

Original Article



Investigating the Mediating Role of Job Stress in the Relationship Between Hardiness and Self-efficacy in Health Network Employees

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Abstract

Background: The health network employees experience problems such as job stress, and characteristics of hardiness and self-efficacy help them in reducing their job problems. The aim of the present study was to investigate the mediating role of job stress in the relationship between hardiness and self-efficacy in the employees of the health network of Tehran.

Methods: In this descriptive-analytical research that was conducted cross-sectionally in 2023, 255 employees working in the health network of Tehran, District 6 were selected and included in the study through random cluster sampling. The data collection tools in this study were three questionnaires including the standard hardiness questionnaire by Kubasa et al, General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES), and Philip L. Rice's Occupational Stress Questionnaire. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and structural equations were used with SPSS 22 and LISREL 8.8 software for statistical analysis.

Results: The results showed that there was a significant relationship between hardiness and self-efficacy (r=0.341), between hardiness and job stress (r=-0.517), and between self-efficacy and job stress (r=-0.433). The values of goodness of fit indices (0.523), adjusted fit index (0.681), comparative fit index (0.653), normed fit index (0.723), non-normed fit index (0.533), and incremental fit index (0.761) showed that job stress had a mediating role between hardiness and self-efficacy.

Conclusion: Hardiness and its components can predict self-efficacy and job stress and be effective in increasing and decreasing it, respectively. Therefore, it is suggested that by providing hardiness training courses as a personality-acquired characteristic can lead to better and higher performance of health network employees.

Keywords: Hardiness, Self-efficacy, Job stress, Health network employees

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Introduction

The safety and health of employees in the organization is becoming more important day by day and attention to it is increasing in terms of quality and quantity. This issue can be considered both in terms of job accidents and diseases in the physical environment and in terms of social and psychological aspects (1). Among different occupations, medical and health sector employees are always exposed to physical and psychological risks, which affects their personal, social, and professional life (2).

One of the variables that can be investigated in health network employees is their job stress (3). Job stress can be seen as the accumulation of stressful factors in job-related situations, which most people agree on being stressful (4). Stress can stimulate and motivate an individual. However, it can also lead to unpleasant and even dangerous side effects (5). A level of stress that motivates an individual to achieve organizational goals is beneficial for the organization and increases performance; while the acute pressure of manpower damages the organization (6).

Self-efficacy is one of the other variables that can be investigated in health network employees (7). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their constructive abilities, through which a person can achieve a certain level of goals. Therefore, the self-efficacy belief includes confirmation of ability levels and, of course, the strength of that belief. Selfefficacy includes beliefs regarding an individual's ability to do certain tasks (8). Yıldırım and Güler, showed in their research that the level of self-efficacy of people working in hospitals and health department employees affects their job stress (9). Bahrami et al showed that the understanding of self-efficacy as a predictor of the behavior of medical and health care staff plays an important role on their professional performance. In addition, they found that nurses with higher self-efficacy have better performance and provide better quality care than nurses with lower



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self-efficacy. These nurses are also more committed to their work and show more endurance when facing difficulties (10). People with high self-efficacy believe that they are able to cope more effectively with their life events and highly expect success compared to those with low self-efficacy. These individuals do not drown in their doubts and look at difficult assignments as challenges, not as threats, and usually seek challenges (11).

One of the other variables that can be investigated in health workers is hardiness. Hardiness is a personality trait that is associated with a person's ability to manage and respond to stressful life events with the help of coping solutions that turn potential unpleasant situations into opportunities for learning and growth (12). Hardiness is a type of personality style in which a person feels commitment instead of withdrawal, feels a kind of control instead of feeling powerless, and sees life's problems as challenges rather than a threat. Due to this personality trait, when such people face a problem in life, instead of considering the problem as unsolvable, they consider it as a challenge and face the problem and try to solve it (13).

Petzold et al showed that mental stress, anxiety, hardiness, and self-efficacy affect people's quality of life and performance when they get sick or are afraid of getting sick (14). Djourova et al stated the relationship between self-efficacy and hardiness in their study (15). Badu et al, in investigating the relationship between job stress and hardiness in mental health nurses, found that the higher the level of hardiness of nurses, the more selfefficacy they experience (16).

Chen et al, while expressing the relationship between self-efficacy and job stress in Chinese nurses, stated that nurses with high self-efficacy maintain their psychological health in stressful situations and therefore increase their job efficiency (17).

The health care workers are the health providers of the society and the existence of some stressful factors in this profession is inevitable. Therefore, identifying the factors affecting their self-efficacy and job stress plays an important role in the quality of providing services and fulfilling their role. On the other hand, the researcher's investigations showed that no research was found that examined the relationship between the aforementioned variables, i.e. the relationship between hardiness and self-efficacy and the mediating role of job stress, and a research gap is felt in this field. Therefore, the present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the mediating role of job stress in the relationship between hardiness and self-efficacy in the employees of Tehran health network.

Methods

Study design and sample selection

The current research was a cross-sectional study conducted in 2023. The statistical population was made

up of all employees working in the health network of Tehran city, District 6, whose total number was 517. Using Morgan's table, 220 employees were selected through the cluster random sampling method. The sampling method was as follows: 10 centers were randomly selected from all the health centers in Tehran, District 6, and all their employees were asked to complete the research questionnaires.

Data collection

Kubasa and colleagues' Standard Hardiness Questionnaire, Scherer and colleagues' General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) questionnaire, and Philip L. Rice's Occupational Stress Questionnaire were used to evaluate the variables.

Standard hardiness questionnaire: this questionnaire was developed in 1981 by Kubasa et al and consists of 50 four-choice questions based on the Likert scale of never (0), rarely (1), sometimes (2) and often (3), which measure the three dimensions of commitment, control, and challenge. The minimum score in this scale is 0 and the maximum score is 150. The total score of these questions is considered as the respondent's hardiness score, and the higher the score, the higher the respondent's hardiness and vice versa. Previous studies show that the components of hardiness, i.e., control, commitment, and challenge have reliability coefficients of 0.70, 0.52, and 0.52, respectively, and these coefficients have been calculated as 0.75 for hardiness as a whole (18). In the present study, the reliability of the standard hardiness questionnaire was estimated to be 0.91 using Cronbach's alpha.

GSES questionnaire: this questionnaire has 17 items and is scored based on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 to 5 for the options of completely agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, completely disagree. The minimum score in this scale is 17 and the maximum is 85. A high score indicates a high sense of self-efficacy (19). In the present study, the estimated reliability of the general selfefficacy questionnaire was 0.79 using Cronbach's alpha.

Occupational Stress Questionnaire: this questionnaire was developed by Philip L. Rice in 1992 and translated to Persian and standardized by Hatami. This scale consists of 57 questions. This test is scored based on a 5-point Likert scale as never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), and most of the time (5). The minimum score in this scale is 57 and the maximum score is 285. Job stress score is obtained from the sum of all scores. Hatami tested this questionnaire for a sample of 275 school teachers. The obtained reliability for this questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha was 89%, and the obtained validity for the entire questionnaire is 0.921 (20). In the present study, the estimated reliability of the occupational stress questionnaire was 0.83 using Cronbach's alpha.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics (percentage, frequency, mean,

standard deviation, minimum, maximum) and inferential statistics (confirmatory factor analysis) and structural equation model were used for data analysis using SPSS 22 and LISREL 8.8 software.

Ethical considerations

First, the research objective was fully explained to the participants. Then the participants were assured of the confidentiality of their information and it was pointed out that they would have complete independence in participating or not participating or leaving the research midway. In addition, this plan was reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the Islamic Azad University, Tehran branch, and received the ethical code IR.IAU.TEHRAN.1401.034.

Results

A total of 220 employees of Tehran health network participated in this research. According to the findings of the research, most of the participants in the research were female (171 people, 77.72%). Most respondents were over 35 years old, and the age group of 40 to 45 years had the highest frequency (83 people, 37.72%) of the participants. Most of the employees of the health network were married (163 people, 74.09%). In addition, the results showed that most of the employees had a bachelor's degree (107 people, 48.63%), had a work experience of 11 to 15 years (86 people, 39.09%), and regarding employment status, most of them were official (134 people, 60.91%) (Table 1).

According to the mean of the hardiness variable (47.28), it can be stated that the hardiness variable is at a low level among the employees of the health network in Tehran. In the description of the components of the hardiness variable, the control dimension with 17.73 has the highest mean, followed by the commitment dimension with 15.61 and the challenge dimension with 14.95. The obtained mean of the variables of self-efficacy and job stress in the employees of Tehran health network were 26.45 and 168.27, respectively (Table 2).

Variable	Mean	Number (percent)	
Gender	Female	171 (77.72%)	
	Male	49 (22.28%)	
	Younger than 40 years	68 (30.9%)	
Age	40 to 45 years	83 (37.72%)	
	Older than 45 years	70 (31.81%)	
A 4 - 114 - 1 - 4 - 4	Single	57 (25.9%)	
Marital status	Married	163 (74.1%)	
	Lower than a bachelor's degree	38 (17.27%)	
Education	Bachelor's degree	107 (48.63%)	
	Higher than a bachelor's degree	75 (34.1%)	
Employment	Official	134 (60.91%)	
status	Unofficial	86 (39.09%)	

The criteria listed in Table 3 were used to evaluate the goodness of fit of the model. For the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), a value lower than 0.08 indicates a good fit of the model, which in the present study was 0.039 and a value less than 3 is considered acceptable for the normed chi-square, which was 1.413 in the present study. The scores of the goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), comparative fit indices (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), non-normed fit index (NNFI), and incremental fit index (IFI) indices range from zero and one, with values closer to one indicating a better fit of the model. In this research, the GFI was 0.523, the AGFI was 0.681, the CFI was 0.653, the NFI was 0.723, the NNFI was 0.533, and the IFI was 0.761. Based on the provided indices, the model had a good fit (Table 3).

After confirming the accuracy of the measurement models, the research hypotheses were checked. The significance level for the relationships in the above standard estimation model is \pm 1.96. Standard coefficient refers to the factor loadings, the larger the factor loading is and the closer it is to one, it means that the independent variable has more influence on the dependent variable. If this value is less than 0.3, the effect is average, if it is between 0.3 and 0.6 the effect is good, and if it is above 0.6 the effect is excellent (21).

Examination of the structural model shows that all the relationships between the variables have become significant. Therefore, the obtained significance value of the relationship between the variables of hardiness and self-efficacy, hardiness and job stress, and self-efficacy and job stress were 2.018, 1.712, and 1.784, respectively. The values of the path coefficients show the direct relationship between the variables of hardiness and selfefficacy and the inverse relationship between hardiness and job stress and self-efficacy and job stress. Therefore, considering the significance of the relationship between the above variables, the calculated values of 18.6%, 14.3%, and 15.9% between these two variables can be accepted (Table 4).

After testing the first structural models, the second structural model that indicates the relationship between the underlying variables (commitment, control, and challenge) and the dependent variable (self-efficacy, job

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum of the variables of hardiness, self-efficacy, and job stress

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Hardiness	47.28	6.18	18	84
Commitment	15.61	3.68	7	27
Control	17.73	4.21	6	22
Challenge	14.95	2.5	4	20
Self-efficacy	26.45	5.76	14	42
Job stress	168.27	17.88	113	224

Table 3. Model	fit indices of the	mediating rol	le of job s	tress in the re	lationship
oetween hardir	ness and self-effic	acy in health	n network	employees	

Index	Reported value
RMSEA	0.039
Normed chi-square	1.413
GFI	0.523
AGFI	0.681
CFI	0.653
NFI	0.723
NNFI	0.533
IFI	0.761

stress) of the research was investigated. Figure 1 show the structural model of the research in standard estimation mode and model coefficients.

After investigating the model in the standard estimation mode, the significance coefficients of the model were examined. The results showed that in all cases, the absolute value of the significance coefficients was greater than 1.96, therefore, all relationships are significant. Table 5 shows the calculated *t* value and the coefficients of each path.

(In this diagram, the direct paths of the variable of hardiness to job stress, job stress to self-efficacy, and the indirect path of hardiness through the intervening variable of job stress to self-efficacy are presented).

The standard coefficients between commitment, control, and challenge with self-efficacy are 0.48, 0.37, and 0.42, respectively, and as these values are between 0.3 and 0.6, which shows the good and direct impact of these components on the self-efficacy of health network employees. In addition, the standard coefficients between commitment, control, and challenge with job stress are equal to 0.39, -0.31, and -0.34, respectively, which shows the good and inverse effect of these components on job stress (Table 5).

Discussion

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the mediating role of job stress in the relationship between hardiness and self-efficacy in health network employees. The results obtained from measurement models confirmed the relationship between hardiness and efficiency and job stress, as well as the relationship between the components of hardiness, including commitment, control, and challenge, with selfefficacy and job stress. In addition, these relationships showed that there was an inverse relationship between hardiness components (commitment, control, and challenge) and job stress.

Consistent with the present study, Petzold et al and Djourova et al confirmed the significant impact of hardiness on self-efficacy (14,15). In addition, these results were consistent with the results of the study of Badu et al, which showed that there was a relationship between job

Table 4. Path coefficients and their significance and investigation of research hypotheses in the main path analysis model

Investigated relationship	Coefficient	т	Type of relationship
Hardiness – self-efficacy	0.341	2.018	Direct relationship
Hardiness – job stress	- 0.517	1.712	Inverse relationship
Job stress – self-efficacy	- 0.433	1.784	Inverse relationship

stress and hardiness (16). Chen et al also showed in their study that there was a relationship between self-efficacy and job stress (17).

According to the confirmation of the hypothesis of the relationship between hardiness and self-efficacy, it can be stated that hardy people use problem-oriented and social support coping methods. When faced with problems, these people evaluate the problems more accurately and use problem-oriented strategies to solve problems. In fact, hardiness increases one's self-efficacy in dealing with problems. Hardiness consists of three components: commitment, control, and challenge. These components increase the person's ability in difficult and stressful situations by increasing the person's correct perception of the problem and increasing the decision-making and problem-solving power (22).

The significant relationship between hardiness and job stress proves that the characteristics of people, including hardiness, cause their tension level to be lower, and these people can better use their cognitive and dynamic skills to deal with problems in mental peace. Hardiness reduces the threat assessment of job events and instead increases the effort to adapt successfully (23). People who have high commitment, in addition to being passionate about their work and dedicating themselves to their work, believe in the importance and value of their activities and can find meaning in what they do. The challenge attribute enables these people not to consider unpleasant events as a threat to their safety, and all these cases will shorten the duration of the negative consequences of stressful events (24). Hardy people, compared to people who are less hardy, evaluate stressful situations as less threatening and more controllable. On the other hand, hardiness acts as a shield against stressful situations in life. Feeling less threatened by the environment and feeling more in control of the situation allows a person to face challenging situations calmer and with more confidence (25).

The low motivation of employees in questionnaire research is considered as a limitation of the research. It is suggested that due to the generalizability of the results; in order to investigate the cultural effects, a similar study should be conducted in another province besides Tehran. It is also suggested that, in addition to the health network employees, the current research should be conducted in other similar occupations so that it has a higher generalizability.

Conclusion

The results obtained from measurement models



Chi-square=658.93, df= 287, p-value=0.0000, RESEA=0.054

Figure 1. Diagram of the research conceptual model

Table 5.	The results of	modeling the s	tructural equations	of research hypotheses
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Relationships of research variables	Coefficient	t	<i>P</i> value	Result
Commitment - self-efficacy	0.48	3.28	0.01	Direct relationship
Control – self-efficacy	0.37	3.19	0.01	Direct relationship
Challenge – self-efficacy	0.42	3.21	0.01	Direct relationship
Commitment – job stress	-0.39	3.48-	0.01	Inverse relationship
Control – job stress	-0.31	3.25-	0.01	Inverse relationship
Challenge – job stress	-0.34	3.34-	0.01	Inverse relationship

confirmed the relationship between hardiness with selfefficacy and job stress, as well as the relationship between the constituent components of hardiness, including commitment, control, and challenge, with self-efficacy and job stress. In addition, these relationships showed that the relationship between hardiness components (commitment, control, and challenge) and job stress is inverse. Considering the significant relationship between hardiness dimensions and self-efficacy and job stress, it seems that in organizations such as health centers that are responsible for care and treatment, necessary training should be provided, such as taking advantage of hardiness, so that the employees experience less job stress in the work environment and the organizations can expect a higher level of productivity from the employees.

Authors' Contribution

Conceptualization: Sajad Panahi Far, Zeinab Nourollahi. Data curation: Sajad Panahi Far. Formal analysis: Sajad Panahi Far. Funding acquisition: Sajad Panahi Far. Investigation: Zeinab Nourollahi. Methodology: Sajad Panahi Far, Zeinab Nourollahi. Project administration: Sajad Panahi Far, Zeinab Nourollahi. Resources: Sajad Panahi Far, Zeinab Nourollahi. Software: Sajad Panahi Far. Supervision: Sajad Panahi Far. Validation: Sajad Panahi Far. Visualization: Sajad Panahi Far. Writing–original draft: Sajad Panahi Far, Zeinab Nourollahi. Writing–review & editing: Sajad Panahi Far, Zeinab Nourollahi.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval

This article was extracted from the thesis of the first author and approved by the Islamic Azad University, Tehran Branch, with the ethical code IR.IAU.TEHRAN.1401.034.

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