

## Testing the Mediating Processes between Work Stressors and Subjective Well-Being

CHRISTINE L. SCHECK

*Northern Illinois University*

ANGELO J. KINICKI

*Arizona State University*

AND

JEANNETTE A. DAVY

*Wright State University*

This study developed and tested a multivariate model of the process through which work stressors and social support affect subjective well-being. The model was derived from previous theory and empirical research. Two hundred eighteen employees were surveyed 1 year after their organization was acquired. Covariance structure analysis was used to evaluate goodness of fit and to compare the model to alternative measurement and structural representations. Results supported the operationalizations of modeled constructs. Structural linkages within the model were generally supported. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed. © 1997 Academic Press

The stress process can be partitioned into three interrelated yet distinct components: the sources of stress, the mediators of stress, and the manifestations of stress. Historically, research primarily focused on the bivariate relations between rather than across these three components. For example, research investigated the relation between stressors and the appraisal of stressors (e.g., Elliott, Chartrand, & Harkins, 1994), stressors and stress outcomes (e.g., Schell, Paine-Mantha, & Markham, 1992), appraisal and coping (e.g., Terry, 1994), coping and emotion (e.g., Stanton, Danoff-Burg, Cameron, & Ellis, 1994), and coping and psychological well-being (e.g., Kinicki & Latack,

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Christine L. Scheck, Northern Illinois University, College of Business, Department of Management, DeKalb, IL 60115.

1990; Long, 1993). Nonetheless, only a few studies tested the mediating processes between stressors and stress outcomes (Blau, Linnehan, Brooks, & Hoover, 1993; Rohde, Lewinsohn, Tilson, & Seeley, 1990). This is an important omission because it limits our understanding about the dynamic process that underlies the relation between life stressors and the manifestations of stress.

The purpose of this study is to investigate a process through which work stressors and social support affect subjective well-being. These relations will be assessed using an intensive covariance structure analysis approach. The process model tested in this study was derived from previous theory and empirical research. Although the current study does not test all relevant variables in a stress process, it does permit examination of how stressors, social support, strain, and coping behaviors come together to influence subjective well-being within a work context.

The model shown in Fig. 1 represents a multistage process through which individuals respond to stressors. It is shown as a path diagram in which hypothesized latent variables are shown in circles/ovals. After providing an overview, theoretical and empirical justification for each linkage is provided.

Subjective well-being is the ultimate outcome variable of interest. It is a multidimensional construct reflecting a general state of acceptance and satisfaction in various facets of one's life (Feist, Bodner, Jacobs, Miles, & Tan, 1995). Figure 1 reveals subjective well-being is directly influenced by problem and emotion-focused coping, positive and negative stressors, and emotional and instrumental social support. In turn, coping functions are directly affected by strain and emotional and instrumental social support. It is further expected that strain is directly determined by both types of social support and positive and negative stressors. Finally, both positive and negative stressors are influenced by emotional and instrumental social support. We now focus more specifically on the proposed linkages.

The social environment provides vital resources an individual uses to survive and flourish. Social support describes those individuals and groups one turns to either on a regular basis or in time of need. Researchers identified two key types of support—emotional and instrumental. Emotional social support is information obtained from others that one is esteemed and accepted (Thoits, 1982). This type of support suggests to individuals that they are valued by another. In contrast, instrumental social support includes a wide range of activities concerning the practical help one is given from others (House, 1981; Thoits, 1982). Such activities include help with family or work responsibilities, advice in resolving situations, and financial aid (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Kahn & Antonucci, 1981).

There are two theoretical explanations of how social support influences the stress process (see Cohen & Wills [1985] and McIntosh [1991] for reviews of these theories). The first posits that social support acts as a moderator or

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