



Job stress and well-being of female employees in hospitality: The role of regulatory leisure coping styles

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ABSTRACT

The job stress and coping behavior of female employees has become a key issue in the hospitality industry. This study investigates the moderating role of regulatory leisure coping styles on the effect of job stress on female employees' well-being. Specifically, this study extends [Patry et al.'s \(2007\)](#) findings to further confirm the direct and moderating role of regulatory leisure coping styles in the relationship between job stress and well-being. Data were collected from the female employees of 22 tourist hotels in Taiwan. The results showed that the Planned-Breather Leisure Coping Style (PBLCS) was positively and significantly associated with well-being, whereas the Avoidant Leisure Coping Style (ALCS) had a negative and significant effect on it. In addition, the results also revealed that the PBLCS plays a buffering role, but that the ALCS plays an amplifying role. Based on these findings, the implications and research suggestions are then discussed.

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1. Introduction

Hospitality is a highly stressful industry ([Kim et al., 2007](#); [Papadopoulou-Bayliss et al., 2001](#); [Wildes, 2007](#)), as it is labor-intensive and involves frequent rotations, work overload, anti-social working hours, intensive contacts with customers, and highly emotional labor characteristics ([Anderson et al., 2002a](#); see also [Chiang et al., 2010](#); [Hayes and Weathington, 2007](#); [Haynes and Fryer, 1999](#)). The majority of employees in this industry are female ([Deery and Iverson, 1996](#)). In a work setting, females encounter dysphoria, which tends to have a ruminative way on their negative emotions, thus amplifying and prolonging their dysphoria and increasing depression ([Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987](#)). Males, on the other hand, tend to respond through behavior and distraction, which then reduces their depression ([Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987](#)). In addition, compared with males, the social role of the female provides support to others and that brings more stress ([Kessler et al., 1985](#)). A previous research done by [Michael et al. \(2009\)](#) also indicated that females often experience higher levels of job stress than males in the work setting. Therefore, an attempt to understand and manage female employees' job stress in the hospitality industry is crucial.

Well-being refers to an individual's overall assessment of his/her quality of life ([Brinkman, 2002](#)); in the stress literature, work-related stress has been found to be negatively associated with well-being ([Fortes-Ferreira et al., 2006](#); [Schabracq et al., 2003](#)). Hence, reducing the negative effects of job stress has become an important issue. Coping refers to general strategies for reducing job stress, which can be categorized according to the following bi-dimensional dichotomy: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies ([Elfering et al., 2005](#); [Penley et al., 2002](#)). Leisure can improve one's health, enhance one's satisfaction with one's life ([Coleman and Iso-Ahola, 1993](#)) and effectively combat the negative effects of stress ([Iwasaki, 2001](#)). Therefore, leisure can be considered as a coping strategy. In their study, [Iwasaki and Mannell \(2000a\)](#) stated that leisure coping strategies are comprised of leisure companionship, leisure palliative coping, and leisure mood enhancement, which have received extensive attention in the relevant literature.

Conventional wisdom states that leisure is an emotion-focused ([Iwasaki and Schneider, 2003](#)), passive and avoidance coping approach. However, [Patry et al. \(2007\)](#) argued that individuals' underlying functional goals for leisure are different and can be distinguished into two regulatory leisure coping styles: the Planned-Breather Leisure Coping Style (PBLCS) and the Avoidant Leisure Coping Style (ALCS). The PBLCS is characterized by an intentional temporary distraction from the stressful event ([Patry et al., 2007](#)), and can be considered as a proactive approach. This form of coping may replenish female employees' energy and help them to be satisfied with their jobs, thereby improving their well-being. On the contrary, the ALCS implies that leisure is a tactic for avoiding

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stressful events (Patry et al., 2007), and can be considered as a passive coping approach. This resistance to stress may elicit anxiety in female employees, which may result in job dissatisfaction and diminished well-being. These two underlying functional goals of leisure may lead to different consequences with regard to coping styles.

In contrast to Iwasaki and Schneider's (2003) perspective, Patry et al. (2007) claimed that leisure coping styles encompassed a problem-focused component. Previous research done by Fortes-Ferreira et al. (2006) found that a direct action coping (i.e., problem-focused coping) strategy can reduce psychological distress and complaints, whereas a palliative coping (i.e., emotion-focused coping) strategy brings about the opposite results. This shows that the effects of different coping strategies vary. Unlike general coping strategies, which are entirely passive, regulatory leisure coping styles encompass active and proactive components. However, the question of whether or not the different underlying functional goals of leisure coping strategies result in different consequences has not yet been fully explored. Thus, the first purpose of this study will be an attempt to explore whether these different goals have different direct effects on well-being.

Situation is not stressful in nature; instead, the interaction between the situation and the individual leads to a psychological, physical, and mental response to stress (e.g., Day and Livingstone, 2001). Accordingly, coping strategies seem to play an important role in determining the consequences of stress (e.g., Greenglass, 2003). Compared with palliative coping, direct action coping has been found to have a stronger buffering effect on the negative impact of work-related stress on psychosomatic complaints (Fortes-Ferreira et al., 2006). This may show that the moderating effect may vary with different coping strategies. Moreover, Iwasaki and Mannell (2000b) indicated that leisure plays a buffering role and can act against the negative effects of stress on physical and mental health in a leisure context. Accordingly, do the different underlying functional goals of leisure coping styles have different buffering effects with regard to coping with job stress? The second purpose of this study attempts to investigate how regulatory leisure coping styles moderate the effect of job stress on female employees' well-being in order to further clarify the moderating role of regulatory leisure coping strategies.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Job stress and well-being

Job stress refers to an individual's reaction to threats which are derived from the characteristics of his or her job (Jamal, 1990), including time stress and anxiety (Parker and Decotiis, 1983). Well-being, in accordance with Noblet and Rodwell's (2005) study, is operationalized as both psychological well-being and job satisfaction in the work setting. In the hospitality industry, the working environment is characterized by irregular and long working hours, role pressure, and work overload. When a female employee faces such a stressful situation, she may easily become nervous and anxious, which in turn elicits dissatisfaction and negative emotions towards work, eventually reducing well-being. Previous studies have confirmed the negative relationship between work-related stress and employees' well-being or job satisfaction (see Fortes-Ferreira et al., 2006; Schabracq et al., 2003; Shani and Pizam, 2009). Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1. The job stress of female employees has a negative effect on their well-being.

2.2. Regulatory leisure coping styles: The PBLCS and the ALCS

Coping strategies can be categorized into two types. The first indicates attempts to react to a threatening situation with the aim of eliminating the threat, and this includes direct action, problem-focused, active, and control strategies. The second type relates to the aim of reducing emotional discomfort through palliative, emotion-focused, passive, and avoidance strategies (see Fortes-Ferreira et al., 2006). As leisure can be considered to be a kind of distraction or avoidance, therefore, leisure coping strategies can be categorized as the Planned-Breather Leisure Coping Style (PBLCS) or the Avoidant Leisure Coping Style (ALCS) based on their different underlying functional goals (Patry et al., 2007). The PBLCS is an active coping approach that combines both problem-focused (i.e., planning) and emotion-focused (i.e., through an activity to temporarily escape from a stressful event) approaches, in line with the palliative coping strategy (i.e., using leisure to refresh one's energy) (Patry et al., 2007). In other words, the PBLCS is an intentional temporary distraction, and its functional goal is to reduce stress and replenish depleted energy. Therefore, leisure is a way of taking oneself far away from the stress, experiencing positive feelings, and replenishing depleted energy (Patry et al., 2007). Compared with the PBLCS, the ALCS is escapist in nature; it is a form of emotion-focused coping and is likely to avoid or deny the stress. That is to say, the ALCS tends to use leisure predominantly as an avoidance tactic (Patry et al., 2007) and as an outlet for procrastination or to avoid dealing with the stress at hand.

Although these two regulatory leisure coping styles are both used to escape from stressful events or for the purposes of distraction, the PBLCS concerns proactive stress regulation, while the ALCS relates avoiding or denying stress. These two types of regulatory leisure coping strategies are reflected as leisure involvement, but have different underlying functional goals. In terms of Patry et al.'s (2007) perspective, the PBLCS involving planning skill has positive links to effective time management. On the contrary, the ALCS is better associated with the avoidance orientation and is negatively and positively correlated with time management and procrastination, respectively. Therefore, the different goals of coping strategies may have different effects on how stress is coped with.

2.3. Regulatory leisure coping styles and well-being

The PBLCS is characterized by an intentional temporary distraction (Patry et al., 2007) that allows the individual to transfer his/her attention away from negative feelings and to generate neutral or positive feelings to replace these negative feelings (Houston, 1987). Engaging in leisure activities can either enhance positive emotions or reduce negative emotions when an individual is faced with stress (Hull and Michael, 1995), which in turn will elicit greater job satisfaction. In addition, distraction-oriented coping (a form of emotion-focused coping) strategy alone cannot lead to a better performance or affective state; however, combining distraction-oriented and task-oriented coping (a form of problem-focused coping) strategies can result in more positive outcomes (Gaudreau and Blondin, 2004). As the PBLCS contains both emotion- and problem-focused orientations (Patry et al., 2007), planned leisure activities can not only help female employees to relax temporarily, but also contribute to positive energy or help to reduce fatigue, which in turn may enhance their well-being.

The PBLCS incorporates the concept of problem-focused coping (Patry et al., 2007), which implies some degree of control over the situation (Zakowski et al., 2001). A leisure activity in which the subject is in control at any time generates a feeling of self-determination (Coleman and Iso-Ahola, 1993) which enhances well-being (Pelletier et al., 1995). Therefore, in this study's context, female employees who use the PBLCS will have the feeling

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