Investigating the Relationship Between Job Characteristics and Job Stress Among Barista Workers in Kuala Lumpur

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ABSTRACT

Baristas in the café industry often face high levels of job stress due to long hours, customer interactions, and complex tasks. However, research on the specific job characteristics contributing to this stress remains limited. This study aims to explore the relationship between job characteristics—task identity, skill variety, task significance, autonomy, and feedback—and job stress among baristas in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, using Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (JCM) as the theoretical framework. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 218 baristas from various cafés, and the data were analysed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses. The findings revealed that autonomy and task identity significantly reduced job stress, while task significance contributed to increased stress levels. This study contributes to the academic literature by applying the JCM to the under-researched café industry, providing insights into how job design influences employee stress. The study suggests that café managers can mitigate job stress by enhancing job autonomy, providing diverse tasks, and offering regular feedback. However, limitations include convenience sampling and self-reported data, which may affect the generalizability and accuracy of the results. Future research should include longitudinal studies with more diverse samples and explore additional factors such as social support and work-life balance. These findings have theoretical implications for understanding job stress in service industries and practical implications for improving workplace well-being and business sustainability in cafés.

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INTRODUCTION

The service industry, particularly the food and beverage sector, has witnessed significant growth and importance in modern economies, contributing substantially to employment opportunities and consumer satisfaction (Altınay & Arıcı, 2021). Within this sector, cafés have evolved into cultural hubs, offering not just beverages but a unique experience centred around coffee, with baristas playing a pivotal role as the face of the café, offering new working conditions and facilitating positive service-work experiences (Buchanan, 2023). Despite the rewarding nature of the profession, baristas often face high levels of job stress stemming from various challenges inherent in their roles. According to Zainal Abidin et al. (2023), baristas experience a high prevalence of poor mental health, with stress (66.70%), anxiety (65.10%), and depression (49.50%) being the most common symptoms. These challenges include long working hours, high-pressure environments, continuous customer interactions, and the need to operate complex coffee-making equipment, which can significantly impact baristas' mental and physical well-being.

While job stress has been extensively studied in various sectors, there exists a notable gap in the literature regarding the specific stressors faced by baristas (Hariyanti & Eva, 2022; Wong et al., 2019; Zainal Abidin et al., 2023). This gap is crucial to address as the stressors unique to baristas affect their well-being and contribute to high turnover rates, posing challenges for café management and the sustainability of businesses in the industry (Park & Min, 2020). Therefore, research is needed to explore how specific job characteristics contribute to job stress among baristas, focusing on understanding the relationship between crucial job characteristics and job stress levels (Guthier et al., 2020).

The study examines the relationship between crucial job characteristics such as task identity, skill variety, task significance, autonomy, and feedback, and job stress among Malaysian barista workers in Malaysian cafés. By utilising Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (JCM) as a theoretical framework, the research seeks to identify which aspects of the barista role are most closely associated with job stress and provide insights into how these stressors can be mitigated. Understanding these factors is essential for improving work conditions for baristas, enhancing overall job satisfaction, and reducing turnover rates in the café industry (Park et al., 2020).

Understanding the factors contributing to job stress in baristas is crucial for improving their work conditions, enhancing overall job satisfaction, and reducing turnover rates in the café industry. By identifying the primary sources of stress, this research will provide practical recommendations for café managers on redesigning job roles to minimise stress and enhance employee well-being. The findings could lead to more sustainable business practices within the café industry, benefiting employees and employers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Stress

Job stress has been widely recognised as a significant factor affecting employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall organisational performance (Pelealu et al., 2023). Defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the demands of a job do not match the resources, capabilities, or needs of the worker, job stress has been linked to various adverse outcomes, including burnout, decreased productivity, and high turnover rates (Wen et al., 2020). The service industry, particularly the food and beverage sector, is notorious for its high-stress

environments, where employees, such as baristas, are often required to perform under considerable pressure (Ghazali & Mohd Amin, 2022). Understanding the factors contributing to job stress in this context is crucial for developing strategies to enhance employee well-being and organisational efficiency (Singh et al., 2022).

Job Characteristics Model (JCM)

Hackman and Oldham developed the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) in 1976, a widely recognised framework that identifies five core job characteristics: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. These characteristics are believed to be motivating and linked to increased job performance and satisfaction (Silva & Menino, 2022). The model posits that specific job characteristics can influence employees' psychological states, leading to positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, performance, and engagement (Chen & Ye, 2023; Kim & Park, 2022).

Research has shown that job characteristics play a crucial role in predicting employees' behaviours and attitudes in the workplace. For instance, job resources and demands, as outlined in the JCM, can impact employees' job satisfaction, performance, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Chen & Ye, 2023). Moreover, the model emphasises how job characteristics produce favourable outcomes by creating specific psychological states (Liu et al., 2021).

Studies have also explored the relationship between job characteristics and outcomes, such as work motivation, organisational commitment, and turnover intentions. The JCM has been used to examine how job design influences work motivation and how job characteristics mediate the link between leadership and job performance (Mariska, 2024; Han et al., 2020). Additionally, the model has been applied to investigate the impact of job characteristics on turnover intentions, organisational commitment, and job crafting behaviours (Cangialosi et al., 2021; Eib et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the JCM has been utilised to explore the effects of job characteristics on employee well-being and job satisfaction. Research has shown that job characteristics can influence job satisfaction, engagement, and emotional exhaustion among employees (Holman, 2023; Zhang, 2023). Additionally, the model has been used to examine the relationship between job characteristics and job stress, burnout, and quality of work life (Faisal et al., 2022; Jing & Zhou, 2020; O'Callaghan, 2024).

Job Characteristics and Job Stress

Research has consistently shown that job characteristics play a significant role in determining the level of stress experienced by employees (Elrayah et al., 2023; Mixter et al., 2020). For instance, tasks that provide a high level of skill variety and task identity are generally associated with lower stress levels, as they allow employees to use a range of skills and see the results of their work (Mixter et al., 2020). Autonomy, or the degree to which employees control their tasks, has also been identified as a critical factor in reducing job stress (Elrayah et al., 2023). Conversely, jobs that lack autonomy and provide limited feedback tend to increase stress levels, as employees may feel powerless and uncertain about their performance (Guo et al., 2022).

Baristas and Job Stress in the Food and Beverage Industry

Baristas, as key personnel in the food and beverage industry, face unique stressors due to the nature of their work (Zainal Abidin et al., 2023). The café environment is often fast-paced,

requiring baristas to handle multiple tasks simultaneously, such as preparing beverages, operating complex machinery, and interacting with customers (Pangestu & Halim, 2022). Studies have shown that the high demands of the barista role, coupled with the need for precision and customer satisfaction, can lead to significant job stress (Hariyanti & Eva, 2022). Moreover, the expectation to maintain a high level of performance during peak hours can exacerbate stress levels, particularly when baristas feel that they lack sufficient control over their work or adequate support from management (Ghazali et al., 2021).

The Role of Job Characteristics in Barista Job Stress

The application of the JCM in the context of baristas has been limited. However, it provides a valuable lens for understanding the factors contributing to job stress in this profession. Research suggests that baristas who experience high task identity and skill variety may feel more engaged and less stressed, as these characteristics contribute to a sense of accomplishment and mastery (Seqhobane & Kokt, 2021). On the other hand, a lack of autonomy and insufficient feedback is likely to increase stress levels, as baristas may need help with decision-making and feel uncertain about their performance. The dynamic and customer-facing nature of the barista role means that feedback is often immediate and continuous, which can either mitigate or exacerbate stress depending on its nature and frequency (Winowatan et al., 2021).

Study Framework

In the proposed study framework, the five job characteristics—skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback—are anticipated to affect job stress levels among barista employees in Kuala Lumpur. The framework suggests that these characteristics directly relate to job stress, indicating that how jobs are organised around these factors can either alleviate or intensify stress. By exploring these relationships, the study clarified how particular elements of barista work contribute to job stress, ultimately providing recommendations for job design that could promote well-being and lessen stress in this dynamic, customer-focused setting.
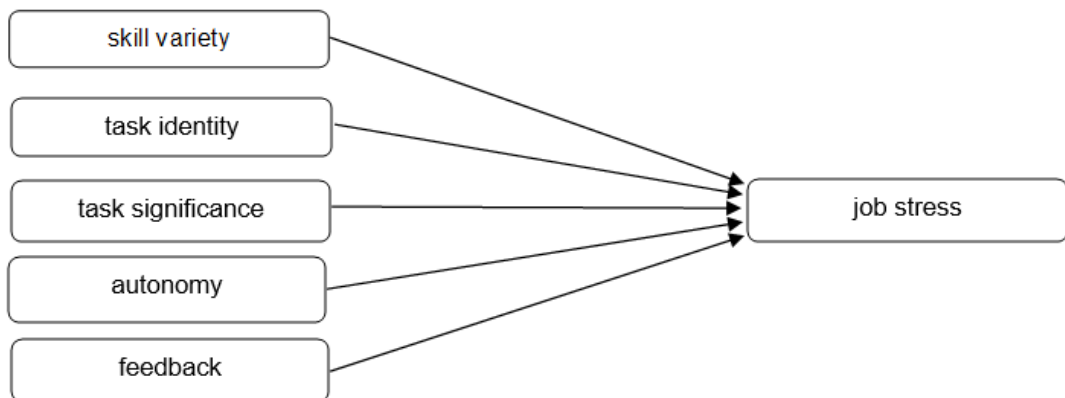

Figure 1. Study Framework

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional research design to investigate the relationship between job characteristics and job stress in the baristas of Klang Valley, Malaysia. A cross-sectional design was chosen because it allows for the examination of multiple variables at a single point in time, making it particularly effective for identifying correlations between job characteristics, such as task identity, skill variety, task significance, autonomy, and feedback, and the resulting levels of job stress. This design is well-suited to the study's objective of understanding how these factors contribute to stress within the dynamic and fast-paced environment of café workplaces.

Population and Sample

The population targeted for this study consisted of baristas working in various café outlets within the Klang Valley region of Malaysia. The sample was drawn from 50 well-known coffee shop outlets, including Starbucks Sdn. Bhd., Friends & Co Sdn Bhd., Costa Sdn Bhd., Gigi Coffee, Zus Coffee, and The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf Sdn Bhd. The sampling method used was convenience sampling, which was selected for its practicality in accessing participants within the given timeframe. The study aimed to gather responses from a minimum of 138 baristas calculated by G-Power to ensure statistical significance. Ultimately, 218 responses were collected, exceeding the minimum requirement and enhancing the study's reliability and generalizability.

Data Collection Method

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to the participating café outlets. The questionnaire was made available via Google Forms, which could be accessed by the baristas using a QR code provided at their workplace. This method allowed participants to complete the survey at their convenience, minimising potential disruptions to their work schedules and ensuring thoughtful and unpressured responses. The data collection process spanned one month, providing ample time for all targeted participants to respond. The choice of an online platform ensured that data could be easily collected and managed, facilitating the subsequent analysis.

Before participating in the survey, respondents were provided with clear information about the study. They were informed that the research aimed to explore the relationship between job characteristics and job stress among baristas in Kuala Lumpur. Participation was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw without consequences. The survey ensured anonymity and confidentiality, with no personal identifiers collected. Consent was obtained digitally through Google Forms, where respondents reviewed the study details, including objectives, risks, and participant rights. A checkbox mechanism required participants to confirm their agreement before proceeding, ensuring explicit informed consent.

Instrument

The primary instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire designed to measure various aspects of job characteristics and stress. The questionnaire was divided into nine sections, each focusing on different dimensions of the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) and the associated stress factors. The questions were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). To ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument, a pilot test

was conducted with 30 respondents. The pilot test results indicated high reliability across all constructs, with Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.704 to 0.880. These findings confirmed that the instrument was suitable for capturing the necessary data with consistency and accuracy.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted before the primary research to assess the reliability and validity of the research instruments. The pilot involved 30 respondents, all baristas working in café environments similar to those in the main study. The primary objective was to ensure that the questionnaire was clear, understandable, and capable of consistently measuring the intended constructs. The instrument's reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, with results indicating high reliability across all constructs, with values ranging from 0.704 to 0.880. These findings confirmed that the questionnaire was reliable and appropriate for the full-scale study, ensuring that the data collected would be robust and credible.

Table 1. Pilot Test - Reliability Analysis

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Task Identity	0.704	8
Skill Variety	0.745	5
Task Significance	0.715	6
Autonomy	0.872	7
Feedback	0.880	6
Job Stress	0.880	4

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Descriptive statistics, including mean, frequency, and standard deviation, were employed to provide an overview of the respondents' demographic profiles and responses to the job characteristics and stress-related questions. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between the independent variables (task identity, skill variety, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) and the dependent variable (job stress). Additionally, multiple regression analysis was performed to identify the strength and significance of the impact of each job characteristic on job stress. The analysis provided insights into which job characteristics were most strongly associated with job stress among baristas, guiding practical recommendations for improving the work environment in café settings. This concise methods section provides a clear and comprehensive overview of the research design, population and sample, data collection methods, instruments, and data analysis techniques used in this study.

FINDINGS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents offers valuable insights into the characteristics of the study sample. Regarding gender, a higher proportion of female respondents (57.1%) were observed than male respondents (42.9%). Regarding race, the majority of respondents were Malay (92.2%), followed by Chinese (5.1%) and Indian (2.7%). The age distribution of the respondents reveals that the majority were young adults, with 66.7% falling within the 21-25 age group and 24.7% within the 26-30 age group. Smaller percentages were represented by individuals under 20 years old (1.4%), between 30 and 35 years old (3.2%), and over 36 years old (4.0%).

A significant portion of the respondents (69.4%) held a Diploma or other equivalent qualifications, followed by SPM (21.5%), First Degree (7.2%), and Postgraduate degrees (1.4%). Regarding income, most respondents earned RM2,500 or less per month (81.3%), with smaller proportions earning higher incomes. The duration of employment revealed that 52.5% of respondents had been employed for 1 to 3 years, while 41.1% had less than a year of work experience.

This demographic profile characterises the workforce as predominantly young, female, and Malay, with diverse educational backgrounds and primarily lower income levels.

Table 2. Respondents' Demographic Profile

Socio-demographic	Total (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender:		
Male	94	42.9
Female	125	57.1
Race:		
Malay	202	92.2
Indian	6	2.7
Chinese	11	5.1
Age:		
Below 20 years old	3	1.4
21 - 25 years old	149	66.7
26 - 30 years old	54	24.7
30 and 35 years	7	3.2
36 and above	9	4.0
Education Level:		
None	1	0.5
SPM	47	21.5
Diploma/Other Qualification	152	69.4
First Degree	16	7.2
Postgraduate (Master/PhD)	3	1.4
Monthly Income:		
RM2500 and below	178	81.3
RM2501 - RM3170	34	15.5
RM3171 - RM3970	2	0.9
RM3971 - RM4850	1	0.5
RM4851 and above	4	1.8
Duration of working:		
Less than 1 year	90	41.1
1 year to 3 years	115	52.5
3 years to 5 years	7	3.2
More than 5 years	7	3.2

Correlational Analysis of Job Characteristics and Barista Outcomes

The correlation table presented in Table 3 comprehensively analyses the relationships between various job characteristics, including Task Identity, Skill Variety, Task Significance, Feedback, Autonomy, and Job Stress. Pearson correlation coefficients, ranging from -1 to 1, were employed to measure the strength and direction of these associations.

A positive correlation coefficient indicates a direct relationship, while a negative coefficient suggests an inverse relationship. For example, the table reveals a strong positive correlation between Task Identity and Autonomy (r = 0.887). It suggests that baristas who perceive their work as meaningful are likelier to experience a sense of autonomy. Conversely, a negative correlation

between Skill Variety and Job Stress (r = -0.541) indicates that jobs that offer a variety of tasks and skills are associated with lower stress levels among baristas.

Understanding these correlations is crucial for organisational development and management practices. By enhancing Task Identity, for instance, organisations can foster a sense of autonomy among baristas, potentially leading to increased job satisfaction and improved performance. Similarly, incorporating various skills into job design can help reduce stress levels and enhance overall well-being. The positive relationship between Feedback and Autonomy (r = 0.738) further emphasises the importance of providing regular and constructive feedback to empower baristas and promote a sense of control over their work.

These insights can inform management practices and guide the creation of more supportive and productive work environments. By leveraging the relationships between job characteristics and barista outcomes, organisations can implement strategies to enhance employee satisfaction, motivation, and overall performance.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix of Job Characteristics and Job Stress

Variables	Task Identity	Skill Variety	Task Significance	Feedback	Autonomy	Job Stress	Sig. (1-tailed)
Task Identity	1.0	-0.303	0.485	0.581	0.887	0.71	.000
Skill Variety	-0.303	1.0	-0.335	0.312	-0.154	-0.541	.000
Task Significance	0.485	-0.335	1.0	0.316	0.515	0.428	.000
Feedback	0.581	0.312	0.316	1.0	0.738	0.252	.000
Autonomy	0.887	-0.154	0.515	0.738	1.0	0.567	.000
Job Stress	0.71	-0.541	0.428	0.252	0.567	1.0	.000

Note: *p* < .05, **p** < .01 (1-tailed).

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the relationship between job characteristics—namely task identity, skill variety, task significance, autonomy, and feedback—and job stress among baristas in Kuala Lumpur's café industry. Using Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (JCM) as the theoretical framework, the research examined how these job dimensions contribute to job stress and provided practical insights into mitigating stress to improve employee well-being.

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed statistically significant relationships between several job characteristics and job stress, shedding light on which aspects of the baristas' roles most influence their stress levels. Task identity and autonomy exhibited strong positive correlations with lower stress levels, suggesting that baristas who perceive their work as meaningful and have more control over their tasks experience reduced job stress. Specifically, task identity was significantly correlated with lower stress levels ($r = 0.710$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that meaningful tasks contribute to stress reduction. Similarly, autonomy was negatively correlated with stress ($r = 0.567$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that greater control over one's tasks reduces stress. The p-values of less than 0.01 confirm that these findings are statistically significant at a 99% confidence level, meaning they are highly reliable and unlikely to have occurred by chance. These findings align with prior research, emphasising autonomy's crucial role in alleviating stress, especially in high-pressure environments such as cafés (Elrayah et al., 2023).

Skill variety also demonstrated a negative and statistically significant relationship with job stress (r = -0.541, p < 0.01), suggesting that engaging in diverse tasks helps mitigate stress. This finding supports the work of Mixter et al. (2020), who noted that varied tasks promote a sense of competence and engagement. In the fast-paced café environment, skill variety allows baristas to avoid monotony, providing them with mastery and personal accomplishment, ultimately reducing stress levels. The statistical significance of these relationships further reinforces the reliability and robustness of the findings.

Interestingly, task significance positively correlated with job stress (r = 0.428, p < 0.05), highlighting the dual nature of meaningful work in a barista's role. While meaningful tasks can motivate employees, they also increase stress by placing additional performance pressure on individuals, especially in customer-facing roles. The p-value < 0.05 indicates statistical significance at a 95% confidence level, though with a slightly higher margin of error than other relationships identified at the 99% level. These findings emphasise the need for café management to balance task significance with appropriate support to prevent employee burnout (Pangestu & Halim, 2022).

Additionally, the analysis identified a modest but significant negative relationship between feedback and stress. While feedback helps baristas feel supported by management and clarifies their performance, its impact on stress reduction is less substantial than other job characteristics. This aligns with prior literature, which suggests that timely and constructive feedback can reduce workplace stress by alleviating uncertainties and reinforcing employee confidence (Shahzad, 2019).

The results of this study align with earlier research on job stress within the service industry, particularly in the food and beverage sector, where employees experience heightened stress due to continuous customer interaction and the demands of fast service (Zainal Abidin et al., 2023). The findings confirm that autonomy and skill variety are essential in mitigating stress. Prior studies have also underscored the importance of providing employees with control over their tasks, which has consistently been identified as a critical stress-reduction factor (Elrayah et al., 2023; Mixter et al., 2020).

Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature by offering insights specific to baristas, a group that has been underrepresented in job stress research. Baristas face unique challenges, including high precision demands and maintaining customer satisfaction, which can significantly impact their stress levels. This research helps bridge the gap in understanding how these challenges can be addressed through improved job design (Buchanan, 2023).

The statistically significant findings provide practical recommendations for café managers. Increasing autonomy, task identity, and skill variety can effectively reduce stress, while task significance—although motivating—requires careful management to prevent excessive performance pressure. Regular, constructive feedback can complement these efforts by offering additional support to employees.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationship between job characteristics—task identity, skill variety, task significance, autonomy, and feedback—and job stress among baristas in Kuala Lumpur, utilising Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (JCM). The findings indicate that autonomy and task identity are critical in reducing job stress, as baristas who have control over

their tasks and find meaning in their work experience lower stress levels. Conversely, while motivating, task significance was positively correlated with increased stress due to heightened expectations to meet customer demands. These results contribute to academic and practical discussions regarding job design and employee well-being, particularly within the under-researched café industry.

Academic Contribution: This study extends the application of the JCM to the service industry, mainly focusing on baristas, a profession often overlooked in job stress research. By identifying specific job characteristics that influence stress levels, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how job design impacts mental well-being in high-pressure customer-facing roles. The findings build on existing job stress literature by offering empirical insights into the café industry, enriching theoretical models that connect job characteristics with employee outcomes.

Practical Implications: For practitioners, particularly café managers, the study highlights the importance of enhancing job autonomy and task identity to reduce stress levels among baristas. Managers can reduce stress by providing more control over tasks, diversifying work roles, and offering constructive feedback. By doing so, cafés can create a more supportive work environment, reduce turnover, and improve overall employee satisfaction and performance, ultimately contributing to business sustainability.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not fully represent all baristas in Kuala Lumpur or other regions. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data could introduce response bias, where participants may misrepresent their stress levels. Furthermore, the cross-sectional research design precludes establishing causality between job characteristics and stress outcomes, limiting the ability to infer long-term effects.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should employ more representative sampling methods across various regions and types of cafés to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal research could provide deeper insights into how job stress evolves and establish more apparent causal relationships between job characteristics and stress outcomes. Additionally, future research should explore other contributing factors, such as social support, work-life balance, and management practices, which may further explain variations in stress levels among baristas. Objective measures of stress, such as physiological markers, should also be considered to supplement self-reported data and provide a more comprehensive understanding of employee well-being in the café industry.

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