

EFFECT OF MANAGERIAL SUPPORT ON JOB STRESS AMONG EMPLOYEES WHO USE FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

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Abstract: *Managerial support represents a significant organizational resource in the context of implementing various forms of flexible work arrangements (home-based work, remote work etc.) as it enables employees to cope more effectively with job demands and positively contributes to the reduction of job stress. The aim of this study is to examine the direct impact of managerial support on job stress among a sample of 448 highly educated employees in Serbia who use flexible work arrangements. To test the proposed relationship, the PLS-SEM method was applied using the SmartPLS 3 software. The results indicate that managerial support has a direct negative effect on job stress, meaning that higher levels of managerial support are associated with lower levels of job stress among employees using flexible work arrangements. Managerial support enhances employees' perceptions of autonomy, fairness, and trust, facilitates the effective implementation of flexible work arrangements, and consequently has a positive impact on the establishment of work-life balance. Lower levels of job stress generate a range of positive outcomes for employees, including improved work-related attitudes (job satisfaction, employee engagement, employee commitment, etc.)*

and work behaviors, which ultimately contribute to enhanced organizational performance. In line with social exchange theory, organizations should develop and strengthen mechanisms of managerial support when implementing flexible work arrangements, as this fosters mutual satisfaction for both employees and organizations. This study makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from the context of a developing economy, with a particular focus on Serbia. Future research should include larger and more heterogeneous samples, and an examination of additional mediating mechanism..

Key words: *Managerial support, job stress, flexible work arrangements, PLS-SEM, Serbia*

JEL classification: *M12, M54, J24, J28*

INTRODUCTION

In modern working conditions, which have been further accelerated due to the development of digitalization and the wider application of different forms of flexible work arrangements, there have been additional changes in the way work is organized and the relationship between employees

and managers (Gašić et al., 2025). Flexible work arrangements have their benefits like better WLB, productivity, efficiency, commitment etc (Shifrin & Michel, 2022; Kumar, Sarkar & Chahar, 2023) but they can also cause additional stress that can arise due to the fact that employees, especially those who work remotely, have the feeling that they are available 24/7. Also, what the employees point out as a big problem of remote and home-based work is social distance (Himawan, Helmi & Fanggidae, 2022; Gašić, Berber, Slavić & Jevtić, 2025). Therefore, managerial support has a significant impact on reducing the negative effects, in this case, job stress. However, in the context of Serbia, the problem that arises is the lack of theoretical and empirical findings on this topic, especially in terms of using flexible work arrangements. The general goal of the research is to use the PLS-SEM model to investigate the direct influence of managerial support on job stress among highly educated employees in Serbia who use flexible work arrangements.

In contemporary organizations, managing employee well-being has become a critical challenge, particularly in the context of increasing workplace flexibility and the rapid digitalization of work. Flexible work arrangements have become an important organizational practice that enables companies to adapt to changing business environments while also influencing employees' working conditions and psychological states (Gašić, 2024). At the same time, managerial support has been recognized as a key organizational resource that can help employees cope with work-related demands and reduce job stress.

In this context, understanding how managerial support affects job stress is particularly important for highly educated employees who often perform complex and demanding tasks. Therefore, this research examines the impact of managerial support on job stress among highly educated employees in Serbia who use various forms of flexible work arrangements. The study focuses on employees' perceptions of the support they receive from their managers and explores how such support can contribute to reducing job stress in flexible work environments.

The paper consists of four parts, the first part "Theoretical background" in which the authors theoretically explained the two main variables investigated in the paper, namely Managerial support and Job stress, as well as the relationship between these two variables. The second part is focused on the research methodology, in which it is explained how the authors created the survey, collected data, coded the data and analyzed the data, also a sample of the research is shown here.

After that, it follows where the examination of the direct influence of managerial support on job stress was carried out in the SmartPLS 3 statistical program for data processing, using the PLS-SEM model. This is followed by a discussion of the obtained results and a summary of the research in the conclusion, as well as suggestions on how to adequately implement managerial support with the aim of reducing the level of stress among highly educated employees who use flexible work arrangements in Serbia.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. MANAGERIAL SUPPORT

Managerial support represents employees' perception of the way their managers, more precisely, superiors take care of their well-being, provide necessary resources for work, appreciate their contribution to work, have empathy for them, direct them (leadership), etc. for the efficient performance of work activities that are assigned and aligned with the organization's goals (Nabawanuka & Ekmekcioglu, 2022; Yunus et al., 2023; Aldabbas & Bettayeb, 2024). Managerial support includes formal and informal forms of help, such as emotional support, counseling, instrumental help, giving feedback as well as understanding their individual needs (Lauzier-Jobin & Houle, 2022). Modern organizations consider managerial support as a key element that focuses on the relationship between managers and employees, which is very important for creating the best possible organizational performance (Sepúlveda-Rivillas, Alegre & Oltra, 2022; Abbas & Kumari, 2023).

Emotional support is a key support when looking at managerial support because it is reflected through empathy, the willingness of the manager to listen to the problems and discussions of the employee (Andersen, Pihl-Thingvad & Andersen, 2025). This kind of support is very important in the psychological aspect and therefore in the context of our research that deals with the impact on reducing job stress among employees who use different forms of flexible work arrangements. On the other hand, there is also instrumental support related to providing adequate resources, determining realistic deadlines, giving clear instructions and helping to solve work problems. If we look at the concept of flexible work arrangements, instrumental support has a great contribution because due to physical absence, there may be difficult communication and coordination of work, and managers are the ones who provide clear expectations, are available for consultation and directly contribute to reducing workload and stress.

1.2. JOB STRESS

Job stress refers to employees' physiological and psychological reactions to work demands that are perceived as excessive or misaligned with their abilities and available resources (Jamal, Yaseen & Khalid, 2022). It commonly emerges when job expectations exceed an individual's capacity to cope or when work demands interfere with personal life, potentially leading to adverse outcomes if not adequately managed.

Previous studies indicate that job stress is influenced by multiple organizational, interpersonal, and individual factors. Excessive workload, time pressure, limited autonomy, and ambiguous job roles represent major organizational stressors, while conflicts with supervisors or colleagues, unfair treatment, and insufficient social support further intensify stress experiences (Jeyaraj & Ramamoorthy, 2013; Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagińska, 2021).

The effects of job stress extend beyond individual well-being and have serious organizational implications. Prolonged exposure to stress is associated with physical health problems and psychological outcomes such as burnout and reduced motivation, while at the organizational level it contributes to absenteeism, lower commitment, and increased turnover, ultimately impairing overall performance (Jain et al., 2025; Sharma et al., 2021).

To address job stress, organizations increasingly emphasize preventive measures, including flexible work arrangements, clearer role expectations, and stronger managerial support. Such practices help employees better balance work and personal demands and foster a supportive work environment that promotes well-being and sustainable performance (Shifrin & Michel, 2022; Monteiro & Joseph, 2023). Consequently, effective stress management remains a critical concern for achieving long-term organizational effectiveness (Berger & Czakert, 2025).

1.3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MANAGERIAL SUPPORT AND JOB STRESS

A search of scientific works on the influence of managerial support on stress at work found that managerial support plays a key role in shaping the overall well-being of employees (Al, 2023). Jolly et al. (2021) point out that managerial support (both instrumental and emotional support) has a significant role in reducing stress among employees, because it provides them with the necessary resources first of all, then guidelines and understanding for effective management of work requirements. Emotional support, such as empathy

and active listening by managers, has a significant contribution to creating a sense of psychological security, which leads to a reduction in feelings of isolation and anxiety. Instrumental support, which includes clear instructions, training and access to resources, enables employees to more effectively manage workloads and overcome challenges.

Kim & Jung (2022) determined that employees who perceive a high level of managerial support experience a lower level of stress at work, because they cope with work pressures more easily. While on the other hand, if there is no managerial support, a higher level of stress occurs because there are work pressures, additional negative effects are created that disrupt work. Consequently, it is necessary for managers to constantly provide clear guidelines and regular feedback for their employees, as this significantly reduces uncertainty at work, thus relieving stress. Flexible work arrangements have proven to be an effective mechanism for reducing stress associated with workload and work-life balance (Gašić, Jevtić, Berber & Aleksić, 2025). Regular recognition and acknowledgment of employees' contributions further reduces stress resulting from feelings of injustice or insecurity (Kuděj et al., 2023). Tran et al. (2023) in their research confirm the positive effects of managerial support on reducing stress at work, emphasizing its role in reducing conflict between work and family, as well as in increasing job satisfaction. Based on the results highlighted by the authors, the following research hypothesis has been proposed:

H: Managerial support have a positive effect on reducing job stress among highly educated employees in Serbia.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. SURVEY

After reviewing the standardized survey, an electronic version was created, which consisted of three parts.

The first part focused on control questions regarding gender and education level. The second part refers to the independent variable "Managerial support" and consists of 4 statements taken from the work of the author Arora (2022).

The third part contained six statements measuring the dependent variable, Job Stress, taken from Lait & Wallace (2002). Respondents answered the statements using a Likert scale from 1 to 5.

2.2. SAMPLE

To collect the sample, an electronic version of the survey was created with the aim of reaching as

many respondents as possible who use flexible work arrangements. Data were collected in multiple waves, the first in May 2023, the second in February 2024, and the third in July 2024, which contributed to the higher accuracy of the data.

Table 1. Sample (448)

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Female	251	56
	Male	197	44
Age	Under 25	81	18
	25–34	192	43
	35–44	175	39
Education	Bachelor’s degree	251	56
	Master’s degree	157	35
	Ph.D.	40	9

Source: Authors of research

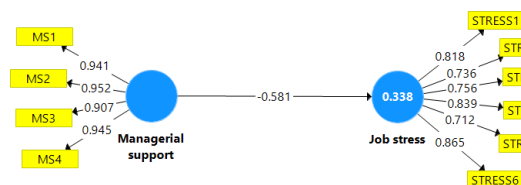
3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis of the effects that managerial support cause on job stress was conducted using the SmartPLS 3 software, applying the PLS-SEM.

A model was created in the software, where the dependent variable, managerial support, was formed as a first-order reflective construct, and job stress is dependent variable, also first-order reflective construct, which is reflected through its indicators.

By analyzing the outer loadings, it was determined that all observed indicators met the recommended criterion (>0.708) in accordance with Hair et al. (2021, p. 77). The results of the path analysis are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Results of path analysis



Source: Authors of research

The next step focuses on the analysis of model reliability, where the values of Cronbach’s α (criterion >0.7 according to Dakduk, Santalla-Banderali & Van Der Woude, 2018).

Composite Reliability (criterion >0.7 according to Hair et al. (2017)), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (criterion >0.5 according to Dash & Paul (2021)) are presented. See Table 2.

Table 2. Assessment of the reliability of the measurement model (internal consistency and convergent validity)

	Cronbach's α	Com. Reli.	AVE
Job stress	0.879	0.908	0.624
Managerial support	0.953	0.966	0.877

Source: Authors of research

Based on the conducted analysis, it can be concluded that all values align with the defined criteria.

The next step focuses on the analysis of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF).

Based on the obtained results, the criterion has been met, as all values are below 10 (Kalnins & Praitis Hill, 2025).

Table 3. Results of Variance inflation factor

VIF	
MS1	4.949
MS2	6.156
MS3	3.484
MS4	5.453
STRESS1	2.241
STRESS2	1.621
STRESS3	2.085
STRESS4	2.384
STRESS5	2.082
STRESS6	2.664

Source: Authors of research

Next step refers to results of HTMT criterion, one of the strictest criteria in analysis (belong to discriminant validity). The values of HTMT need to be below 0.9 (Gašić & Berber, 2021).

Table 4. Results of HTMT criterion

	Job stress	Managerial support
Job stress		
Managerial support	0.618	

Source: Authors of research

Next step is testing the structural model using bootstrapping analysis.

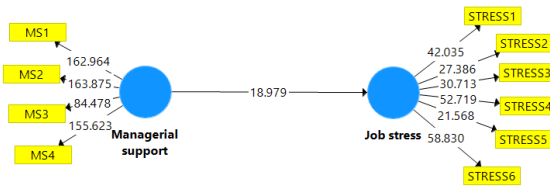
Table 5. Results of direct effect managerial support on job stress

	β	St. Dev.	T St.	p
Managerial support -> Job stress	-0.581	0.031	18.979	0

Source: Authors of research

The results shown in Table 5 indicate a statistically significant negative relationship between managerial support and job stress ($\beta = -0.581$; $T = 18.979$; $p = 0.000$). These relationships are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Results of bootstrapping analysis



Source: Authors of research

Based on the research results on a sample of 448 highly educated employees, the research hypothesis H can be confirmed: Managerial support have a positive effect on reducing job stress among highly educated employees in Serbia.

CONCLUSION

The research was conducted on a sample of 448 highly educated employees in Serbia with the aim of determining the impact of managerial support on job stress among employees who use flexible work arrangements. By reviewing the theoretical and empirical knowledge so far, it was determined that managerial support has a significant impact on reducing job stress in different ways and that every organization should nurture a culture that develops managerial support, because in addition to reducing stress, adequate support also has other significant benefits such as a positive impact on the working attitudes and behaviors of employees such as work engagement, job satisfaction, commitment, reduced intention to leave employees, etc. Although flexible work arrangements such as remote, flexi-time, hybrid model, etc. have a great potential to influence WLB, their effectiveness is also reflected in the reduction of stress among employees, and it also largely depends on the quality of support that such employees have directly from their managers, superiors.

With highly educated employees, who are more exposed to high cognitive demands, have greater responsibility at work, a high level of performance is expected, flexible work arrangements can paradoxically lead to an additional level of stress at work if they are not accompanied by adequate managerial support. In such situations, if there is a lack of clear guidelines, expectations, emotional and work support as well as adequate feedback, there is isolation, overload and a high level of

uncertainty. Accordingly, if managers actively provide instrumental and socio-emotional support, flexible work arrangements can be a very effective way to alleviate work stress and preserve employee well-being.

Based on the findings, certain key recommendations can be defined for organizations that strive to build a sustainable and supportive work environment. *Development of managerial competencies* for leading in a flexible work environment (organizations should continuously invest in additional skills of managers in terms of developing communication skills, performance management in remote and hybrid work conditions, providing feedback, conflict resolution, etc.). The second recommendation is aimed at the *institutionalization of a culture of support*, where managerial support should not solely depend on the personal characteristics of an individual manager, but should be integrated within the organizational culture itself through formal policies, standards of behavior and the evaluation system of managerial work. The third proposal is aimed at *establishing clear expectations and transparent communication*, where it is necessary to pay special attention to the definition of goals, deadlines, criteria, etc. with the aim of reducing the level of uncertainty and cognitive pressure. The fourth proposal is aimed at *supporting the mental health and well-being* of employees, where organizations should develop programs aimed at preventing stress and preserving mental health, so that managers have an active role in recognizing early signs of overload and burnout. The fifth recommendation would be aimed at *evaluating managers by applying an adequate reward and promotion system* in case they prove to be good managers who support their employees, and this is reflected in the performance of both employees and the organization. Also, one of the proposals is *encouraging autonomy with available support*, especially for highly educated employees, because it is necessary to enable such employees to be able to decide on something and to be listened to, but of course with a clearly defined and accessible manager as a source of advice, help and support.

Proposals for future research are aimed at including more variables, such as work engagement, commitment, innovative work behavior, employee performance, etc. Also a larger number of respondents and perhaps additionally include certain questions about the importance of managerial support.

Limitations refer to the limited data on theoretical and empirical knowledge about the influence of managerial support on job stress as well as on

other variables, both in Serbia and in the world. However, on the other hand, this is one very important advantage that this research brings.

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