Perceived Stress and Performance Appraisal Discomfort: the Moderating Effects of Core Self-Evaluations and Gender

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The study examines the relationships between perceived stress and performance appraisal discomfort with core self-evaluations and gender as moderating variables. It also asks the question to what extent do these variables predict perceived stress. The study is a cross-sectional survey that used structured questionnaires to obtain data from a sample of 300 managers in Gaborone, Botswana. Usable data was obtained from 167 managers. A negative and insignificant association was found between performance appraisal discomfort and perceived stress. Neither core self-evaluations nor gender significantly moderated the relationship between performance appraisal discomfort and perceived stress. Women earned less income and their perceived stress was significantly higher than men's. Also gender, core self-evaluations and then performance appraisal discomfort (in that order of strength) were significant predictors of perceived stress accounting for 12 percent of its variance. The findings also suggest that HR practitioners need to consider individual characteristics more than organizational policy in effective implementation of performance appraisals and stress reduction strategies and as a consequence worker-related interventions may be particularly pertinent. Finally, it presents data for a relatively under-explored area of behavioral research focusing on appraisers' (as opposed to appraisee) discomfort and core self-evaluations as a moderator variable of perceived stress.

Key words: Botswana, core self-evaluations, gender, perceived stress, performance appraisal discomfort

Introduction

The literature on organizationally induced work stress has been well detailed.[1] Stress has been shown to affect employees psychologically,[2] physiologically,[3] and behaviourally.[4] All of these have been associated with lower job performance, with invariably negative outcome and implications for an organization.[5]

While the importance, problems and benefits of performance appraisal/evaluation in organizations have never been lost on both practitioners and researchers of HRM, the appraisal process itself may leave not only the appraisee[6] but also the appraiser[7] unhappy. Indeed, it has been suggested that appraisal may be a cause of stress for the appraiser.[8] This paper therefore examines the relationship between performance appraisal discomfort (PAD) and perceived stress. Both the appraiser's perceived stress and discomfort with performance appraisal are likely to be related to his/her psychological traits. We therefore also examine the moderating effect of core self-evaluations (CSE)—a basic, fundamental appraisal of one's worthiness, effectiveness, and capability as a person,[9] which encompasses self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, neuroticism and locus of control—on the performance appraisal discomfort and perceived stress relationship.

We do not pretend to be able to determine the causal order of the relationship since a cross-sectional study can never truly establish a causal pattern and there is always the risk that making such inference will always be wrong.[10] Since we were unable to identify studies that have investigated these three key psychological concepts simultaneously, we hope this study will commence the process of filling this gap and providing a better understanding of these important linkages. Moreover, HRM and organizational behavior research on these issues have mainly been conducted in the West and East Asia. There is a dearth of research on these topics in Africa. Compared with the West, Africa's level of infrastructure is much poorer, poverty much higher and family sizes often larger. Finally, therefore, this paper seeks to contribute to redressing the lack of empirical research into stress and performance appraisal discomfort in Africa.

Perceived Stress

Researchers on work stress appear to agree that job stress is a serious problem in many organizations globally.[11] The experience of workplace stress has been subject to a large amount of research and interest in the topic shows no sign of waning.[12] Stress has become an issue of contemporary importance with the media mentioning it almost daily and relating stories of stress-related illnesses, family break-up and at its most extreme, work-related suicide.[13] Concern over

the mounting research evidence linking work stress to negative individual and organizational outcomes has prompted an interest in identifying and developing strategies to prevent, control and manage stress and its consequences.[14] These strategies may take a wide variety of forms. In particular, distinctions have been drawn between "work-directed" and "worker-directed" interventions,[15] with some studies suggesting that the latter, individual-focused interventions are both more common and less effective than those which adopt more work-related, preventative interventions.[16]

One work practice which may lead to stress is the annual performance review. This may result in stress of some form because both the appraisee and appraiser are confronted with opportunities, constraints and demands. For the appraisee a good performance review may lead to promotion, greater responsibilities and higher salaries, while a poor review may prevent the individual from being promoted and may result in job loss when extremely poor.[17] The possible stress that may be associated with performance review (an HRM organizational policy issue) is however not limited to the appraisee, which is the more widely acknowledged. There is a strong possibility that the appraiser may also be exposed to potential stress as a result of the review processs.[18].

This study employs the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), which is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful.[19] Items were designed to tap how unpredictable, uncontrollable and overloaded respondents find their lives.[20] The PSS was argued as providing a conceptually clearer and better measure of appraised stress than most other measures.[21]

Performance Appraisal Discomfort

Much as performance appraisal may seem a rather simple and straightforward activity—depending on the participation status of the person making the judgement—experiences in organizations with the process, the format, the appraiser, and the employee being appraised does not authenticate this view. Indeed, Bernardin[22] noted that it is one of, if not the, most problematic area in human resource management. The issues that arise from the appraisers' problems are closely related to the problems of performance appraisal process. The appraiser's criticisms develop because the appraiser has a high level of stress put on him or her to serve in this role and represent the organization.[23] Other performance appraisal problems are well detailed in the literature.[24] Significant however with respect to the appraiser is the fact that appraisers may feel they are placed in conflicting roles by having to be a coach and a judge of subordinate performance.[25]

Villanova, Bernardin, Dahmus and Sims[26] reported some of PAD consequences to include giving more lenient subordinate ratings and being less likely to distinguish among subordinates. Presumably, by giving uniformly high appraisals, the appraisers can avoid the potential consequences of assigning high ratings to some subordinates and low ratings to others.[27] It is also possible that performance appraisers may for the same reasons, and perhaps others, want to avoid potentially aversive situations while enhancing interpersonal relationships by inflating scores of their subordinates especially in situations that would require a face-to-face feedback to the subordinate evaluated.[28]

In sum, giving performance feedback to subordinates, especially if the subordinates have performed poorly, is by no means a palatable activity and thus many supervisors will avoid doing it if they have a choice.[29] The impact of such feedback is thus not restricted to the subordinates and the relationship between the duo, it could also be a source of psychological pressure on some appraisers. This raises the following questions: (a) to what extent is such pressure related to the perceived stress of the performance appraiser? and (b) are some appraisers more likely to feel such discomfort than others?

Core Self-Evaluations

Judge, Locke and Durham[30] introduced the core self-evaluations concept in an effort to provide a useful predictor of job satisfaction and other applied criteria. Core self-evaluations (CSE) is a broad, latent, higher-order trait indicated by four well-established traits in the personality literature: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, neuroticism, and locus of control. The commonality of these traits is that CSE is a basic, fundamental appraisal of one's worthiness, effectiveness, and capability as a person.[31] The importance of these four CSE traits has been well referenced in the literature.[32] In several studies[33] the four core traits have not only been shown to load on a single factor, they also share conceptual similarity[34] all buttressing the argument that they are all indicators of a common core.[35]

Subjective appraisals are influenced by "the deepest (e.g., metaphysical) assumptions people hold about themselves, other people, and the world (p.18)."[36] According to Best, Stapleton and Downey[37] these fundamental beliefs, or core self-evaluations, influence personal appraisals of external events and are particularly suited for occupational stress research. Best, et al.[38] suggested a mediated relationship linking core self-evaluations with job burnout (which they defined as a job-specific type of stress) through perceived organizational constraints. They tested the notion that how individuals fundamentally see themselves is presumed to influence the way in which they interpret and

react to organizational constraints in determination of affective responses, such as stress. They found that core self-evaluations and perceived organizational constraints influence job burnout and satisfaction, suggesting personal and contextual contributions.

In several studies, core self-evaluations has been linked with job satisfaction and job characteristics,[39] job performance,[40] motivation and performance,[41] and stress.[42] However, in many of these studies core self-evaluations has been measured indirectly; and Judge, et al.[43] noted that this is a serious limitation. In the present study the concept was measured directly using the 12-item core self-evaluations scale (CSES).[44]

There have been relatively few studies on the role of personality in performance appraisal, but there is good reason to believe that specific aspects of the appraiser's personality will influence the rating he or she gives.[45] Specifically it is expected that CSE (a personality trait) will moderate the relationship between PAD and perceived stress. Individuals with high CSE scores are expected to experience a different association between PAD and perceived stress from those with low CSE scores.

About Botswana and the Gender Influence

This study is based upon research of appraisers in Botswana—a landlocked country in Southern Africa equal in area to the size of France. Botswana is among those Southern African countries considered politically stable and a potential economic success. It enjoys sound economic growth, and minerals (mainly diamonds) are its main source of revenue. Botswana total population is 1.858 million, adult literacy is 81 percent and GNI per capita US$5,900.[46] Some of Botswana's indicators for females are generally more positive than those of males in many respects. For example, recent UNICEF data[47] indicated a life expectancy of 49 years for the country but females as a percent of males (101); adult literacy rate: females as a per cent of males (103); enrolment and attendance in secondary school ratios: females as a percent of males, enrolled (109); attending (122). The enrolment figures for males however far outnumber those of females in higher levels of education, including vocational training schools.[48] About 47 percent of all households are headed by females.[49]

Academic research and debate in recent years in developing countries have focused on the examination of the characteristics of poverty and life chances, specifically focusing on the gender of the head of the household.[50] Female-headed households, which represent about 61 percent of Botswana's population, have been shown to be poorer than other types of households.[51] Female-headed households have unique physical, emotional, and economic

stresses, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where rich and poor families are still the unit of socio-economic survival of its members.[52] Previous studies note a positive relationship between female-headed households and poverty in urban and rural areas of Botswana.[53] Female-headed households have a higher incidence of severe and increasing poverty than do male-headed households.[54] In addition, Perrett[55] indicate that poverty among female-headed household tend to be higher in urban areas than in rural areas. In a study analysing the socioeconomic characteristics of households and econometrically determining the relationship between income poverty and socioeconomic variables in Botswana, Mmolawa and Kapunda[56] found that households having female heads are more in poverty and have other characteristics that aggravate poverty—less education, large households and more dependents—are more vulnerable to unemployment and have fewer assets. In this study, we therefore anticipate likely gender differences in our data with females possibly reporting higher levels of stress. In recent times, gender issues have been a popular subject of study in Botswana, like most Southern African countries. However, investigating a relatively highly educated and highly paid group as the present study undertakes is unusual, but a useful contribution with the growing number and visibility of women in top and middle level positions in the country.

The primary objectives of this study are to: (1) investigate the specific relationship between PAD and perceived stress; (2) establish the moderating effects of CSE in the association between PAD and perceived stress; (3) examine gender differences in perceived stress especially the moderating effect of gender in the relationship between PAD and perceived stress: do women experience a stronger or weaker association between PAD and perceived stress than men?; and (4) examine the extent to which performance appraisal discomfort, core self-evaluations and gender predict the appraisers' perceived stress. Jose[57] noted that moderating variables in contrast to mediating ones are expected to be relatively stable variable like a demographic variable (e.g. gender) or a personality trait (e.g. core self-evaluations). Finally, understanding these relationships will extend existing knowledge about possible predictors of perceived stress and provide a better understanding of if and how gender and individuals' core self-evaluations moderate the relationship between PAD and perceived stress. This will serve as a useful guide for current thinking about how to intervene to mitigate the incidence of stress in the workplace. The specific hypotheses emerging from the foregoing discourse are enumerated below.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Performance appraisal discomfort (PAD) will be positively related with perceived stress

H2: Females will report higher perceived stress than males

H3: Core self-evaluations (CSE) will moderate the relationship between PAD and perceived stress

H4: Gender will moderate the relationship between PAD and perceived stress

H5: PAD, CSE and gender will collectively predict perceived stress.

The Method

The study is a cross-sectional design and data was collected from a sample of managers across several industries in Botswana.

Participants and Procedure

Data was sought from a sample of 300 public and private sector employees in Gaborone, Botswana's capital city. To encourage a wider level of participation, private and public sector organizations were invited to the survey. In all 18 self-selecting organizations volunteered participation across both sectors. Prior data collection in Botswana[58] has shown this to be a most effective way to obtain the active cooperation and participation in survey researches, since the volunteering organizations cooperates with researchers in eventual data collection. All participating organizations were visited and the human resources department, through a designated officer, served as the collection point for returned questionnaires in sealed envelopes. Of the 300 questionnaires administered 192 were returned and a total of 167 usable questionnaires representing about 55.7 percent response rate, from 18 organizations formed the basis of data analysis.

Participants were largely from the public sector in government departments/ministries, and higher educational institutions representing about 81 percent, while the remaining respondents were from the private sector. About 51.5 percent of respondents were males and about 55 percent were married. Also about 48 percent falls within the age bracket of 31-40 years. About 54 percent have worked for over 10 years, while 27.5 percent have worked for 6-10 years. Most of the respondents were well educated with 70 percent possessing a basic university degree or higher. Over 65 percent earned equivalent of

more than US$1,500 monthly indicating a fairly well paid sample for the African continent. The participants completed a self-report questionnaire which was targeted to each participating organization shortly after the annual performance appraisal period. The questionnaire used was in English as the sample was well educated enabling problems associated with translations to be eliminated. Moreover, Cohen and Williamson[59] reported that the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), one of the scales used in this study, was designed for use in community samples with at least junior high school education.

Measures

Perceived Stress: was measured with the popular 10-item scale of Cohen, et al.[60] and Cohen and Williamson.[61] It was anchored on a five-point scale from 1 representing "Never" to 5 representing "Very Often." A high score on this scale indicates a higher perceived stress. Item examples include: (1) In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? (2) In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? For this scale we obtained an alpha of 0.70 in our sample.

Performance Appraisal Discomfort: this was measured with the 19-item measure of Smith, et al.[62] plus an additional item which they also used and which was deemed relevant and appropriate in this sample—"Telling an employee that you will not tolerate his or her taking extended breaks." All the responses were anchored on a five-point scale with 5 representing "High Discomfort" and 1 representing "No Discomfort at all." A high score on this scale indicates a high degree of performance appraisal discomfort. Smith, et al.[63] reported a coefficient alpha of 0.90, while the coefficient alpha obtained for our study was 0.92. Examples of items include: (1) Talking to an employee about his or her performance on the job (2) Conducting a formal performance appraisal interview with an ineffective employee.

Core Self-evaluations: was measured with the 12-item scale of Judge, et al.[64] Responses were also provided on a five-point scale from 1 representing "Strongly Disagree" to 5 representing "Strongly Agree." Six of the items were reverse scored and Judge, et al.[65] reported reliability coefficients from 0.81 to 0.87. For the sample in this study we obtained a reliability coefficient alpha of 0.78. Examples of items include: (1) I am confident I get the success I deserve in life. (2) Sometimes, I do not feel in control of my work.

Demographic Characteristics: in addition to the main measures, personal and demographic data were also obtained: gender, marital status, education, organization type, age, work experience and total income.

As with similar studies of this nature, the social desirability effect is a major potential limitation for our instrument as respondents may answer questions according to their perception of social desirability.[66] However, given the complete anonymity guaranteed in the research process it is hoped that the effect, if at all, would be minimal.

Analysis and Results

While the main purpose of the study was to examine the relationships between performance appraisal discomfort and perceived stress, it also investigates the moderating effects of CSE and gender in the relationship between the PAD and perceived stress. In addition, we examined significant gender differences in the study variables.

Table 1: T-test of study variables by gender with means and standard deviation

S/N		Male		Female		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance				
	Study Variables	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**F**	**Sig.**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
1	Perceived Stress	3.05	0.49	3.25	0.42	.25	.614	-2.70	148	**.008**
2	PAD	4.13	0.78	4.19	0.71	1.19	.276	-.54	148	.587
3	Core Self-evaluation	3.45	0.59	3.48	0.54	.38	.540	-.35	148	.729
4	Total Income	4.13	1.27	3.62	1.40	1.80	.181	2.32	148	**.022**

N = 167, Male = 79, Female = 71

In order to investigate whether gender differences affect perceived stress, PAD, CSE and income independent t-test were conducted. The result of t-test indicate that perceived stress among women is significantly higher than men [$t(148) = -2.70$, $p < .008$] and women also earn significantly less [$t(148) = 2.32$, $p < .022$] than their male counterpart. To address the gender differences on perceived stress further, an item comparison of the 10-item measure of stress[67] was performed. Females significantly reported higher

stress levels on 3 items: how often they felt unable to control the important things in their life; felt nervous and "stressed"; and angered because of things that were outside of their control. This finding confirms H2 that females will report higher perceived stress than males. This is also in line with reported literature in Botswana.[68]

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among study variables

	Study Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Perceived Stress	3.14	0.46	**(.70)**	-.15	-.24**	.25**	-.01
2.	PAD	4.15	0.73		**(.92)**	.16*	.05	.21**
3.	Core self-evaluations	3.46	0.56			**(.78)**	.00	.32**
4.	Gender	0.49	0.50				-	-.19*
5	Total Income	3.84	1.37					-

Notes: $N = 167$; ** $p < 0.01$; & * $p < 0.05$. Cronbach's Alpha (α) reliability of multiple-item measures in parentheses and bold

The descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the study variables are presented in Table 2. In H1 a positive relationship between PAD and perceived stress was predicted, but the result however revealed a negative but insignificant association between the two variables ($r = -.15$) thus we reject our H1. A significant positive association was found between perceived stress and gender ($r = .25$, $p < 0.01$). Perceived stress showed negative and statistically significant relationship with core self-evaluations ($r = -.24$, $p < 0.01$). The higher the core self-evaluations the lower the perceived stress; which is perhaps indicative of a strong link between how a person sees, views and places value on self (core self-evaluations) as a possible reflection of the state of perceived stress for the individual. A positive and significant relationship was also found between performance appraisal discomfort and core self-evaluations ($r = .16$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that high level of performance appraisal discomfort is associated with high core self-evaluations. Again the relationship between CSE and total income ($r = .21$, $p < 0.01$) was positive and significant. Indeed, income was significantly and positively related to all study variables except gender with which a negative association ($r = -.19$, $p < 0.05$) was found, and perceived stress with which it showed an insignificant association.

To test for the moderating effects of both CSE and gender on the PAD to stress relationships, the methods of Aiken & West[69] and Jose[70] were applied and separate regression analysis performed. In other words, for each of PAD, CSE and gender a new variable was created in which the mean has been sub-

tracted from each value and the interaction term was obtained by multiplying the two main effects.

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis for perceived stress with CSE as moderating variable

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		**B**	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
1	(Constant)	3.14	.04		83.30	.000
	PAD-c	-.11	.05	-.17	-2.14	.034
2	(Constant)	3.15	.04		84.92	.000
	PAD-c	-.09	.05	-.14	-1.75	.083
	CSE-c	-.17	.07	-.21	-2.59	.010
3	(Constant)	3.15	.04		83.60	.000
	PAD-c	-.09	.05	-.14	-1.75	.083
	CSE-c	-.17	.07	-.21	-2.54	.012
	PAD-c X CSE-c (interaction)	.01	.09	.01	.15	.884

Hierarchical multiple regressions was performed (see Table 3) controlling for the moderating effect of CSE (a continuous variable) in the relationship between PAD and perceived stress. Individuals who reported higher levels of PAD also reported lower stress levels. To answer the question whether a new variable would explain a significant new variance in the dependent variable, CSE was entered into the model. The results revealed statistically significant but a negative beta (-.21) for CSE indicating that higher CSE is associated with lower perceived stress which Cohen and Wills[71] refers to as a main effect for CSE. The interaction term however did not yield a significant p-value. Consequently, we can infer that CSE does not significantly moderate the PAD to stress relationship. The continuous moderator chart of the ModGraph programme version 2.0[72] was also applied. Jose[73] noted that "statistical interactions occur when lines are not parallel." For this data, the three lines (high, medium and low CSE) were parallel an indication that there was no statistically significant interaction, thus H3 is rejected.

As hypothesised, hierarchical multiple regressions was also performed (see Table 4) controlling for the moderating effect of gender (a categorical variable) in the relationship between PAD and perceived stress. As in previous finding above, individuals who reported higher levels of PAD also reported

Table 4: Multiple regression analysis for perceived stress with CSE as moderating variable

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		**B**	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
1	(Constant)	3.14	.04		84.97	.000
	PAD-c	-.09	.05	-.15	-1.88	.062
2	(Constant)	3.14	.04		87.61	.000
	PAD-c	-.11	.05	-.16	-2.15	.033
	Gender-c	.23	.07	.25	3.27	.001
3	(Constant)	3.14	.04		87.35	.000
	PAD-c	-.10	.05	-.15	-2.01	.046
	Gender-c	.23	.07	.25	3.25	.001
	PAD-c X Gender-c (interaction)	.10	.10	.08	1.00	.317

lower stress levels but this was not statistically significant. When gender was entered into the regression model, the results revealed a statistically significant and positive beta for gender (.25) indicating that gender is directly associated with stress which is the main effect for gender. The interaction term however did not yield a significant p-value which implies that gender does not significantly moderate the PAD to stress relationship. This nullifies H4. Nevertheless when the categorical moderator chart of the ModGraph programme version 2.0[74] was similarly applied, the slope for women was horizontally straight while the slightly steep slope for males suggests that PAD decreases as stress levels increases. As the emerging lines from the graphs were not parallel Jose[75] noted that this is evidence of some statistical interactions between gender, PAD and perceived stress.

Finally, multiple regressions analysis was performed using the enter method with PAD, CSE and gender entered simultaneously. A significant model emerged with gender, CSE and PAD as predictor variables ($F = 6.85$, (3, 147). Together the three variables account for 12 percent of the variance in perceived stress (see table 5). This confirms the H5. Some of the other demographic variables (age, marital status, education, work experience and organization type) were dropped from the model because they did not add much value to the regression model and secondly we did not have any theoretical literature to support them. Of the emergent predictors of perceived stress the standardised regression coefficient show that gender (= 0.23 and

Table 5: Multiple regression analysis for perceived stress with CSE as moderating variable

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	B	SE	Beta	t
(Constant)	4.05	.28		14.27
Performance Appraisal Discomfort	-.09	.05	-.15	-1.92*
Core Self-evaluation	-.18	.06	-.21	-2.70**
Gender	.21	.07	.23	2.92**
R	.35			
R^2	.12			
Adj. R^2	.10			
R^2 change	.12			
N (df.)	167 (3, 147)			
F	6.85**			

Note: (n = 167), * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

t = 2.92) is the strongest predictor followed by core self-evaluations (β = -0.21 and t = -2.70), and then PAD (β = -0.15 and t = -1.92).

Discussion and Managerial Implications

This study offers opportunity for the empirical investigation of some of the concepts of our interest (perceived stress, performance appraisal discomfort, core self-evaluations and gender) in an area relatively under-investigated in behavioral research especially in the developing world, nay, Africa. Some of the results, albeit tentative, are consistent with studies from the West.

The literature review suggested further that performance appraisals can cause appraisers substantial discomfort and require them to adopt conflicting roles,[76] and may lead to greater levels of stress.[77] However, this study found no significant relationship between performance appraisal discomfort and perceived stress. While appraisers may find the process of performance appraisals problematic, nevertheless, this is not associated with any increase in stress, even in the period immediately following the appraisal (the period during which the survey was administered).

On the relationship between perceived stress and core self-evaluations, it is plausible to expect and indeed argue that the lower the core self-evalua-

tions (a basic, fundamental appraisal of one's worthiness, effectiveness, and capability as a person) the higher would be the perceived stress, as this study demonstrates. An individual who scores high in core self-evaluations is probably someone who is well adjusted, positive, self-confident, efficacious, and believes in his or her own agency and it is this broad core that is manifested in high levels of self-esteem, emotional stability, and general self-efficacy, and an internal locus of control.[78] Individuals with low core self-evaluations, not believing they could achieve much, might readily perceive high levels of stress even with the slightest disequilibrium in their situation or their work environment. For example, any upward targets or policy changes like the introduction of a new performance management strategy may be overwhelming.

Indeed, this study indicates that individuals with higher core self-evaluations experience greater levels of performance appraisal discomfort. This has two key implications. In the first place, it reveals a significant relationship between psychological traits and discomfort with the performance appraisal process. In the second place, it suggests that it is precisely those appraisers who have the greatest core self evaluations who are most likely to experience discomfort. Even though such discomfort is not reflected in greater perceived stress, these employees may require support during the performance appraisal process, if organizationally dysfunctional behaviors[79] are to be avoided.

Investigating the moderating effects of CSE and gender on the relationship between PAD and perceived stress is another major interest of this study. Findings in these respects were largely disappointing. Results indicate that CSE does not significantly moderate the PAD to stress relationship. Albeit with CSE as a moderator there is a significant inverse relationship between PAD and perceived stress. Since CSE is a continuous variable, individuals of different levels of CSE (high, medium and low) did not differ in perceived stress under different levels of PAD. Similarly, gender (a categorical variable) did not significantly moderate the PAD to stress relationship. But do women experience a stronger or weaker association between PAD and perceived stress than men? Although not statistically significant, evidence suggest the contrary, men's PAD seem to decrease as stress levels increase while for women no differences in levels of stress manifest with different PAD levels.

Another purpose of the present study is to investigate to what extent the study variables are predictive of perceived stress. A key finding of the study therefore is the emergence of gender, core self-evaluations and performance appraisal discomfort as important predictor variables of perceived stress. These three variables emerged as significant predictors of perceives stress. However, and in line with the discussion above, gender and CSE emerged as stronger predictors of perceived stress than PAD. It appears that core self-eval-

uations and performance appraisal discomfort are yet new constructs adding to the ever increasing predictors of perceived stress among individuals, which given the pioneering nature of the study in an African sample may require further investigations.

The results imply that demographic and psychological traits (individual characteristics) are more significant predictors of perceived stress than discomfort with performance appraisal (an organizational policy issue). This finding has important implications for HR practitioners seeking to develop stress reduction strategies. In the first place, while some studies have recommended prioritising the removal of organizational sources of stress over individually-focused interventions, this study implies that interventions which develop individuals' core self evaluations may have significant impacts upon their perceptions of stress. Secondly, these findings make clear that interventions to reduce appraisers' perceived stress are not the responsibility of the employing organization alone, and that HR practitioners may need to collaborate with external institutions if appraisers' stress is to be managed effectively. Within the context of Botswana, for example, national policies to ameliorate gender inequality by widening access to higher education and supporting female-headed households may have a significant role to play in reducing the greater stress perceived by female appraisers.

Comparisons of the findings from this African sample to other parts of the world certainly have some impact in our every shrinking world. In the Western world with different work ethics, ethos and values for example, would differences in gender and psychological traits (like CSE) have a more significant impact on perceived stress? Moreover, organizational policy issues (exemplified by performance appraisal discomfort) are more dynamic in the West than in most developing countries and this study have found them less important than individual characteristics in the prediction of perceived stress. This could be potentially different in the USA or the UK. While the generalizability of the present finding is limited, yet global and large multinational companies could find the issues they raise useful as these companies develop and implement human resource policies and practices in their various locations.

In the absence of studies that have investigated these relationships (perceived stress, performance appraisal discomfort, core self-evaluations and gender) simultaneously in the literature, these preliminary findings provide potentially useful insights into some of the causes of managerial anxiety. They indicate that more attention needs to be focused on the individual manager's psychological and demographic characteristics if his or her perceived stress and responses to performance appraisal are to be predicted, and their possible negative impacts on work performance avoided.

Limitations of This Research and Future Research Direction

As in many other studies, several potential limitations are inherent in this study. First, the number of predictor variables was few and possible additional relevant predictor variables could be used in a research of this nature. Although the literature reports a number of predictor variables for perceived stress much less have been written about the link variables investigated here (especially performance appraisal discomfort and core self-evaluations). A lot could still be done to enhance managerial understanding of these much less-explored variables. It would therefore be more useful to explore other behavioral predictor variables in subsequent efforts, as this will enhance the robustness of the model in the regression equation. Indeed it would be useful to verify what variables would be predictive of both performance appraisal discomfort and core self-evaluations.

Secondly, a cross-cultural as well as multi-cultural investigation of the constructs—performance appraisal discomfort and core self-evaluations—across a number of culturally dissimilar countries would prove useful in furthering our understanding of the constructs. Future research should also consider the question of how differences in performance evaluation and the individual manager's response to it could constitute a gap in the comparative assessment of managers. This would have a significant benefit for international business and its managerial applications in today's global and competitive environment.

Finally, there are three sampling related limitations. The first is the self-selecting sample of organization which is a potential impediment for generalisation despite the reasonable sample size, given the small population of Botswana. Related to this is the need to acknowledge the possibility that such a design could lead to inflated significance level, which is probably not the case in this instance. Moreover, the cross-sectional nature of the study renders it difficult to draw conclusions about the relationships among the various study variables. Even though a few significant correlations were reported, cross-sectional research does not explain why such exist or what other external factors might have caused the observed significant correlation. Nevertheless, this study provides a foundation for further examinations in our quest to better understand how these relatively unexplored behavioral variables (performance appraisal discomfort and core self-evaluations) relate to perceived stress. The second relates to the high level of education in the sample. With about 70 percent possessing a basic university education or higher the sample is heavily skewed. However given the nature of the measuring items, translation with

its attendant problems would have been required in a sample with a lower education. The third sampling limitation relates to the heavy tilting of the obtained data (respondents) from the public sector (81 percent), which however is largely a reflection of the workforce in Botswana like most African countries where the private sector is relatively poorly developed. It is hoped that future studies will attempt a more radical balance of the two sectors for more comparable data and hence a stronger generalisation opportunity. It suffice that this data is strongly public sector based.

Conclusions

Human behavior is complex and complicated, hence understanding and manipulating it for effective organizational results requires going beyond the mastery of rhetoric and untested concepts. A single country study and data rarely have much strength since it allows little opportunity for comparison or generalisation. However, as much less research results do come out of Africa compared with the West and perhaps the rest of the world, it is hoped that findings from these preliminary effort would kindle enough interest for a more global expansion of the concepts examined here.

In sum, the result indicated insignificant negative association between performance appraisal discomfort and perceived stress. The result indicated neither CSE nor gender as important moderators of the relationship between PAD and perceived stress. However, gender, core self-evaluations and performance appraisal discomfort emerged significant predictors of perceived stress in that order of strength. At a tactical level, the study's findings have raised awareness and highlighted the need for more attention to be focused on core self-evaluations if managerial understanding of sources of perceived stress and performance appraisal discomfort are to become more robust, albeit the findings need further investigation. It also raises some questions and concerns for HR managers about demographic characteristics and perceived stress, with females' perceived stress generally significantly higher than males in this Botswana sample. Given that gender and core self-evaluations (both individual characteristics) were stronger predictors of perceived stress than performance appraisal discomfort (an organizational policy related characteristics), one may be tempted to ask if perceived stress is more due to individual characteristics than to organizational policy, and as a consequence worker-related interventions may be particularly pertinent. If appraisers are to implement performance appraisals effectively and perceived stress reduced, it is critical to ensure that individual discomforts arising from performance evaluations are addressed, and attention paid to nourishing and supporting highly

confident employees with significant self-belief. The self-reported limitations of the study might not enable the article to serve as the cornerstone of this line of research, but much can be taken from the outcomes and prospects and possibly challenged in other settings.

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