

Stress and Emotional Labour as Predictors of Psychological Wellbeing: Evidence from Nigerian Production Workers

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ABSTRACT

Psychological wellbeing among production workers in Nigeria's manufacturing sector remains an underexamined concern despite the considerable occupational demands characterising this work environment. Existing research has largely focused on wellbeing outcomes in other populations, with insufficient attention to the roles of stress and emotional labour in industrial settings. This study examined stress and emotional labour as predictors of psychological wellbeing among production workers in Nigeria, while controlling for important demographic characteristics. Participants were 203 production workers (121 men and 82 women) drawn from four manufacturing organisations in Lagos and Ogun States. Purposive sampling was employed in the selection of participants. The Symptom Checklist-90, the Positive Affect subscale of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, and the Emotional Exhaustion Scale were used to measure stress, psychological wellbeing, and emotional labour respectively. Hierarchical multiple regression was used to analyse the data. Findings showed that stress and emotional labour negatively predicted psychological wellbeing, with stress emerging as the stronger predictor. Organisational interventions targeting the primary sources of job demands, alongside initiatives that reduce unnecessary emotion regulation requirements within production teams, are recommended to promote the psychological wellbeing of workers in Nigerian manufacturing environments.

Introduction

Workplaces within Nigeria's manufacturing sector are characterised by high production demands, long working hours, safety hazards, and limited worker autonomy, conditions that collectively place substantial strain on the psychological functioning of employees (Jayapraksh & Banu, 2024; Okpaegbe et al., 2025). When workers' psychological wellbeing deteriorates, the consequences extend well beyond individual suffering: organisational productivity declines, absenteeism rises, and the quality of interpersonal relationships at and beyond the workplace is adversely affected (Rugulies et al., 2023; Nwaogu et al., 2023). The question of what drives such deterioration, particularly in the context of labour-intensive production environments in sub-Saharan Africa, has not received the empirical scrutiny it warrants. The present investigation therefore set out to examine two theoretically compelling antecedents of workers' psychological wellbeing: stress and emotional labour.

Psychological wellbeing refers to a positive evaluative orientation toward one's life and work, encompassing the experience of positive affect, a sense of purpose, and adaptive functioning in social and occupational roles (Watson et al., 1988).

Within occupational health psychology, wellbeing is widely regarded as a core outcome variable, given its documented links to job performance, organisational commitment, and physical health (Rugulies et al., 2023; Lulli et al., 2021). In production contexts specifically, where work tends to be physically demanding, repetitive, and often emotionally taxing, the maintenance of psychological wellbeing may be particularly challenging. Yet the factors that influence psychological wellbeing among manufacturing workers in Nigeria remain insufficiently understood.

The knowledge gap motivating the present work is twofold. First, while the antecedents of worker wellbeing have been examined extensively in Western and East Asian occupational settings, comparatively little attention has been directed at production workers in West Africa, a context distinguished by its specific socio-economic pressures, cultural norms around emotional expression, and structural labour conditions (Adegbite et al., 2020; Anibor et al., 2025). Second, stress and emotional labour have each been studied in relation to wellbeing within discrete professional groups such as nurses,

teachers, and civil servants (Rafiei et al., 2024; Jabeen et al., 2025; Ozoemena et al., 2021), but their joint predictive utility among manufacturing workers in Nigeria has not been established.

Occupational stress, understood as the psychological strain arising when job demands exceed an individual's coping resources, provides a theoretically well-grounded starting point for examining threats to wellbeing (Mensah, 2021; Habtu et al., 2025). Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), it is possible to theorise that chronically stressful work conditions deplete the cognitive, emotional, and social resources upon which psychological wellbeing depends. Empirical evidence from diverse occupational groups and cultural settings lends provisional support to this possibility: higher stress has been linked to poorer mental health outcomes among university staff (Adeleke et al., 2025), healthcare workers (Goson et al., 2025; Okonkwo et al., 2024), and civil servants (Anibor et al., 2025). Whether comparable patterns would obtain within the specific circumstances of Nigerian manufacturing workers, where resource constraints and work intensification may operate differently, remained an open empirical question prior to the present study.

Emotional labour, defined as the management of felt and expressed emotions in accordance with occupationally prescribed display rules (Hochschild, 1983), represents a distinct but potentially complementary pathway to diminished wellbeing. Production workers who interact with supervisors, colleagues, or customers while suppressing genuine affective states, or who must sustain the appearance of equanimity under pressure, may incur a form of resource depletion that extends beyond what cognitive or physical demands alone would predict (Gabriel et al., 2023; Riforgiate et al., 2021). Meta-analytic evidence suggests that surface acting, in particular, carries a moderate positive association with adverse mental health outcomes (Zhao et al., 2025), though whether emotional labour in its broader manifestation predicts wellbeing among production workers in a Nigerian industrial setting had yet to be empirically examined before the present study.

The Nigerian context introduces additional dimensions that may shape these relationships in ways not fully captured by theoretical models developed in highly industrialised western cultures. Nigeria's manufacturing sector is characterised by economic precarity, limited employment alternatives, and a cultural context in which collectivist obligations and hierarchical authority structures may constrain workers' capacity to disengage psychologically from demanding work environments (Adegbite et al., 2020; Amazue & Onyishi, 2016). In settings where family and community obligations are deeply valued yet material resources are constrained, work-related psychological strain may carry heightened salience (Olaseni et al., 2020; Fagbenro et al., 2025). These contextual characteristics suggest that findings from Western or East Asian production contexts may not translate straightforwardly, and that examining wellbeing antecedents in

Nigerian manufacturing environments constitutes a meaningful contribution to the cross-cultural occupational health literature.

Without empirically grounded knowledge of what drives or undermines psychological wellbeing among production workers in this context, organisations cannot design effective interventions tailored to local conditions, and foreign wellbeing practices developed for different cultural and structural environments may fail to produce their intended effects (Rugulies et al., 2023; Aust et al., 2024). Resources may be directed toward approaches that are poorly matched to the actual psychological challenges facing Nigerian manufacturing workers, perpetuating rather than alleviating the problem.

The present study therefore addressed this gap by examining the contributions of stress and emotional labour to psychological wellbeing among production workers in four Nigerian manufacturing organisations. At an empirical level, the study provided evidence regarding the relative predictive utility of these two antecedents within a previously under-studied occupational group and cultural context. At a theoretical level, the findings offered an opportunity to evaluate the cross-cultural applicability of resource depletion accounts of wellbeing erosion in production settings. At a practical level, the results may have direct implications for the design of organisational wellbeing interventions in Nigerian manufacturing environments.

We hypothesise that: (1) workers with high levels of stress will report lower psychological well-being, and (2) high levels of emotional labour will predict lower psychological well-being.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants comprised 203 production workers (, 59.6% men and 40.4% women) drawn from four manufacturing organisations located in Lagos and Ogun States, south-western Nigeria: DE United Foods Industries Limited (Sango Ota, Ogun State; $n = 50$), Laca Sera Company (Amuwo-Odofin Industrial Estate, Lagos; $n = 53$), Petals Cosmetics Limited (Agege, Lagos; $n = 49$), and CHI Limited (Ajao Estate, Ikeja, Lagos; $n = 50$). Workers' ages ranged from 16 to 50 years ($M = 28.2$). Among the sample, 65% were married and 35% were single. Their average job tenure was 4.50 years ($SD = 3.00$). A total of 280 questionnaires were distributed, of which 203 (79%) were appropriately completed and retained for analysis; the remaining 52 (20.4%) were discarded due to incomplete responses or substantial missing data. Eligibility was determined by current employment in a production role within one of the four selected organisations. After obtaining approval from the management of selected manufacturing organisations, researchers visited the workplaces and informed employees about the study during designated periods. Workers who met the inclusion criteria and expressed willingness to participate were invited to complete the survey after providing informed consent. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality was assured, and completed

questionnaires were collected immediately or returned within an agreed time frame. Demographic characteristics including gender, age, marital status, and job tenure were explored given their potential relevance to the study variables.

Measures

Stress was assessed using the Symptom Checklist-90 (SCL-90; Derogatis et al., 1973), a 90-item self-report inventory designed to capture the breadth of psychological distress and stress-related symptomatology. Items are presented in a Likert format with responses ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*). All items are scored directly; higher total scores indicate greater levels of stress. The SCL-90 has demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency across its subscales, with alpha coefficients ranging from .74 to .97 as reported by Derogatis et al. (1973). In the present sample, Cronbach's alpha for the total stress index was .91, indicating high reliability. The instrument has been applied in diverse cultural and occupational contexts, including Nigerian samples (Agoha et al., 2018; Owofe et al., 2007; Teibowei, 2018; $\alpha = .82$), and its use in the present study was considered appropriate given its capacity to capture the multidimensional nature of stress symptomatology among workers.

Psychological wellbeing was indexed using the Positive Affect subscale of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988). The positive affect subscale comprises ten items describing positive emotional states. Respondents rate the degree to which they generally experience each state on a scale anchored at 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) and 5 (*extremely*). Higher scores on the subscale reflect a greater tendency toward positive affective experience, which served as the operational index of psychological wellbeing in the present study. Prior studies have documented strong internal consistency for the positive affect subscale, with alpha values of .86 (Morris, 1995) and .85 (Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000). The instrument has also been validated and applied within Nigerian contexts (Agbo, 2016; Donald & Egboluche, 2023; Nwankwo, 2025). The Cronbach's alpha obtained in the current sample was .83. Only the positive affect subscale was used in accordance with the study's focus on wellbeing as an adaptive affective orientation rather than the dual valence of mood.

Emotional labour was measured using the Emotional Exhaustion Scale (EES; Maslach & Jackson, 1981), a 12-item scale adapted from the original 22-item Maslach Burnout Inventory. Although the EES was designed primarily to assess emotional exhaustion, it captures the cumulative psychological cost of sustained emotional management at work, thereby serving as a valid operational proxy for emotional labour in the present context (Abraham, 1998; Jackson et al., 1986). Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). All items are scored directly, with lower scores indicating lower emotional exhaustion and higher scores reflecting greater emotional labour burden. Established internal

consistency reliability has been reported by Maslach (1981; $\alpha = .87$), Jackson et al. (1986; $\alpha = .89$), and Abraham (1998; $\alpha = .90$). The scale has further been applied in Nigerian occupational and professional samples with acceptable psychometric properties (Adekunle, 2017; Enwereuzor et al., 2017). The present sample yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .88, confirming adequate reliability.

Design/Statistics

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses, with statistical analyses conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21.0. Demographic variables including gender, marital status, job tenure, and age were entered in Step 1 as controls; occupational stress and emotional labour were entered jointly in Step 2.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 1. The results of the hierarchical multiple regression for predictors of psychological wellbeing appear in Table 2.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Gender, Marital Status, Job Tenure, Age, Occupational Stress, Emotional Labour, and Psychological Wellbeing.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gender	–	–	–						
Marital Status	–	–	.05	–					
Job Tenure	4.50	3.00	-.10	-.30**	–				
Age	28.20	6.00	-.08	-.45***	.60***	–			
Stress	107.71	24.17	.08	-.10	-.15*	-.20**	–		
Emotional Labour	57.93	8.06	.10	-.08	-.12	-.10	.31***	–	
Psychological Wellbeing	56.46	7.09	-.05	.12	.10	.15*	-.72***	-.47***	–

Note. *N* = 203. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Gender was coded 1 = male, 2 = female; marital status: 1 = married, 2 = single. Job tenure and age were continuous variables in years.

Results in Table 1 indicated that among the socio-demographic variables, age showed a small positive association with psychological wellbeing, while marital status also showed a positive correlation with psychological wellbeing. Job tenure was negatively associated with stress, and age had a strong positive correlation with job tenure alongside a moderate negative correlation with marital status. Among the primary predictors, stress and emotional labour each showed significant negative associations with psychological wellbeing, with occupational stress demonstrating the stronger of the two relationships. There was also a significant positive association between stress and emotional labour.

Table 2: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Results Predicting Psychological Wellbeing by Occupational Stress and Emotional Labour

Variable	Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Controls						
Gender	−0.43	−.03	−0.43	0.15	.01	0.21
Marital Status	2.81	.19	2.37*	1.48	.10	1.86
Job Tenure	0.09	.04	0.45	−0.05	−.02	−0.34
Age	0.15	.13	1.43	0.02	.02	0.33
Predictors						
Occupational Stress				−0.20	−.69	−14.12***
Emotional Labour				−0.24	−.27	−5.52***
— <i>R</i> ²	.035			.570		
ΔR^2	.049			.539		
ΔF	2.56 (4, 198)*			126.34 (2, 196)***		

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$. Gender was coded 1 = male, 2 = female; marital status: 1 = married, 2 = single.

Results in Table 2, in which psychological wellbeing was the criterion variable, indicated that the demographic variables (gender, marital status, job tenure, and age), entered in Step 1 as controls, collectively accounted for 4.9% of variance in psychological wellbeing. Marital status was the only control variable that made a unique, positive, and significant contribution in this step ($t = 2.37$, $p < .05$), indicating that single workers reported higher levels of psychological wellbeing compared to married colleagues. When occupational stress and emotional labour were entered jointly in Step 2, they collectively explained a substantial additional portion of variance in psychological wellbeing over and above the demographic controls. In the final model, occupational stress was the stronger negative predictor ($\beta = -.69$, $p < .001$), while emotional labour also negatively predicted psychological wellbeing ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$). All demographic effects that were significant at Step 1 became non-significant once the work stressors were entered.

Discussion

The present study examined the extent to which stress and emotional labour predicted psychological wellbeing among 203 production workers employed in four Nigerian manufacturing organisations, controlling for gender, marital status, job tenure, and age. Both hypotheses were supported. In the final hierarchical model, stress emerged as the stronger negative predictor of psychological wellbeing, while emotional labour also contributed a significant and independent negative effect. Together, the two work stressors explained a substantial portion of variance in wellbeing beyond what the demographic controls accounted for. These findings contribute to an emerging, if still limited, evidence base concerning the potential occupational determinants of worker wellbeing in Nigerian industrial contexts.

The finding that stress was a robust negative predictor of psychological wellbeing supports the earlier hypothesis that workers with high levels of stress would report lower psychological well-being. It also aligns with predictions derived

from the Conservation of Resources framework (Hobfoll, 1989). According to this perspective, individuals who experience sustained or intense stressors are placed in a state of resource loss, wherein the cognitive, emotional, and social resources that underpin psychological functioning are progressively depleted. The very strong negative association observed in the present sample between stress and psychological wellbeing, and the substantial unique contribution of stress in the final model, may suggest that, within the demanding conditions of Nigerian production environments — where job security is fragile, pay is often inadequate relative to effort expended, and job autonomy is limited (Anibor et al., 2025; Oose et al., 2025) — the resource-depleting effects of stress may be amplified. Workers who lack access to buffering resources, such as managerial support or psychological capital, may be particularly susceptible to the wellbeing consequences of stress accumulation.

The pattern of findings is broadly consistent with evidence from other occupational settings such as in Europe (Mensah, 2021), among Iranian nurses (Rafiei et al., 2024), Pakistani shift workers (Zehra & Sadaf, 2025). That the relationships observed in the present Nigerian manufacturing sample appear directionally consistent with findings from diverse global settings may suggest that the resource-depleting properties of stress are to some degree transcontextual, though the specific magnitude of effects is likely shaped by local structural conditions. The present findings extend this body of work by demonstrating that comparable predictive relationships obtain within a West African production context that has previously received limited empirical attention.

The negative association between emotional labour and psychological wellbeing supports the hypothesis that high levels of emotional labour would predict lower psychological well-being. The finding is consistent with the emotional resource depletion account advanced by Gabriel et al. (2023) and with the broader meta-analytic evidence reported by Zhao et al. (2025). When employees are required to manage their emotional expressions in ways that diverge from their genuine affective states, the surface acting that results draws on limited self-regulatory capacity, contributing to exhaustion and, ultimately, to diminished wellbeing. In the present context, although a fine-grained distinction between surface and deep acting strategies was not operationalised, the use of the Emotional Exhaustion Scale as a proxy for the cumulative demands of emotional labour is theoretically defensible, given that exhaustion is widely regarded as the primary downstream consequence of sustained emotional regulation (Jabeen et al., 2025; Riforgiate et al., 2021). The comparatively smaller effect of emotional labour relative to stress in the final model may suggest that the overall demands of the production context, as captured by the broader stress measure, exert a more pervasive influence on wellbeing than the specifically interpersonal regulatory demands indexed by the exhaustion scale.

The pattern of findings with respect to emotional labour accords with the meta-analytic conclusions of Zhao et al. (2025), who reported a moderate positive association between exhaustion-inducing emotional labour and poorer mental health across multiple occupational groups. Studies of nurses (Liu et al., 2024), teachers (Hong et al., 2022), and social workers (Jeong & Kim, 2025) have each documented negative wellbeing consequences associated with high emotional labour demands. The present findings extend these observations to production workers in Nigerian manufacturing, a group whose emotional labour demands, whilst less frequently discussed than those of service-sector workers, may nonetheless be substantial, given hierarchical supervisory relationships and the need to sustain cooperative interpersonal orientations within high-pressure production teams.

The magnitude of the stress effect observed in the present study invites reflection on the specific contextual dynamics at work. Nigeria's manufacturing sector is characterised by structural vulnerabilities that may intensify the wellbeing consequences of work demands. As Adegbite et al. (2020) documented among Nigerian bankers, social wellbeing and psychological wellbeing are closely intertwined, with insecurity, family conflict, and material hardship all contributing to workers' psychological states. In a context where workers may lack access to occupational health resources, trade union protections, or formal employee assistance programmes, the cumulative burden of stress may be borne predominantly by individual resource reservoirs, depleting them more rapidly than would be the case in environments with stronger institutional support. The collectivist cultural orientation prevalent in Nigerian society may further compound this dynamic: workers who experience deteriorating psychological wellbeing may nonetheless feel constrained to maintain their engagement with familial and community obligations, leaving limited space for recovery (Amazue & Onyishi, 2016; Fagbenro et al., 2025).

One notable contextual observation concerns the exception reported by Sanido and Echalar (2025), who found a positive association between stress and psychological wellbeing in a Philippine hospital sample and attributed this to the mobilisation of positive psychological resources under challenge. The contrasting pattern observed in the present study may indicate that, whereas some groups of workers can draw upon identity-based or vocational resources to sustain wellbeing under stress, production workers in Nigerian manufacturing may lack equivalent protective reserves, making resource depletion rather than resource mobilisation the more plausible outcome of exposure to high occupational demands. This interpretation, whilst speculative, points toward the importance of examining moderating variables, including psychological capital and perceived social support, in future research with this population.

The present study makes several contributions to the occupational health literature. Empirically, it provides, to the best

of the present authors' knowledge, the first systematic examination of stress and emotional labour as joint predictors of psychological wellbeing among production workers in Nigerian manufacturing, with demographic variables appropriately controlled. Prior Nigerian studies have examined wellbeing primarily among healthcare workers (Goson et al., 2025; Ugwu et al., 2024), teachers (Ozoemena et al., 2021), and civil servants (Anibor et al., 2025), leaving production workers as a largely neglected group. Theoretically, the findings lend cross-cultural support to resource depletion accounts of wellbeing erosion, whilst simultaneously highlighting the possibility that effect sizes observed in contexts of structural vulnerability may be larger than those typically reported in resource-rich environments. Practically, the demonstration that stress emerged as a substantially stronger unique predictor of wellbeing than emotional labour in the final model offers a degree of prioritisation guidance for organisations seeking to allocate limited intervention resources effectively.

The findings carry several implications for organisational practice within Nigerian manufacturing. Given the substantial explanatory role of stress, interventions targeting the primary sources of job demands merit priority attention. Organisational redesign efforts that increase worker control, clarify role expectations, and reduce unnecessary work intensification would be theoretically consistent with COR principles and have demonstrated effectiveness in comparable settings (Fox et al., 2021; Rugulies et al., 2023). Regular appraisal of workload distribution and the provision of adequate rest periods within production schedules could serve as structural protections against resource depletion. Human resource managers should be attentive to the particular vulnerability of workers who simultaneously experience high production demands and constrained recovery opportunities. With respect to emotional labour, organisations should attend to the interpersonal climate within production teams. Supervisory training aimed at reducing unnecessary emotional regulation demands — for instance by fostering psychologically safe environments in which workers can express authentic concerns — may help to moderate the wellbeing cost of sustained emotional management (Ellis et al., 2025; Lim & Moon, 2024). More broadly, the development of workers' psychological capital through structured interventions, including activities designed to cultivate hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy, has demonstrated efficacy in related contexts (Hong et al., 2022) and may represent a feasible, if complementary, approach to wellbeing promotion within Nigerian production environments.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and the exclusive reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of common method variance. The purposive sampling approach, though appropriate to the study's exploratory aims, limits the generalisability of findings to

the broader Nigerian manufacturing workforce. A key limitation of using the SCL-90 to measure stress in the workplace is that it was designed primarily to assess psychological symptoms and distress rather than work-specific stressors. Consequently, elevated scores may reflect a range of emotional or mental health difficulties that are not necessarily caused by workplace conditions. Similarly, our not considering the multidimensional nature of stress operationalised by the SCL-90 may obscure the specific workplace factors contributing to employee distress. As a result, findings may oversimplify the stress experience and provide limited guidance for targeted interventions and organizational improvements.

Despite these constraints, the study employed validated instruments with strong reliability in the current sample and drew on a reasonably sized participant group spanning four distinct organisations, lending its findings a degree of contextual breadth. Future research should employ longitudinal or prospective designs to clarify the temporal dynamics and directionality of associations between stress, emotional labour, and psychological wellbeing. It would also be theoretically informative to examine potential moderating variables, including perceived social support, job autonomy, and psychological capital, to identify conditions under which the wellbeing consequences of stress and emotional labour may be attenuated. Future studies also need to distinctively examine the dimensions of both stress and emotional labour in relation to wellbeing. Replication across additional manufacturing sectors and geographical regions within Nigeria, as well as cross-cultural comparisons with production samples from other African countries, would advance understanding of the contextual boundary conditions of these relationships.

Conclusion

Psychological wellbeing among workers in Nigeria's manufacturing sector is frequently characterised as a secondary concern relative to physical safety and productivity; the present findings suggest that such a characterisation may carry substantial organisational costs. Stress and emotional labour each emerged as significant negative predictors of psychological wellbeing, with stress demonstrating a particularly pronounced predictive role, accounting for approximately half of the variance in wellbeing scores. These results, grounded in a resource depletion perspective, indicate that the cumulative demands of production work in Nigerian industrial contexts may deplete the psychological resources upon which workers' positive affective functioning depends. The practical implication is that organisations operating within Nigerian manufacturing environments cannot afford to treat worker psychological wellbeing as incidental to production goals. Structural interventions targeting the primary sources of stress, alongside the cultivation of psychologically safe interpersonal environments and targeted capacity-building for workers, represent evidence-informed pathways toward more sustainable

and humane production contexts. The present study provides an empirical foundation upon which such efforts can be grounded.

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