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Citation for published version:

Chia, Y & Chu, MJT 2016, 'Moderating effects of presenteeism on the stress-happiness relationship of hotel employees: A note', *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, vol. 55, pp. 52-56.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2016.02.005>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1016/j.ijhm.2016.02.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2016.02.005)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

International Journal of Hospitality Management

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**Moderating effects of presenteeism on the stress-happiness
relationship of hotel employees: A note**

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Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the kind encouragement of the editors, the helpful comments of the anonymous reviewers as well as the advice and encouragement from Jake Ansell, Ingrid Jeacle, Falconer Mitchell, Jamil Ouenniche and Stephen Walker.

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**Moderating effects of presenteeism on the stress-happiness
relationship of hotel employees: A note**

Abstract

This research note investigates the moderating effects of presenteeism on the stress-happiness relationship of 358 hotel employees in Sabah, Malaysia. The results support the moderating role of presenteeism in the relationship between stress and happiness. More specifically, the findings identify the presence of a non-monotonic relationship between perceived stress and happiness over the range of the degree of presenteeism. Contributions and limitations of the study are identified and discussed.

Key words: Presenteeism, Happiness, Perceived job stress, Malaysia

1 **Moderating effects of presenteeism on the stress-happiness**
2 **relationship of hotel employees: A note**

3

4 **1. INTRODUCTION**

5 While the issue of job stress in the hospitality industry has been gaining interest
6 in the literature (e.g., Jung and Yoon, 2013, Karatepe, 2013), the outcome of job stress
7 is observed to be still much under-reported (O'Neill and Davis, 2011). An example of
8 outcome is the limited reporting on the commonly identified negative relationship
9 between stress and happiness (Schiffirin and Nelson, 2010) in the hospitality industry.
10 Happiness is important in contributing to a harmonious working environment and is
11 particularly relevant in the case of keeping hotel guests happy as well (Amin and Akbar,
12 2013). In a country like Malaysia where the hospitality industry contributes an
13 estimated £13 billion of revenue for the economy (Treasury Malaysia, 2013) and which
14 accounts for 12% of the country gross domestic product, the issue of the happiness of
15 hotel employees takes on a greater significance. Despite the observation by
16 Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) that happiness creates success, the limited engagement with
17 happiness of employees in the hospitality industry has resulted in valuable insights
18 being overlooked. This observation provides the main motivation for the current
19 research note.

20 In the stressful hospitality environment, hotel employees may engage in
21 presenteeism, which is commonly referred to as the act of going to work when one is
22 not feeling well, as a coping strategy (Hemp, 2004) when experiencing stress (Siegrist
23 and Theorell, 2006). The positive association between stress and presenteeism has been
24 commonly observed and engaging in presenteeism could well be a sign of good
25 organizational citizenship behaviour (John, 2011).

26 Within an appraisal theory framework (Scherer, 1999), the stressful work
27 environment is appraised as having an effect on the well-being (e.g., happiness) of hotel
28 employees. The employees will engage in presenteeism behaviour to cope with job
29 stress and the resulting effect is on their levels of happiness. For example, in a highly
30 stressful work environment, hotel employees engaging in high degrees of presenteeism
31 may perceive a sense of 'control' in alleviating job stress (Chiang et al., 2010) as well
32 as feeling a sense of relief and achievement on having successfully performed their

1 roles and discharged their responsibilities. In turn, such feelings will result in increased
2 level of happiness or well-being (Larson, 1989). Similarly, Wright and Cropanzano
3 (2004) state that an individual's happiness is enhanced when being more proactive to
4 adverse and/or stressful situations. The discussion implies that presenteeism moderates
5 the stress-happiness relationship with the higher the degree of presenteeism, the greater
6 is its positive effect on the relationship.

7 In contrast, the hotel employees will feel a loss of control if they do not exert
8 effort as in the form of engaging in presenteeism when faced with stressful events. The
9 lower the degree of presenteeism, the greater will be its negative effect on the stress-
10 happiness relationship. Therefore, it is likely that the resulting cognitive dissonance will
11 cause a decrease in the level of happiness for the hotel employees.

12 When perceived job stress is low in the work environment, the hotel employees
13 will neither be motivated nor feel the necessity to engage in presenteeism, as tasks or
14 situations are either routine and/or easily resolved. The additional option of engaging
15 in a high degree of presenteeism may actually make them feel worse off and resulting
16 in a lowering of happiness. Thus far, the discussion raises the possibility of
17 presenteeism as a moderator in the stress-happiness relationship. The moderating role
18 is tested by examining the interaction effects of perceived job stress and presenteeism
19 on happiness in the following set of hypotheses:

20
21 *H1a: There is a two-way interaction between perceived job stress and*
22 *presenteeism on the happiness of hotel employees.*

23
24 *H1b: The greater the degree of presenteeism, the greater is its positive*
25 *effect on the relationship between perceived job stress and the*
26 *happiness of hotel employees.*
27 *In contrast, the lower the degree of presenteeism, the greater is its*
28 *negative effect on the relationship between perceived job stress and*
29 *the happiness of hotel employees.*

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32 The subsequent sections address the research design, results, implications and
33 contributions, conclusion, as well as identify limitations and areas for future research.

1 **2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

2 The data used in this study were part of the information collected in a
3 questionnaire survey on factors affecting individual outcomes of hotel employees in
4 Sabah, Malaysia. 500 hotel employees were randomly selected from fourteen hotels of
5 which 358 completed questionnaires were used in the final analysis. There were 150
6 males and 208 females and the age of the respondents ranged between 16 years of age
7 to above 60 years of age. 77.9% of the respondents were tertiary degree holders.

8 Presenteeism was measured using the 6-item instrument designed by Gilbreath
9 and Frew (2008). The perceived job stress was a modified version of the 10-item
10 instrument of Cohen and Williamson's (1988). The 4-item instrument for measuring
11 the happiness construct was adapted from Lyubomsky and Lepper (1999) and Seligman
12 (2006). The responses to each of the three variables were measured on a 7-point Likert-
13 type scale. Table 1 shows the factor loading for each item of the three variables. Item
14 10 and item 4 of the respective variables of perceived job stress and happiness were
15 found with factor loading of less than 0.40, and these two items were excluded in the
16 final analysis (Hair et al., 2014). For each variable, the average score of remaining items
17 was used in the final regression analysis, with a higher score indicating the respondent's
18 increased level of perception of the particular variable.

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21 **TABLE 1**
22 **Factor loading of items in the respective variables**
23 **N = 358**
24

Variables	Factor loading
Presenteeism	
Item 1: <i>I'm unable to concentrate on my job because of work-related stress.</i>	0.81
Item 2: <i>I spend a significant proportion of my workday coping with work stress.</i>	0.80
Item 3: <i>Work stress distracts my attention away from my job tasks.</i>	0.89
Item 4: <i>Mental energy I'd otherwise devote to my work is squandered on work stressors.</i>	0.89
Item 5: <i>I delay starting on new projects at work because of stress.</i>	0.81
Item 6: <i>I spend time talking to co-workers about stressful work situations.</i>	0.65

Perceived job stress	
Item 1: <i>In the last month, you have been upset because of something that has happened unexpectedly in your job.</i>	0.68
Item 2: <i>In the last month, you have felt that you were unable to control important things in your job.</i>	0.73
Item 3: <i>In the last month, you have felt nervous and stressed.</i>	0.75
Item 4: <i>In the last month, you have felt that things were not going your way.</i>	0.56
Item 5: <i>In the last month, you have felt that you could not cope with all the things that you have to do.</i>	0.69
Item 6: <i>In the last month, you have been unable to control annoyances in your life.</i>	0.43
Item 7: <i>In the last month, you have felt that you were not 'on top of things'.</i>	0.51
Item 8: <i>In the last month, you have been angered because of things that were beyond your control.</i>	0.72
Item 9: <i>In the last month, you have been thinking about the things you have yet to accomplish.</i>	0.51
Item 10: <i>In the last month, you have been unable to control the way you spend your time.</i>	0.28
Happiness	
Item 1: <i>In general I consider myself to be happy.</i>	0.87
Item 2: <i>Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself to be happy.</i>	0.88
Item 3: <i>Some people are generally happy; enjoying life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?</i>	0.49
Item 4: <i>Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?</i>	0.19

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The concern of common method bias in this cross-sectional study was mitigated via the application of various procedural approaches as suggested in Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) study. First, assurance of anonymity and indication of an absence of right or wrong answers to the questions helped to reduce social desirability bias and confidentiality of responses were made known to the potential respondents. Fox and Spector (1999) argued that the anonymity of self-reports provides the closest estimations of the relationships among the variables in view of the ethical need of minimizing potential job risk to the respondents. Second, the measurements of the predictors and dependent variable were not in sequential order and intermingled with other variables that formed the broader study. This approach served to reduce the respondents' perception of the direct connection among perceived job stress, presenteeism and happiness. The use of a single source of data as in the self-reported

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1 questionnaire survey might result in an overstatement of relationships among the
2 variables although Conway and Lance (2010) had argued that such an effect might not
3 necessarily be supported. In this study, self-reported measures were appropriate
4 because the respondents were best suited to determine perceptually their respective job
5 stress and presenteeism levels as well as being able to determine their happiness.
6 Further, the variables in this study possessed acceptable validity and reliability values.
7 Together the evidence suggested that substantial method effects could be rule out
8 (Conway and Lance, 2010).

9

10

11 **3. RESULTS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

12 Table 2 shows the goodness-of-fit statistics from the confirmatory factor
13 analysis output. The chi-square (χ^2) goodness-of-fit value, with a significant *p*-value (*p*
14 <0.0001), does not demonstrate a match between the observed covariance matrix and
15 the estimated covariance matrix within sampling variance. Hair et al. (2014, p. 630))
16 observe that this outcome relates to ‘... the problems associated with using this test
17 alone, and the effective sample size...’ of 358 respondents in the present study. An
18 investigation of other selected fit statistics in Table 2 indicates that the various indices
19 are within their respective acceptable threshold levels (Hair et al., 2014). Therefore, the
20 results suggest that the research model yields a reasonably good fit to the data, and thus
21 facilitates the application of all constructs to examine the hypotheses.

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TABLE 2
Results of goodness-of-fit statistics from confirmatory factor analysis
N = 358

Chi-square (χ^2)
Chi-square = 195.87 ($p < 0.0001$)
Degree of freedom = 74
Absolute Fit Measures
Goodness-of-fit (GFI) = 0.92
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.068
90 percent confidence interval for RMSEA = (0.056; 0.080)
Root mean square residual (RMR) = 0.12
Standardized root mean residual (SRMR) = 0.05
Normed chi-square = 2.63
Incremental Fit Indices
Comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.96
Normed fix index (NFI) = 0.94
Non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.95
Parsimony Indices
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = 0.89

Tables 3 and 4 display the descriptive statistics and the correlation among the variables, respectively. The results indicate that Cronbach's alphas for reliability are above the acceptable levels of .70 (Hair et al., 2014). Since the zero-order correlations among the predictors and dependent variable are less than .70, there is no problem with multicollinearity in the regression equation (Pedhazur and Kerlinger, 1982).

TABLE 3
Descriptive and other statistics: Independent and dependent variables
N = 358

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Range	Cronbach alpha coefficient
Perceived job stress	4.21	1.06	1.00 - 7.00	0.84
Presenteeism	3.58	1.38	1.00 - 7.00	0.92
Happiness	4.92	1.08	1.00 - 7.00	0.79

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TABLE 4
Correlation matrix of the variables

Variables	Happiness	Perceived job stress	Presenteeism
Happiness	1.00	0.05 (<i>p</i> =0.3876)	-0.09 (<i>p</i> =0.0942)
Perceived job stress		1.00	0.47 (<i>p</i> <0.0001)
Presenteeism			1.00

Table 5 displays the results of the standard regression analysis (Chia and Koh, 2007). Equation A shows the results of the regression performed on happiness against perceived job stress and presenteeism. The moderating effects of presenteeism on the relationship between perceived job stress and presenteeism are characterized by the interaction term in Equation B.

TABLE 5
Results of multiple regression analysis
with happiness (Y) as the dependent variable
N=358

Variables	Equation A Regression coefficient (Standard Error) <i>t</i> -value	Equation B Regression coefficient (Standard Error) <i>t</i> -value
Perceived job stress (X ₁)	0.11 (0.06) <i>t</i> = 1.88 <i>p</i> =0.0611	-0.16 (0.12) <i>t</i> = -1.33 <i>p</i> =0.1841
Presenteeism (X ₂)	-0.11 (0.05) <i>t</i> = -2.37 <i>p</i> =0.0184	-0.45 (0.14) <i>t</i> = -3.22 <i>p</i> =0.0014
Interaction between Perceived job stress (X ₁) and Presenteeism (X ₂)	–	0.08 (0.03) <i>t</i> = 2.58 <i>p</i> =0.0104
<i>R</i> ²	1.76%	3.57%
Change in <i>R</i> ² (due to interaction)	–	1.81%
<i>F</i> -value	3.18 <i>p</i> =0.0426	4.37 <i>p</i> =0.0049

From the results of Equation B in Table 5, the interaction term shows a positive *t*-value (2.58) which is statistically significant at the .05 level. This outcome provides support for the presence of a significant two-way interaction between perceived job stress and presenteeism on happiness as proposed in Hypothesis H1a. The results confirm a moderating role of presenteeism in the relationship between perceived job stress and happiness. Following Gul and Chia (1994), and Chia and Koh (2007), the

1 partial derivative of Equation B over X_1 (perceived job stress) gives the following
2 results:

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4 $\partial Y/\partial X_1 = -0.16 + 0.08 X_2$ --- Equation (C)

5

6 In Equation (C), the effect of perceived job stress (X_1) on happiness (Y) is a
7 function of the degree of presenteeism (X_2). Equation (C) yields zero when X_2 has a
8 value of 2.00. The value of 2.00 is the inflection point for this population sample. The
9 graph in Figure 1 depicts the partial derivative of Equation (C).

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11 **FIGURE 1**
12 **Graph showing the effects of presenteeism (X_2) on the relationship**
13 **between perceived job stress (X_1) and happiness (Y)**

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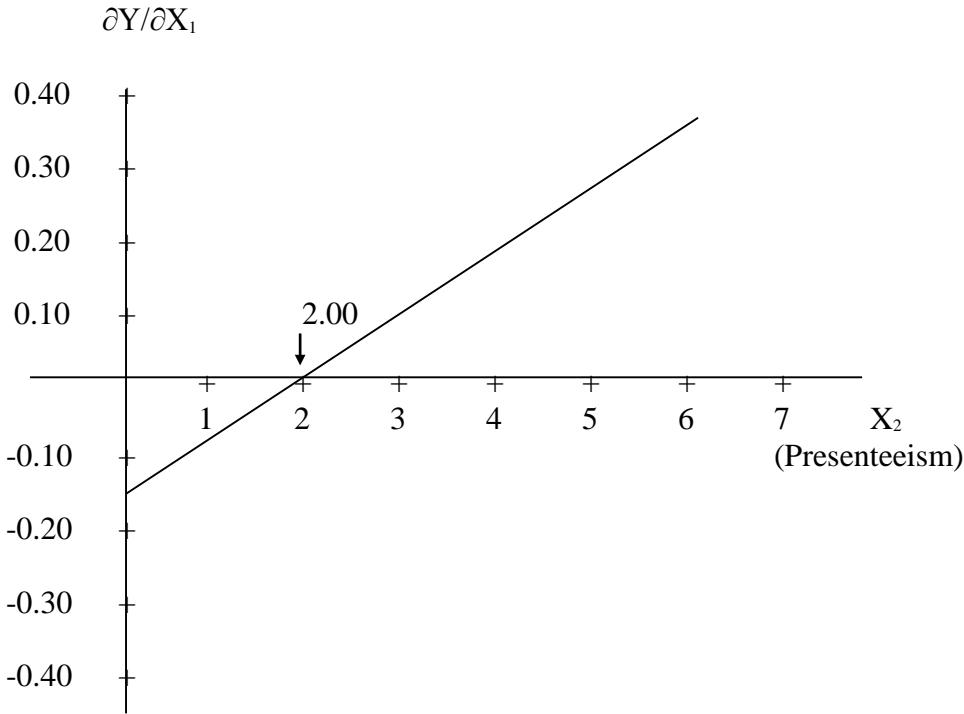
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37 When X_2 is above the value of 2.00, the partial derivative equation is positive
38 and is negative when X_2 is below 2.00. As depicted in Figure 1, this change of direction
39 suggests that perceived job stress has a contingent effect on happiness over the range
40 of the degree of presenteeism of hotel employees. The results indicate that the higher
41 the degree of presenteeism (that is, at any value higher than the point of inflection), the

1 greater is its positive effect on the relationship between perceived job stress and
2 happiness. In contrast, the results suggest that the lower the degree of presenteeism (that
3 is, at any value lower than the point of inflection), the greater is its negative effect on
4 the perceived job stress-happiness relationship. Together these results provide support
5 for Hypothesis H1b.

6 While the literature on presenteeism tends to emphasise its negative effect on
7 organizational and individual outcomes (e.g., Aronsson, 2000; Bockerman and
8 Laukkanen, 2009), the findings have identified the moderating role of presenteeism
9 when viewed simultaneously with perceived job stress on happiness. The findings suggest
10 that presenteeism can trigger positive affect, such as the happiness of hotel employees
11 who encounter high level of perceived stress in the workplace. These findings are
12 plausible since stress and happiness do not operate in isolation in practice. It may be
13 that presenteeism enables hotel employees to be both motivated in view of the perceived
14 sense of control and able to keep abreast of their work along with contributing to the
15 interdependence workload with their colleagues. Presenteeism behaviour may also
16 provide psychological benefits derived from a sense of greater responsibility and
17 autonomy in managing job stress, as well as conferring advantages, such as spending
18 more time in the workplace to resolve conflicting situations.

19 The adoption of an interactionist approach generates additional information on
20 the contingent effect of perceived job stress on happiness over the range of the degree
21 of presenteeism of hotel employees to complement existing evidence on the direct
22 negative relationship between stress and happiness. The findings facilitate our
23 understanding regarding the two-way interaction effects of perceived job stress and
24 presenteeism on an outcome variable at the individual level. This insight provides a
25 means for assisting the development of human resources practices to benefit the highly
26 stressed employees in the hospitality industry. For example, management and human
27 resource practitioners may make decisions on how to handle perceived job stress
28 differently. They should focus their attention on other programmes and policies in the
29 development of a better social support network including a supportive working
30 environment with a flexible work schedule (Trompe and Blomme, 2012). Such
31 strategies will enable the stressed employees to feel happier and more engaged when
32 compare to those working in an environment where there is weak social support (Lee
33 and Ok, 2015). These strategies are potentially more viable as opposed to the direct

1 approach of simply requiring employees to undergo job stress awareness programmes
2 which may not necessarily be helpful, given the inherent presence of perceived stress
3 in the hospitality industry as well as the social stigma facing an individual who is seen
4 as being unable to handle job stress within the cultural context of Asian countries.

5 Similarly, the findings may encourage management and human resource
6 practitioners to take alternative actions when presenteeism is viewed differently in light
7 of the findings. Normally, enforcing mandatory leave of absence as a means to curtail
8 the presenteeism of employees will be the most direct approach when presenteeism is
9 viewed in isolation. By embracing presenteeism behaviour as a potential means of
10 allowing the hotel employees to increase their feelings of commitment and display good
11 organization citizenship behaviour and considering presenteeism in the context of its
12 moderating role in the stress-happiness relationship, management and human resource
13 practitioners may implement other forms of positive organizational support policies to
14 influence the psychological aspect of the workplace. Following Chiang et al.'s (2010,
15 p. 30) observation that it is easier to manage the psychological context of the workplace
16 as compared with influencing the structural aspects of the job, it is proposed that a
17 provision of appropriate care practices may impact on personal motivation as well as
18 engendering a sense of loyalty and reciprocity from the employees. These feelings of
19 hotel employees can potentially increase their level of happiness and moral, and reduce
20 their turnover intentions.

21 The implications suggest alternative strategies to the prevalent solutions of
22 attending stress management programmes and taking mandatory leave from work when
23 managing job stress and presenteeism of employees. In addition, the findings deepen
24 our understanding of the consequences of presenteeism. Research on presenteeism has
25 mainly focused on main-order effects of predictor variables on presenteeism rather than
26 outcomes (e.g., Admasachew and Dawson, 2011; Aronsson and Gustafsson, 2005). The
27 findings draw attention to the relevance of investigating outcomes of presenteeism and
28 thus constitute a contribution to the organization literature.

31 **5. CONCLUSION**

32 The findings add to the limited investigation of presenteeism in the hospitality
33 industry (Cullen and McLaughlin, 2006) and contribute to what '... little is known

1 about stress and well-being in the hospitality industry...’ (O’Neill and Davis,
2 (2011:385). In addition, this research note provides empirical evidence on the potential
3 benefits of presenteeism and supports the theoretical arguments forwarded by Johns
4 (2011) and the observations in Johansen et al.’s (2014) study. An awareness of the
5 moderating role of presenteeism in the stress-happiness relationship will enable
6 management and human resources practitioners to apply appropriate social and
7 psychological intervention strategies that can enhance the happiness of hotel
8 employees.

9 10 11 **6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE** 12 **RESEARCH**

13 The cross-sectional nature of the data suggests only the identification of
14 associations between variables and highlights two areas of weaknesses: (a) causality of
15 relationships cannot be established, and (b) other potentially significant differences
16 among the hotels in the sample have not been investigated. It is proposed that case
17 studies and longitudinal studies be conducted in future investigations (Gul and Chia,
18 1994; Chia and Koh, 2007) to gather evidence to complement the findings of this study.
19 For example, a longitudinal study can take the form of tracking an identified group of
20 hotel employees to assess whether or not there are changes to their levels of happiness
21 when their perceived job stress changes over time.

22 A second limitation relates to the test for non-response bias. Whilst some
23 controls were in place during the data compilation stage, it was not known which
24 employees and companies responded to our survey. This was because the respondents
25 were provided with anonymity to achieve a higher degree of independence and honesty
26 in their responses. The third limitation involves the threats of common method bias
27 although the various strategies adopted in the present study should help to minimize the
28 threats.

29 While the results were generated from respondents in different hotels of
30 varying sizes and a wide range of organizational conditions in Sabah, East Malaysia,
31 the findings might not be representative of the hotel industry in Malaysia and other
32 Asian countries. To increase the scope of the findings, future investigation could
33 examine whether the observed moderating effects of presenteeism on the stress-

1 happiness relationship has happened across other more cosmopolitan states in Malaysia
2 as well as in other Asian countries where diversities are found in cultural norms and
3 operating environments. In addition, the results indicate the presenteeism instrument as
4 a potentially useful measurement tool for both academic researchers and human
5 resource professionals in Asia and other non-western countries. Adoption of the
6 instrument in future studies will help to verify its validity and reliability in these
7 regions.

8 Although this study has demonstrated the interaction effects of perceived job
9 stress and presenteeism on the happiness of hotel employees, these individual-level
10 variables may be significantly affected by organizational-level variables. For example,
11 a possible research idea would be to investigate the three-way interaction effects of
12 perceived stress, presenteeism, and ethical work climate on the happiness of hotel
13 employees. This would provide insight as to whether the work environment can
14 influence the identified relationship found in the present study.

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