Job Performance: Exploring The Role of Work Stress and Psychological Resilience among Selected Professionals in Lagos.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationships between work stress, psychological resilience, and job performance among selected professionals in consulting firms in Lagos. A total of 150 professionals from Deloitte, EY, KPMG, and PwC participated in the study, comprising 93 males and 56 females. Quantitative data were gathered via self-report questionnaires, including the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10), and an adapted 12-item job performance scale. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse demographic data, while Pearson correlation, linear regression, moderation analysis, mediation analysis, and independent-samples t-test were used to test the research hypotheses. Results showed that work stress had a significant negative relationship with both job performance and psychological resilience, while psychological resilience had a significant positive relationship with job performance. Psychological resilience did not significantly moderate the work stress-job performance relationship; however, it significantly and partially mediated this relationship, indicating that work stress impairs performance both directly and indirectly through the erosion of resilience. A significant difference in job performance based on gender was also found, with male professionals reporting higher job performance than their female counterparts. To this end, the researcher recommended that Big Four consulting firms in Nigeria should invest in structured resilience development programmes alongside systemic interventions that address organisational sources of stress, moving beyond individual-centric approaches. Further studies should be carried out using larger samples and should examine additional demographic variables such as firm culture and career progression pathways, as potential sources of variation in stress and performance outcomes.

Keywords: Work Stress, Psychological Resilience, Job Performance

1.INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

High workloads, tight deadlines, and continuous pressure to perform at a high level are major issues that professionals at consulting firms face. These issues lead to work-related stress, which can negatively impact psychological well-being and job performance. Psychological resilience, the ability to adapt, recover, and thrive under stress can reduce the effects of stress on an individual.

By examining the relationship between work stress, psychological resilience, and job performance, data-driven insights can be used to develop strategies tailored to employee well-being, training, and subsequent policies. This research is relevant in Nigeria, where mental health is still an emerging topic and studies are still limited The consulting services industry has long been recognised as one of the most demanding professional environments, characterised by intense workloads, time pressures, complex client expectations, and an increasing reliance on algorithmic performance control (Kellogg et al., 2020). Globally, professionals within the "Big 4" consulting services firms, namely Deloitte, KPMG, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), and Ernst & Young (EY), operate under conditions that expose them to increasing work stress. These four organisations rely heavily on human capital to deliver audit, tax, advisory and assurance services to clients across various sectors. Hence, the quality of employee performance directly influences client satisfaction, organisational reputation, and revenue

In Nigeria, there are even more challenges associated with the work environment due to additional situational stressors such as unstable economic conditions, regulatory volatility, limited infrastructure, tight project timelines, and other pressures associated with operating in a developing economy are all factors that could significantly impact human performance (Akinwale et al 2025). Professionals in the Big 4 firms are usually required to manage multiple client engagements at the same time, meet tight deadlines, and adapt to rapidly changing market requirements. These conditions significantly increase the likelihood of work-related stress.

The World Health Organisation has recognised work stress as a major occupational health challenge resulting from poor work design and organisational practices. It is defined as a psychological and physiological response that occurs when job demands exceed an individual's capacity to cope (Leka & Cox, 2003). High levels of work stress have been linked to burnout, reduced motivation, emotional fatigue, and decreased job performance. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). For consulting firms, declining employee performance translates into reduced productivity, errors in deliverables, low levels of client trust, an increased attrition rate, and a loss of competitive advantage.

Despite the importance of resilience and stress management, research focusing specifically on the Nigerian consulting industry remains limited. While international studies provide insights into stress and performance dynamics, the unique socio-economic and cultural context of Nigeria highlights the need for localized research. The Big 4 firms in Nigeria face various challenges, such as high turnover among young employees, burnout complaints, mental health concerns, and increasing pressure for quality deliverables. This research highlights the need to examine how work stress and resilience interact to influence job performance among professionals in these firms. This research therefore, seeks to investigate work stress, psychological resilience, and job performance among selected professionals in consulting firms in Lagos, specifically the Big 4 firms, addressing a significant empirical and practical gap

Current Study

The professional services industry is widely recognised as one of the most demanding work environments in the world. A global survey conducted by the McKinsey Health Institute between February and April 2022, involving nearly 15,000 employees and 1,000 HR decision-makers across 15 countries, found that about one in four employees reported symptoms of burnout. The study also identified toxic workplace behaviour, such as work environments where employees feel undervalued or unsafe, as the strongest predictor of burnout and intention to leave, accounting for more than 60% of negative employee outcomes. These findings highlight a growing global challenge in workplace well-being, particularly in high-pressure professional environments such as consulting.

Similarly, Gallup's 2023 State of the Global Workplace report found that 44% of employees worldwide reported experiencing significant stress the previous day. This marked the second consecutive year in which global workplace stress reached record levels, continuing a trend that has been rising for over a decade. Importantly, the report also included experiences from Nigerian workers, showing that work-related stress affects employees across different regions of the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Nigeria, the pressures associated with demanding professional roles are further intensified by economic and infrastructural challenges. Factors such as unreliable power supply, heavy traffic in major cities like Lagos, currency fluctuations, and changing regulatory requirements create additional pressures for professionals. As a result, employees are often expected to meet global professional standards while also dealing with local operational challenges.

Empirical studies within Nigeria support the presence of work-related stress in professional environments. For example, Odunlami and Oludipe (2021) examined work stress and employee performance among banking professionals in Lagos and Ogun States and found a significant negative relationship between work stress and employee performance. The study identified workload, long working hours, and poor work–life balance as major sources of stress. Also, Aderibigbe, Nwokolo, and Solomon (2020), in a study involving 1,532 Nigerian graduate employees across different sectors, found that work stress was common and increased with years of work experience.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the levels of work stress, psychological resilience, and job performance among selected consulting professionals in Lagos, specifically the Big 4 firms. The study also investigates the relationships among these variables and examines whether psychological resilience moderates and mediates the relationship between work stress and job performance in this professional context.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between work stress, psychological resilience, and job performance among selected professionals in consulting firms in Lagos. The specific objectives are to:

Examine the relationship between work stress and job performance.

Assess the relationship between psychological resilience and job performance.

Determine the relationship between work stress and psychological resilience.

Investigate whether psychological resilience moderates the relationship between work stress and job performance.

Examine whether psychological resilience mediates the relationship between work stress and job performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, the consulting profession is easily recognised as one of the most demanding careers, characterised by prolonged working hours, high client expectations, complex problem-solving demands, tight timelines, and strong performance expectations. In Nigeria, these common work pressures are worsened by economic instability, lack of infrastructure, uncertain regulatory landscape, and the socio-political complexities of operating in a developing economy. These contextual factors create a uniquely challenging work environment for professionals with the Big 4 firms (Deloitte, PwC, KPMG & EY) who are expected to deliver world-class services like their counterparts in developed societies while navigating distinct Nigerian realities.

Understanding how work stress operates within this setting, and how psychological resilience functions as a buffer or coping mechanism in the stress-performance relationship, is both significant in theory and practically important. This literature review examines organisational psychology, occupational health, management science, and related disciplines to develop a comprehensive conceptual and empirical foundation for the study.

The Concept of Work Stress

Work stress is defined as the harmful emotional and physical responses that occur when there is a mismatch between job demands and the employee's capabilities, resources, or needs (Leka & Cox, 2018). Stress arises when individuals perceive work requirements as challenging, overwhelming, or exceeding their capacity to cope. The common sources of work stress include excessive workload, time pressure and long working hours, difficult clients, job insecurity and career uncertainty, technological demands, and performance evaluation pressure (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Selye (1956) differentiated between eustress, which is the positive stress that motivates performance, and distress, the negative stress that impairs functioning. While eustress may improve alertness and performance for a short period, chronic distress has well-documented long-lasting adverse effects on physical health, mental well-being, and professional effectiveness.

In the consulting industry, work stress is increased by multiple concurrent projects, billable hour targets, utilization rates, and tight deadlines. The Big 4 professionals also face reputational pressure to maintain global standards of excellence.

The Concept of Psychological Resilience

This refers to the ability to adapt successfully, recover from adversity and trauma, and maintain functioning under pressure (Southwick et al., 2014). It involves emotional strength, cognitive flexibility, social support, and effective coping strategies. Resilience is not just innate; it can also be developed through training, learning, and supportive environments. The key components of psychological resilience include: Emotional Regulation, Optimism and Positive Appraisal, Problem-Solving Ability, Self-efficacy and Confidence, Social Support Systems and Cognitive Flexibility

Psychological resilience does not eliminate stress; it enables individuals to persevere under pressure and recover effectively. Resilient employees are more likely to remain engaged, creative, and productive (Robertson et al., 2015). In consulting firms, resilience is linked to sustained performance, creativity, and positive client engagement. It is vital because work cycles are unpredictable, deadlines are tight, and expectations are high. In organisational setting, the key dimensions of resilience that are relevant include emotional regulation, use of social support, self-efficacy, positive coping strategies, and the ability to create meaning in the face of work-related challenges.

The Concept of Job Performance

Job Performance refers to the behaviours and outcomes that contribute to the goals and objectives of an organization (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015). It comprises three parts: Task performance: this refers to the execution of core duties and responsibilities. Contextual performance: this refers to the work behaviour that supports the psychological and social environment of the organisation, even though it is not part of the employee's formal job description. It includes teamwork, showing initiative, and organizational citizenship. Adaptive performance: This refers to flexibility and responsiveness to change.

In consulting firms, job performance may also include client satisfaction, quality of deliverables, billable hours, timeliness, teamwork efficiency, and problem-solving ability. Cognitive overload or emotional exhaustion resulting from work stress may reduce performance. However, psychological resilience sustains performance by helping employees remain engaged and productive under pressure.

Theoretical Review

This section reviews theoretical perspectives that address the mechanisms through which work stress influences job performance and the role of psychological resilience in this relationship. The theories examined have been taken from organisational psychology, occupational health, and management science, and collectively provide the research foundation for this study.

The Conservation of Resources Theory

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory was proposed by Steven Hobfoll in 1989, and offers a motivational structure for understanding stress, stating that individuals are basically driven to acquire, retain, protect, and nurture resources, these resources are defined broadly as objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies that individuals value or that serve as means to achieving other valued results. (Hobfoll, 1989).

The COR Theory explains that psychological stress happens under three conditions: when resources are threatened with loss, when resources are actually lost or when individuals invest significant resources and fail to gain expected results. In consulting, resources include professional knowledge and skills, time, autonomy, social support from colleagues and supervisors, physical energy, and career advancement opportunities. When the demanding nature of consulting work threatens or depletes these resources without sufficient replacement, stress occurs.

Hobfoll (2001) later described the 'loss spiral' concept, whereby initial loss of resources increases the susceptibility of individuals to more losses, leading to a progressive decline of wellbeing and performance. Alternatively, gains in resources, whether through skill development, organisational support, mentorships, or personal psychological development, create 'gain spirals' that protect against stress and enhance performance capacity. This two-directional dynamic is very relevant to understanding the role of psychological resilience as a personal resource that can interrupt loss spirals and initiate gain spirals among Big 4 professionals in Nigeria.

3. METHOD

This chapter describes the methods used to conduct the study on work stress, psychological resilience, and job performance among selected professionals in consulting firms in Lagos. The chapter presents the research setting, population and sampling procedures, research design, research instruments, procedure for data collection, operational definition of variables, validity and reliability of the research instrument, and methods used for analysing the data.

Research Setting

The study was conducted within the Nigerian operations of the major global professional services firms commonly referred to as the Big 4: Deloitte, PwC, EY, and KPMG.

These organisations provide a comprehensive range of professional services including audit and assurance, tax advisory, risk advisory, people advisory, technology advisory and financial advisory. The work environment in these firms is typically characterised by demanding workloads, strict deadlines, high client expectations, and long working hours. Such conditions make these firms a particularly important context for examining work stress, psychological resilience, and job performance as professionals routinely encounter high-demand situations that are theoretically linked to stress and performance outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hobfoll, 1989).

The study primarily targeted professionals associated with the Nigerian operations of these firms, with Lagos serving as the natural focal point given that it hosts the largest concentration of the Big 4 professionals in the country and is the commercial and financial centre of Nigeria. While recruitment was not restricted by geographic location within Nigeria, the sample is assumed to be predominantly Lagos-representative given the significant concentration of the Big 4 operations and workforce in the city. This provided access to a diverse and representative sample of consulting professionals operating across various service lines and organisational levels.

Population/ Sample and Sampling Procedures

The target population for this study comprised professionals either currently employed by or having departed from any of the Big 4 consulting firms in Nigeria within the preceding two years. This population included individuals ranging from Entry Level to Director/Partner across all service lines. The inclusion of recently exited professionals was deliberate, as they retain current and relevant insights into the Big 4 work environment and can provide valid perspectives on levels of work stress, psychological resilience, and job performance experienced in such settings.

Given the confidential and proprietary nature of employee records within these organisations, a comprehensive sampling frame was not available. Accordingly, a non-probability sampling approach was adopted, with purposive sampling serving as the primary recruitment strategy. This involved targeting individuals who explicitly met the study's eligibility criteria, namely, current or recent employment within the preceding 24 months at a Big 4 firm in Nigeria, ensuring that all participants possessed direct and recent experience critical to the research objectives.

Recruitment was facilitated through LinkedIn, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp. For PwC, EY, and KPMG professionals, the researcher sent over 400 direct LinkedIn connection requests to identified current or recent Big 4 employees in Nigeria, and upon connection, personally invited eligible professionals to participate in the survey. A small number of PwC and EY professionals within the researcher's existing personal contacts were also reached directly via WhatsApp. For Deloitte, where the researcher is employed, recruitment was conducted through multiple channels: Microsoft Teams communications to colleagues within the firm, WhatsApp messages to Deloitte professionals within the researcher's personal contacts, and LinkedIn outreach to Deloitte professionals outside the researcher's immediate network who were identified and connected with through the same LinkedIn recruitment process used for the other three firms.

A minimum sample size of 150 valid responses was targeted, considered adequate for the planned regression-based analyses and moderation and mediation models, consistent with recommendations by Hair et al. (2010) and Green (1991). To mitigate potential non-response and incomplete questionnaires, approximately 450 survey invitations were distributed. A total of 160 responses were initially received. After excluding 6 responses that failed the embedded attention check and setting aside 4 responses received after data analysis had commenced, a final dataset of 150 valid responses was retained for analysis.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

The cross-sectional design involved collecting data from all respondents at a single point in time, facilitating the examination of relationships among variables across a diverse sample without the resource requirements typically associated with longitudinal observation. This methodological choice is consistent with prevailing approaches in occupational stress and resilience research (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Robertson et al., 2015) and was appropriate for addressing the research questions and hypotheses of the current study.

Section A: Demographic Information

This section collected background information about respondents across thirteen variables including: employment status (current or exited within the last two years), firm affiliation, primary service line, work orientation (client-facing, mixed, or internal-facing), grade level, gender, age group, highest academic qualification, professional qualification status, years of professional experience, self-rated role demands, included as an additional indicator of chronic work demands, to complement the PSS-10, which measures stress over the past month.

Section B: Work Stress

Work stress was measured using the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) originally developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) and adapted for an occupational context. Items were contextualised to reflect occupational stressors, and respondents indicated the frequency of experiencing specific stress-related thoughts or feelings within their work environment on a five-point Likert scale ranging

from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Often). Four items (4, 5, 7, and 8) were positively worded and were reverse scored before analysis. Total scores ranged from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating greater perceived work stress.

Section C: Psychological Resilience

Psychological resilience was measured using the 10-item Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10) as validated by Campbell-Sills and Stein (2007). The CD-RISC-10 evaluates an individual's capacity to adapt to change, cope with stress, and maintain functional effectiveness under adversity. Items were contextualised to reflect work-related experiences, and responses were recorded on a five-point scale from 1 (Not true at all) to 5 (True nearly all the time). Total scores ranged from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating greater resilience.

Section D: Job Performance

Job performance was measured using a 12-item self-report scale adapted from Williams and Anderson (1991), guided by the task and contextual performance framework established by Borman and Motowidlo (1993). Six items measured task performance, referring to how effectively employees perform their core job duties, and six items measured contextual performance, referring to behaviours that support the organisational environment, such as cooperation, teamwork, and initiative. Items were phrased in the past tense to ensure a consistent frame of reference for both currently employed and recently exited respondents. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating superior self-reported performance.

Procedure

The survey questionnaire was disseminated electronically through LinkedIn direct messaging, WhatsApp messages, and Microsoft Teams communications. Each invitation included a concise participant information statement outlining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, anonymity assurances, and an estimated completion time of 5 to 7 minutes. Completion of the survey was taken to constitute informed consent.

Data collection commenced in March 2026 and spanned approximately seven weeks. Periodic reminder messages were sent to encourage participation and optimise response rates. To ensure data quality, an embedded attention check item was incorporated into Section A. Respondents who failed this check (n = 6) were excluded from analysis. Four additional responses received after data analysis had commenced were also not included. The final cleaned dataset comprised 150 valid responses from the total of 160 responses that were initially received.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

All statistical analyses were conducted using JASP statistical software version 0.96.0. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were computed for all scales prior to hypothesis testing to assess internal consistency. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and observed ranges, were computed for all scale variables to provide an overview of the prevailing levels of work stress, psychological resilience, and job performance within the sample.

Moderation analysis was performed using the Classical Process Model (Hayes configuration, Model 1) in JASP with 5,000 bootstrap resamples to address Research Question 4 and test Hypothesis 4. Work stress and psychological resilience were mean-centred prior to this analysis. Mediation analysis was conducted using the SEM-based Mediation Analysis module in JASP with 5,000 bootstrap resamples to address Research Question 5 and test Hypothesis 5. An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in job performance, addressing Research Question 6 and testing Hypothesis 6.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical principles for research involving human participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw from the survey at any point without penalty. Informed consent was obtained electronically: the survey opened with a participant information statement outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the approximate completion time, and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Completion and submission of the survey was taken to constitute informed consent.

6. RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the empirical investigation into work stress, psychological resilience, and job performance among professionals in the Big 4 consulting firms in Nigeria. The results are structured to first present the descriptive statistics, followed by reliability statistics, and inferential analyses testing the six hypotheses formulated for the study. Each hypothesis is presented with its corresponding statistical result and a decision on whether it is accepted or rejected.

Inferential Statistics

This section presents the results of the hypotheses tested in the study. The study tested six hypotheses. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 with simple linear regression providing additional support; the Classical Process Model (Hayes configuration) was used to test Hypothesis 4; SEM-based mediation analysis was used to test Hypothesis 5; and an independent samples t-test was used to test Hypothesis 6. All analyses were conducted using JASP version 0.96.0.

Correlation and Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 1: Work stress will have a significant negative relationship with job performance.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation

		1	2
	Work Stress	1	
	Job Performance	-.465**	1

*Note: ** p < .001 (two-tailed). N = 150*

Results showed a significant negative correlation between work stress and job performance, r = -.465 (p < .001). Therefore, Hypothesis 1, which states that work stress will have a significant negative relationship with job performance, is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological resilience will have a significant positive relationship with job performance.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation

		1	2
	Psychological Resilience	1	
	Job Performance	-.516**	1

*Note: ** p < .001 (two-tailed). N = 150*

Results showed a significant positive correlation between psychological resilience and job performance, r = .516 (p < .001). Therefore, Hypothesis 2, which states that psychological resilience will have a significant positive relationship with job performance, is **accepted**.

Hypothesis 3: Work stress will have a significant negative relationship with psychological resilience.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Statistics between Work Stress and Psychological Resilience

		1	2
	Work Stress	1	-.515**
	Psychological Resilience	-.515**	1

Note: ** p < .001 (two-tailed). N = 150

Results showed a significant negative correlation between work stress and psychological resilience, r = −.515 (p < .001). Therefore, Hypothesis 3, which states that work stress will have a significant negative relationship with psychological resilience, is accepted.

Hypothesis 4: Psychological resilience will significantly moderate the relationship between work stress and job performance, such that the negative impact of work stress on performance will be weaker for professionals with higher levels of resilience.

Table 8: Moderation Analysis for Psychological Resilience as Moderator of the Work Stress-Job Performance Relationship

	B	SE	z	p	95% CI [LL, UL]
Work Stress (WS_c)	-.019	.006	-3.444	< .001	[-.030, -.008]
Psychological Resilience (PR_c)	.030	.006	4.798	< .001	[.018, .043]
WS_c X PR_c (Interaction)	-.000	.001	-.158	.875	[-.002, .001]
Model: R^2 = .321			n = 150		Bootstrap CI based on 5,000 resamples

Note: WS_c and PR_c are mean-centred variables. LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

Results showed that the interaction term between work stress and psychological resilience was not significant, B = -.000 (p = .875), 95% CI [-.002, .001]. Therefore, Hypothesis 4, which states that psychological resilience will significantly moderate the relationship between work stress and job performance, is rejected.

Hypothesis 5: Psychological resilience will significantly mediate the relationship between work stress and job performance.

Table 9: Mediation Analysis for Psychological Resilience as Mediator of the Work Stress-Job Performance Relationship

	B	SE	z	p	95% CI [LL, UL]
Path a: Work Stress → Psychological Resilience	-.450	.059	-7.676	< .001	[-.565, -.334]
Path b: Psychological Resilience → Job Performance	.030	.007	4.200	< .001	[.016, .044]
Direct effect (c'): Work Stress → Job Performance	-.019	.006	-3.438	< .001	[-.030, -.008]
Indirect effect (a×b): Work Stress → PR → JP	-.014	.003	-4.018	< .001	[-.021, -.007]
Total effect (c): Work Stress → Job Performance	-.033	.005	-6.438	< .001	[-.042, -.022]

Note: Bootstrap CI based on 4,997 successful resamples of 5,000. PR = Psychological Resilience; JP = Job Performance.

Results showed a significant indirect effect of work stress on job performance through psychological resilience, B = -.014 (p < .001), 95% CI [-.021, -.007], with the confidence interval excluding zero. The direct effect remained significant, c' = -.019 (p < .001), indicating partial mediation. Therefore, Hypothesis 5, which states that psychological resilience will significantly mediate the relationship between work stress and job performance, is accepted.

7. DISCUSSION

Before discussing the relationships that have been hypothesised, it is useful to briefly situate the general profile observed in the sample. Descriptive findings indicated moderate levels of perceived work stress, moderately high psychological resilience, and high overall job performance, with task performance rated marginally higher than contextual performance. The moderate stress level, despite the demanding nature of Big 4 work, may reflect a professional adaptation phenomenon, a normalization of high-demand conditions among professionals who have self-selected into and persisted within one of the most demanding professional environments in Nigeria. This interpretation is consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping, and with Oruh and Dibia's (2020) observation that Nigerian

professionals in high-pressure sectors frequently internalise demanding conditions as normative features of their work environment. The moderately high resilience observed is consistent with the view that professionals who sustain careers in highly competitive environments tend to develop stronger resilience capacities over time, in line with Hobfoll's (2001) resource caravan concept. The high level of professional certification and the predominantly client-facing orientation of the sample may further reflect a proactive, resource-building professional identity that supports resilience development. The marginally higher task performance relative to contextual performance is consistent with the idea that task performance is more directly aligned with the formal metrics by which Big 4 professionals are evaluated and rewarded (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Taken together, this profile suggests a professionally adapted workforce, against which the hypothesis-specific findings discussed below can be interpreted.

Work Stress and Job Performance

Findings from the first hypothesis tested supported that there is a significant negative relationship between work stress and job performance. This shows that as work stress increases, job performance tends to decline. This finding is consistent with extensive literature documenting the detrimental effects of occupational stress on individual productivity. Halbesleben and Bowler (2007) found that emotional exhaustion significantly diminished job performance through its negative effect on motivation, while LePine, Podsakoff, and LePine (2005) showed that hindrance stressors consistently and negatively predicted job performance. Within the Nigerian context, similar findings were reported by Odunlami and Oludipe (2021) and Imbur, Agba, and Iloma (2023) among banking professionals, and the present study extends this pattern to the consulting sector.

This finding is well explained by the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which holds that occupational stressors deplete the personal resources, energy, attention, cognitive capacity, and motivation that employees need for effective performance. As stress increases and these resources diminish, employees have progressively less capacity to sustain effortful performance.

Psychological Resilience and Job Performance

Findings from the second hypothesis tested supported that there is a significant positive relationship between psychological resilience and job performance. This shows that professionals with higher resilience tend to perform better. Resilient individuals are better equipped to navigate challenges, recover from setbacks, and maintain focus, capacities that directly support sustained high-quality performance. This finding aligns with Phina, Patrick, and Nwabuike (2022), who found that emotional resilience significantly predicted employee performance among commercial bank employees in South-East Nigeria. It is also consistent with Youssef and Luthans (2007) and Avey, Reichard, Luthans, and Mhatre (2011), who found resilience-related capacities to be positively associated with performance, satisfaction, and commitment.

The JD-R Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) conceptualises personal resources such as resilience as enabling employees to cope with job demands and maintain performance under pressure. Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory further suggests that the positive states associated with high resilience expand cognitive resources in ways that support sustained performance. The additional variance in job performance explained by resilience, beyond work stress alone, underscores its independent and meaningful contribution to performance outcomes in this context.

Work Stress and Psychological Resilience

Findings from the third hypothesis tested supported that there is a significant negative relationship between work stress and psychological resilience. This shows that as perceived stress increases, resilience resources tend to diminish. This pattern is theoretically central to COR Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which holds that stress depletes personal resources, and resilience as a personal resource is not immune to this process. When individuals are chronically exposed to high-demand conditions, their capacity to adapt, recover, and function effectively is progressively eroded, creating a self-reinforcing cycle in which stress reduces resilience, reduced resilience limits effective stress management, and unmanaged stress further depletes resilience, what Hobfoll (2001) describes as a loss spiral.

This finding has particular relevance for the Nigerian Big 4 context. Oruh and Dibia (2020) highlighted that the high power-distance culture prevalent in Nigerian professional organisations limits employees' ability to challenge or reduce their exposure to stressors, meaning stress accumulates with limited possibility for relief. Under these conditions, the negative relationship between stress and resilience is likely particularly pronounced for junior professionals who have not yet built the experience-based coping resources of their

more senior counterparts.

The Non-Moderation of Resilience

Findings from the fourth hypothesis tested did not support the hypothesis that psychological resilience would moderate the relationship between work stress and job performance. This shows that the negative impact of work stress on performance was similarly experienced regardless of an individual's level of resilience. This is the most theoretically nuanced finding of the study and warrants careful interpretation.

This result does not imply that resilience is unimportant, the strong direct relationships of both stress and resilience with performance clearly establish their independent significance. Rather, it suggests that in the specific context of Big 4 consulting in Nigeria, resilience functions primarily as a direct performance resource rather than as a buffer that weakens the stress-performance relationship at higher resilience levels. In other words, resilient professionals tend to perform better overall, but they are not meaningfully more protected than their less resilient peers from the performance-damaging effects of elevated stress.

Several explanations may account for this finding. The COR perspective on resource depletion (Hobfoll, 1989) suggests that when environmental demands are sufficiently intense and sustained, as they are in Big 4 environments, even highly resilient individuals may lack the resource reserves needed to buffer performance against stress. The intensity of Big 4 occupational demands may simply exceed the buffering capacity of individual resilience. This interpretation finds some support in Robertson, et al (2015) systematic review of workplace resilience training, which found that while resilience training improved performance and wellbeing, its moderating role in the stress-performance relationship was not consistently demonstrated across studies.

Psychological Resilience as a Mediator

Findings from the fifth hypothesis tested supported the hypothesis that psychological resilience significantly mediates the relationship between work stress and job performance, with the direct effect of work stress on job performance remaining significant even after accounting for resilience. This indicates partial rather than full mediation.

This finding reveals an important mechanism through which work stress translates into reduced job performance, by eroding the psychological resilience resources that professionals rely upon to sustain effective performance. Together, the pathways from stress to resilience and from resilience to performance establish a sequential resource-depletion mechanism grounded in COR Theory (Hobfoll, 1989): occupational stress erodes resilience resources, and as those resources diminish, the capacity for sustained high-quality performance is correspondingly reduced.

The partial nature of the mediation further indicates that work stress also damages performance through additional pathways beyond resilience depletion, potentially including cognitive load, motivational depletion, emotional exhaustion, and interpersonal strain, all documented as stress-performance mechanisms in the literature (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). This finding advance prior Nigerian research, where studies such as Odunlami and Oludipe (2021) and Imbur et al. (2023) established the negative stress-performance relationship without explaining the mechanism through which it operates. The present study demonstrates that psychological resilience is a meaningful intervening mechanism, with direct implications for how organisations should respond.

Gender Difference in Job Performance

Findings from the sixth hypothesis tested supported the hypothesis that there is a significant difference in job performance based on gender, with male professionals reporting higher job performance than their female counterparts. This finding warrants careful interpretation. The difference may reflect differential self-assessment tendencies, as research has documented that women tend to rate their own performance more conservatively than men even when objective performance is equivalent (Pulakos et al., 2000). It may also reflect structural inequities within the Big 4 environment, such as differential access to high-visibility assignments, mentoring relationships, or developmental opportunities, that shape the performance experiences and self-perceptions of male and female professionals differently.

This finding contrasts with the lack of significant gender differences observed for work stress and psychological resilience, suggesting that both genders experience broadly similar levels of occupational stress and possess comparable resilience resources in this sample, even as their self-reported performance diverges. Due to the lack of available data on factors such as assignment allocation or appraisal history, the present results cannot confirm the underlying causes of this performance gap.

8. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationships among work stress, psychological resilience, and job performance among selected professionals in consulting firms in Lagos, drawing on the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) as theoretical anchors. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design and a sample of 150 professionals across Deloitte, EY, KPMG, and PwC, the study tested six hypotheses.

The findings confirm that work stress significantly and negatively relates to job performance, that psychological resilience significantly and positively relates to job performance, and that work stress significantly and negatively relates to psychological resilience. The mediation analysis further reveals that resilience partially mediates the stress-performance relationship, occupational stress erodes resilience resources, which in turn reduces capacity for sustained high-quality performance. The moderation hypothesis was not supported, indicating that resilience functions primarily as a direct performance resource rather than a contingent buffer in this context. A significant gender difference in job performance was also found, with male professionals reporting higher performance than their female counterparts.

Taken together, these findings paint a picture of a professionally adapted but stress-affected workforce in which individual resilience is a critical performance resource, yet insufficient alone to neutralise the performance costs of intense occupational demands. The study provides empirical support for the relevance of COR Theory and the JD-R Model in the Nigerian Big 4 context and contributes meaningfully to the underexplored intersection of occupational psychology, professional wellbeing, and organisational performance in Nigeria.

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