

## Prediction of Job Stress Based on Spiritual Intelligence and Self-Differentiation

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### Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** Job stress is not always caused directly by the stressful sources, but it results more from the way in which those sources are perceived. Therefore, a lot of factors are effective in job stress. As such, the present study was done to predict the job stress based on spiritual intelligence and self-differentiation of teachers of exceptional children in the town of Shahriar.

**Methods:** It is a cross-sectional and analytical study. The population of this study consisted of all teachers of exceptional children in the town of Shahriar in the academic year of 2014-2015, from whom 120 individuals were selected by cluster sampling method. Data were collected using Osipw's job stress questionnaire, Bowen's self-differentiation questionnaire and King's spiritual intelligence questionnaire. The data were analyzed using simultaneous regression and SPSS software.

**Results:** The results showed that there was a negative relationship between job stress and self-differentiation, and also a significant negative relationship was found between spiritual intelligence and job stress ( $p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, the analysis of data in simultaneous regression showed that the predictor variables can predict about 41.7 of job stress variance.

**Conclusion:** Job stress is predictable based on spiritual intelligence and self-differentiation. Therefore, drawing the actual goals and values is attainable, playing meanwhile an effective role in learners' learning in future performance and job far from any conflict.

**Keywords:** Job stress, spiritual intelligence, self-differentiation

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### Introduction

In recent decades, the phenomenon of job transition has caused more complexity in the issues of job, human relations and working environments with 'job stress' as one of the consequences of this phenomenon (1). Job stress is the harmful physical and emotional response of individuals, which occurs in conditions in which the job requirements are

not compatible with the capabilities, resources or needs of employees. This response may appear in the form of adverse behaviors, engaging in violent behaviors, accidents and work injuries, various physical illnesses and even death (2). Stress is costly both for people who are suffering from it and for the central institute and administration, whose

complications appear in the form of mental or physical fatigue, touchy and irritability, excitability, anxiety, high blood pressure, lack of self-confidence, job satisfaction and working motivation and reduced productivity (3).

Amram (4) believes that in order to improve the performance of employees, spiritual intelligence can have an important role in having a successful and efficient job management, so that spiritual intelligence of an individual not only causes the change of the individual's perception of difficult job problems and opportunities, but also s/he feels more compassion toward the others and shows more tolerance and stability against the adversities of job environment. Hence, focusing on spiritual intelligence of employees can prevent job stress or reduce its severity. Jain et al. (5) consider the spiritual intelligence an experienced ability that allows the individuals to achieve more knowledge and understanding, providing the ground for perfection and progress in life. In fact, the spiritual intelligence is related to the inner life of the mind and the soul and its relationship with the world, which includes the capacity for a deep understanding of existential questions and insight into the multiple levels of consciousness (6).

According to King (7), spiritual intelligence is a set of mental capacities that participate in unity, integration, and adoptive application of non-material and meta-physical aspects of an individual and achieving such results as deep existential thoughts, improvement of meaning, recognition of super ego and dominant on spiritual levels. He also presents four factors of spiritual intelligence comprising the following elements: 1-“Critical existential thinking” on issues such as life, death, life after death, truth, justice and other existential or supernatural issues; 2-“The ability to create personal meaning” and “the personal goals of the mental and physical experiences, or in other words, living according to established goals; 3-“Transcendental consciousness” i.e., the ability to identify the transcendent and metaphysical dimension in self, others and material world; 4-“Expanding awareness”, the ability to enter into the spiritual states or beyond the consciousness (7).

In a research Penal (8) found that the employees of the Department of Elementary Education enjoy the high levels of spiritual intelligence and moderate levels of job stress, but no significant difference was found between spiritual intelligence and job stress. The results of correlation coefficients and regression analysis (9) showed that job stress has a negative relationship with organizational spirituality. The results of a study (10) showed that there is a significant negative relationship between job stress and spiritual intelligence. In this regard, the findings of a study (11) indicated that the components of spiritual intelligence can explain 31 percent of changes related to job stress in university staff.

Another concept examined in this study is “self-differentiation”. It means that family members learn to differentiate their intellectual functioning and emotional functioning from one other and also their functioning from those of their family members. The concept of “differentiation” is one of the basic concepts of Bowen theory, which refers to the ability to experience intimacy with others, and yet independence from others (12). In Bowen's systemic theory, all signs and symptoms such as mental illness, physical illness, substance abuse and social problems have a positive relationship with failure to adapt to the system, trivial self-differentiation and exaggeration in emotional process (13). High-differentiated people are self-conscious towards emotions and able to assess the situation thoughtfully. These individuals have the ability of “self-independent” growth are able to maintain their peace and comfort in deep relationships, and thus avoid emotional fusion or emotional separation to modify their internal tensions, while less-differentiated individuals either incline toward emotional fusion and by separating from important people are going to be exhausted, or yield emotional separation, so when facing with emotional intimacy show anxious reaction (14).

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no research has been done about direct examination of the relationship between job stress and self-differentiation, but mention can be made of a similar research. For example, Beebe R, Frisch

(15) studied the relationship between differentiation and job burnout in nurses. The results showed that individuals with higher levels of differentiation experience lower levels of job burnout and people with lower differentiation experience higher levels of job burnout. The findings of a study (16) demonstrated that there is a reverse and significant relationship between differentiation and job burnout and its components in female-headed and non-female-headed households.

One of the strata of society whose mental health should be considered is the stratum of school teachers. Teachers, due to hard work and difficulties in interpersonal relationships with managers and other colleagues in school as well as spending extra energy on controlling students' abnormal behaviors, are constantly living in a state of tension and anxiety (17), and therefore are more likely at risk of occupational stress. Since in any country, the system of education is of great importance and the quality of the education system is dependent on the efficiency of teachers, dealing with factors such as job stress that affects the productivity of teachers is, without a doubt, necessary and as the job stress is common among teachers, trying to identify predictors of this phenomenon is deemed to be indispensable. Furthermore, the variables of spiritual intelligence and self-differentiation in relation to job stress have not been sufficiently studied. As such, the lack of research in this area is felt and the present research is undertaken to fill this gap. Therefore, the main goal of researchers in this study is to predict job stress based on spiritual intelligence and self-differentiation in exceptional primary school teachers in city of Shahriar. The most important question in this research is that "Is job stress with linear combination of variables of spiritual intelligence and self-differentiation predictable?"

## Methods

It is a cross-sectional and analytical study. The population of this study consisted of all teachers of exceptional students in the town of Shahriar in the academic year of 2014-2015. The sampling method was cluster sampling, so that among the five regions of Education

Organization in the town of Shahriar, three regions were randomly selected and then 120 individuals (60 males and 60 females) were chosen, who then completed three questionnaires of spiritual intelligence, self-differentiation and job stress.

**Osipow's job stress questionnaire:** This questionnaire was first developed and applied by (18); it has been made up of three parts which applies the six dimensions of role overload, role incompetence, role ambiguity, role boundary, responsibility and physical environment in order to evaluate the role of stress in an individual. Each of these dimensions is assessed by 10 items. There are 5 options for each item from "never" (equal to 1 score) to "most of the time" (5 scores). Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was reported to be 0.89 (18). Its validity has been confirmed in various studies and its reliability was obtained to be 0.84 by Cronbach's alpha method in research (19). In this study, reliability was obtained to be 0.79 using Cronbach's alpha method.

**Self-reported scale of spiritual intelligence:** This questionnaire was constructed by (7) and has 24 items that measure the spiritual intelligence in Likert 5-option scale and its scores range between 0 and 96. It has four sub-scales of existential critical thinking, creating the sense of self-concept, transcendental consciousness, expansion of the consciousness state. The reliability of the scale was obtained to be 0.92 and 0.91 using Cronbach's alpha and split-half methods, respectively. In studying the validity of each sub-scale also the Cronbach's alpha for sub-scales of existential critical thinking, creating the sense of personal concept, transcendental consciousness, the expansion of the consciousness state was obtained to be 0.78, 0.78, 0.87, and 0.91, respectively (7). Moreover, in a study (20), Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this questionnaire was obtained to be 0.89 and its validity factor was calculated to be 0.67 through test-retest in a sample of 70 people in a time interval of two weeks. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.89.

**Self-differentiation questionnaire:** This questionnaire was developed by (21), and then revised. The questionnaire contains 46 items. The options were rated in a 6-point Likert scale

from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). In terms of reliability, (21) has reported its Cronbach's alpha coefficient to be 0.88. (22) made standardized this questionnaire and reported its reliability to be 0.85. Validity of the questionnaire was reported to be 0.83 through internal consistency (22). In the present study, reliability was obtained to be 0.83 through Cronbach's alpha.

**Result**

The descriptive findings of the research are reported in Table 1. As seen in Table 1, the mean and standard deviation for variable of spiritual intelligence are 112.67 and 33.55; for variable of self-differentiation they are 150.04 and 21.09 and regarding the variable of job stress are they are 141.08 and 23.76, respectively.

Table 1. The descriptive information of the research variables

Variable's name	No.	mean±SD
Spiritual intelligence	120	112.67±33.55
Self-differentiation	120	150.04±21.9
Job stress	120	141.08±23.76

As shown in Table 2, the relationships between the variables of spiritual intelligence and self-differentiation with job stress are -0.58 and -0.47, respectively that is significant at the level of 0.05.

According to the results of Table 3, the simultaneous analysis of data shows that each of the predictor variables contributes to predicting the job burnout. The  $\beta$ -value for spiritual intelligence is -0.47 and for self-differentiation is -0.30. These two variables together predict up to 41.1 of the variance in job stress. Therefore, the hypothesis of the study is confirmed. B-factor represents the rate of the influence of predictor variable on the criterion variable.

According to the results in the table (4) and  $p < 0.05$  and  $F = 57.86$ , it is indicated that the research variables have the ability to predict the dependent variable, from which the significant model has been obtained using the simultaneous method.

Table 2. The results of the Pearson correlation between research variables

Variable	Spiritual intelligence	Self-differentiation	Job stress
Spiritual intelligence	1		
Self-differentiation	-0.47	1	
Job stress	-0.58*	-0.47*	1

**Discussion**

The main objective of this study was to predict job stress based on the spiritual intelligence and self differentiation of teachers in exceptional schools in the town of Shahriar. According to the results of simultaneous regression, job stress is predictable based on spiritual intelligence and self-differentiation. Therefore, the research hypothesis is confirmed. The results of regression analysis showed that the spiritual intelligence predicts the job stress negatively, i.e., the higher the spiritual intelligence, the lower the job stress will be. The above finding can be known to be partly consistent with findings of researches (9-11), but is not compatible with the finding of the research (8) that found there is no significant difference between spiritual intelligence and job stress. (23) came to the conclusion that there is a significant correlation between the variables of mental stress tolerance, optimism and taking responsibility with spiritual intelligent, so that the individuals with higher spiritual intelligence have higher capability in facing with the problems of life and analyzing and solving them; furthermore, they can tolerate more stress. To explain this finding, it can be said that the

Table 3. The results of simultaneous regression

The criterion variable	The predictor variable	$\beta$	Constant value	R	R <sup>2</sup>	T	p-value
Job stress	Spiritual intelligence	-0.47	154.59	64.6	41.1	8.96	0.05
	Self-differentiation	-0.30				-5.75	

Table 4. ANOVA for the significance of regression

	Total squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean squares	F	Significance
Regression	57452.68	2	28726.34	57.86	0.05
Remainder	80301.67	242	331.82		
Total	137754.36	244			

spiritual intelligence is a set of activities that, in addition to softness and flexibility in behavior, leads to the individual's self-awareness and deep insights about life and its purposefulness, so that the goals are drawn beyond the material

world and this process brings about the individual's compatibility with the work environment due to satisfaction and happiness of the others (24).

The results of regression analysis showed that self-differentiation predicts job stress negatively. Since self-differentiation is a concept that much has been studied about family issues, a research that directly studies the relationship between self-differentiation and job burnout was not found, but the results of the present research is consistent with those of similar researches, including (15-16), which showed that there is a significant negative relationship between self-differentiation and job burnout. In explaining this finding, the theoretical principles may help us. (25) Believes that the self-distinguished individuals are not easily influenced by others to contribute to anxiety or absorb their anxiety, and do not show the signs of damage because of the issues, problems, failures or anxiety. Thus, it can be expected that the people who are more self-differentiated react reasonably in facing with occupational problems and stresses, and when the signs of job stress emerge, in addition to controlling their stress, they try to reduce its symptoms. Therefore, these cases can reduce the incidence of occupational stress in people with high self-differentiation.

Gladding (26) believes that individuals who receive a lower score in terms of differentiation are vulnerable to stress and are more susceptible to illness including physical and social illnesses and when their dysfunctions appear, they are more likely to be chronic. People, who receive a higher scale in terms of differentiation, after the stress passes, can quickly get to emotional balance. Therefore, according to this

characteristic in people with high differentiation, it can be expected that these individuals receive less job stress. People who have reached a sufficient differentiation enjoy a clear thinking independent and distinct from the others and can clearly separate their feelings, thoughts, beliefs and emotions from the others and control them. Therefore, given that when the job stress occurs, the individual's emotions are reduced and s/he experiences a wave of negative thoughts and feelings, one would expect that people with high differentiation could control their negative feelings and reduce the likelihood of their job stress using reasonable methods (27).

Since the population of the present research consisted of the teachers of exceptional primary schools, caution should be taken in generalizing its results to other courses of educational periods. Given that the results show the predictability of job stress based on spiritual intelligence and self-differentiation variables, the educational authorities are recommended to pay attention to these factors to react to job stress in their planning in large scale. In addition, since the results of this study showed that there is a significant relationship between self-differentiation and spiritual intelligence with job stress, and due to the fact that few research has been done in this field, the future researchers are recommended to pay attention to these two factors in their future studies.

### Conclusion

The results indicate that spiritual intelligence and self-differentiation play an important role in job stress. As a conclusion it can be said that in order to reduce job stress, the spiritual and social support should be increased on the one hand, and the physical and psychological pressure should be controlled and job security should be enhanced on the other hand. Furthermore, holding the training classes as a way to promote spirituality and spiritual intelligence, and the formation of spiritual

supporting groups (religious workers) among employees seem necessary to reduce job stress and job pressures and tensions.

#### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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