationship with job satisfaction wherein multiple studies have indicated that more experienced workers report higher levels of job satisfaction through increased professional competence and adaptation to workplace demands,<sup>22</sup> One reason for this discrepancy may include the fact that humanitarian work often

occurs in unpredictable and emotionally intense contexts, where organizational factors such as workload, support systems and working conditions may matter more than individual experience. Also, the finding that employees who were familiar with Rohingya dialect reported marginally elevated levels of stress has seldom been explored in past studies. This increase may mirror the added emotional and communicational burden placed upon workers who engage more closely with impacted populations, notably at refugee sites.

In addition, the other important finding of concern in the study was that job stress among management level staff was statistically significantly higher than field-level employees. The reason might be the high level of administrative duties, decision-making stress and accountability that comes with management positions. Humanitarian organizations rely on managers to carry out complex operations, work with scarce resources, and maintain program effectiveness. Though they exhibited higher stress, job satisfaction did not differ significantly between management and staff in the field, indicating that managerial positions were capable of offering intrinsic rewards like leadership opportunities, professional recognition or increased independence.

The results of this study offer some concrete implications for humanitarian organizations. Given the negative influence concerning job satisfaction by job stress, organizations are called to implement occupational stress reducing strategies and better health state of their employees. This might be the provision of supportive supervision, improvements in workload management, access to stress management training and psychosocial support services. These strategies have the potential to increase employee satisfaction and decrease the likelihood of burnout among humanitarian personnel.

## Conclusion

The present study shows that job stress is a significant predictor of job satisfaction among humanitarian workers in Bangladesh. Job stress was negatively correlated with satisfaction, and experience was a weak predictor of satisfaction. Hence addressing occupational stress through organisational support and management strategies may be crucial to improving employee well-being and delivering effective humanitarian services. Longitudinal designs may be useful in future research to determine the trajectory of job strain and job satisfaction in humanitarian workers over time.

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