



Job embeddedness and employee performance of some selected federal medical centres in North-central, Nigeria: A moderating effect of job stress

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to investigate the effect of job embeddedness on employee performance in some selected public hospitals in North-Central Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the moderating effect of job stress. The research is grounded in the Conservation of Resources Theory, aiming to explore how psychological attachment, social connection and career alignment influence employee performance through the lens of job stress. This study utilized a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the proposed relationships. The target population comprised 7,503 medical personnel, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, and other allied health professionals across five Federal Medical Centres (FMCs) in North-Western Nigeria. A sample size of 380 respondents was calculated using Yamane's formula, based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale and subsequently analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results revealed that career alignment, job stress, psychological attachment, social connection have positive and significant effect on employee performance. For the indirect relationship, job stress significantly moderate the relationship between psychological attachment and employee performance, job stress significantly moderate the relationship between social connection and employee performance, that job stress significantly moderate the relationship between career alignment and employee performance. The study recommended that public hospitals should create structured career development plans, including training, mentoring, and opportunities for advancement, to ensure employees' career goals align with organizational objectives.

Keywords: Career Alignment, Employee Performance, Job Embeddedness, Job Stress, Psychological Attachment

1. Introduction

In public hospitals, effective human resource management (HRM) practices such as recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and motivation are essential to developing and retaining a productive workforce. Employee performance, a critical outcome of HRM practices, indicates the extent to which

employees effectively execute their responsibilities and support the achievement of hospital objectives. High performance enhances patient satisfaction and hospital efficiency, while poor HRM practices lead to delays, errors, and reduced service quality. Strengthening HRM systems that promote engagement

and retention is therefore crucial to sustaining effective healthcare delivery. According to a Statista (2025) survey revealed Toronto General University Health Network in Canada as the top performing hospital worldwide, with a 90.1% score in reputation, patient satisfaction, and overall quality outcomes. The World Health Organization (2023) further reported that African public hospitals particularly in South Africa and Kenya recorded 54.9% in patient satisfaction, 61% in patient safety, and 70.8% in service effectiveness. Similarly, Nigeria's healthcare system showed a 45% performance capacity, with under 30% of citizens satisfied with public hospital services, ranking 142nd out of 195 countries in access and quality (AHOP, 2025). The low level of hospital service delivery in the country may be attributed to insufficient welfare provisions for medical personnel and the government's inability to foster adequate job embeddedness among healthcare employees. Research has shown that job embeddedness positively influences employee performance in public healthcare delivery by reinforcing employees' psychological and social ties to their organizations. This is because embedded workers particularly healthcare workers are more likely to remain committed, motivated, and productive resulting in improved patient care, efficiency, and sustainability of public hospital services delivery.

Job embeddedness (JE) is the extent to which healthcare workers feel connected (links), compatible (fit), and invested (sacrifice) in their job and work environment (Mitchell et al., 2001). This is why in public hospitals, where patient care depends heavily on human interactions and teamwork, job embeddedness plays a critical role in shaping employees' sense of belonging,

purpose, and loyalty to the institution (Uzochukwu et al., 2018). Considerable researchers have utilized fit, links, and sacrifice as dimensions of job embeddedness. However, this study used psychological attachment, social connection, and career alignment as dimensions of job embeddedness. This is because the dimensions are align more closely with HRM realities in developing nations, where emotional bonds, social belonging, and career growth opportunities are crucial determinants of workforce stability and service delivery quality.

Psychological attachment refers to the emotional and cognitive connection that employees establish with their organization, job, or role (Fejoh & Onanuga, 2023; Demir & Zehir, 2021). It involves a sense of belonging, identification, and commitment to one's work, which drives employees to put forth extra effort, remain loyal, and engage in behaviours that exceed their formal job responsibilities.

Social connection refers to the quality and strength of interpersonal relationships, teamwork, and social support that employees experience within their workplace (Hussain et al., 2023). It reflects the extent to which employees feel connected to colleagues, supervisors, and teams, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support.

Career Alignment refers to the degree to which an employee's current job corresponds with their long-term career goals, aspirations, and professional growth objectives (Ng & Feldman, 2012; Zeng et al., 2018). It reflects how well the tasks, responsibilities, and developmental opportunities provided by an organization support an employee's personal career trajectory. Employees with high job embeddedness tend to demonstrate stronger task performance, organizational citizenship behaviour, and organizational

commitment (Karatepe & Ngeche, 2012). In hospitals, embedded staff is more likely to adhere to established protocols, deliver quality healthcare services, and exceed formal job requirements, thereby improving patient outcomes and operational efficiency.

However, this situation does not adequately reflect the reality in Nigeria, where health professionals, including doctors and nurses, are increasingly migrating to countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates. Major drivers of this migration include inadequate remuneration and welfare packages, limited allowances, unpaid hazard or night-shift bonuses, and weak pension schemes, all of which make foreign opportunities more attractive. In addition, chronic staff shortages in public hospitals contribute to work overload and burnout, compelling existing personnel to undertake excessive responsibilities. Poor infrastructure and inadequate medical equipment further limit effective service delivery and constrain professional development opportunities. Weak governance, unfavourable working conditions, inconsistent policies, and insufficient leadership support continue to reduce job satisfaction among healthcare workers (Abinabo et al., 2023; WHO, 2023; Omolade et al., 2022). Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge by examining the moderating role of job stress in the relationship between job embeddedness and employee performance among selected public hospitals in North-Central Nigeria.

Employee performance remains a critical determinant of hospital effectiveness because it influences the quality, timeliness, and safety of healthcare delivery. In public hospitals, particularly within Nigeria's North-Central region, maintaining high levels of employee

performance has become increasingly difficult due to persistent staff turnover, declining morale, and weak commitment among healthcare professionals. Despite government interventions through recruitment, training, and welfare initiatives, the sector continues to experience inefficiencies manifested in delayed service delivery, medical errors, absenteeism, and low patient satisfaction (WHO, 2023; AHOP, 2025). Existing evidence indicates that these challenges are associated not only with inadequate resources but also with employees' weak attachment to their jobs and institutions. Several scholars have adopted the model proposed by Mitchell et al. (2001), which identifies fit, links, and sacrifice as the major dimensions of job embeddedness. Nevertheless, the model does not sufficiently explain how Human Resource Management (HRM) practices, including rewards, performance appraisal, training, and financial incentives, influence embeddedness and employee performance (Fejoh & Onanuga, 2023; Ng & Feldman, 2010; Karatepe & Ngeche, 2012). To address this limitation, the current study refines and contextualizes the model by incorporating additional dimensions such as psychological attachment, social connection, and career alignment. These dimensions are introduced to better reflect the realities of diverse cultural, industrial, and economic environments where the explanatory power of the original model appears inadequate.

Although longitudinal designs provide valuable insights into temporal changes, they are also associated with methodological limitations. Previous studies (Fejoh & Onanuga, 2023; Ng & Feldman, 2010; Omolade et al., 2022; Zeng et al., 2018) employed longitudinal approaches that may have introduced testing and learning effects, as respondents became familiar with

repeated survey administration and subsequently adjusted their responses. Such effects can threaten the internal validity and reliability of findings. To overcome this limitation, the present study adopts a cross-sectional design in order to provide a more objective assessment of the variables under investigation.

Furthermore, earlier studies suggest that the relationship between job embeddedness and employee performance may be negative or non-significant in contexts characterized by advanced Human Resource Management (HRM) capacity (Qin et al., 2022). For instance, studies by Ampofo et al. (2022), Nguyen et al. (2023), Philip and Medina-Craven (2022), and Yusoff et al. (2022) reported weak or inverse relationships. These findings highlight both theoretical and practical gaps, indicating that job embeddedness alone may not necessarily enhance employee performance but may instead depend on organizational and contextual conditions. Consequently, the present study introduces job stress as a moderating variable to determine the conditions under which job embeddedness positively influences employee performance in public hospitals.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Employee Performance

The era of globalization demands companies to achieve superior effectiveness and efficiency, as these qualities strengthen their ability to compete and survive in increasingly intense business conditions (Andreas, 2022). Among the various factors that influence employee performance, motivation plays a crucial role. As such, organizations must pay serious attention to employee motivation in managing their human resources. Utin and Yosepha (2019) defined employee performance as

work quality and quantity achieved by an employee in carrying out his function in accordance with the responsibilities given to him. Employee performance refers to the level of achievement an individual demonstrates over a given period when completing assigned tasks, compared to established standards, targets, or agreed-upon criteria. According to Hajjali et al. (2022), employee performance reflects the actions carried out by employees in fulfilling their job responsibilities within an organization. Furthermore, performance is interconnected with job satisfaction, the level of compensation provided, and is shaped by individual competencies, talents, and personal attributes.

The study operationalizes employee performance as effectiveness of workers to carry out their tasks, meet organizational expectations, and contribute to achieving institutional goals. In the public hospitals, employee performance is especially critical because it directly affects the quality of healthcare services, patient satisfaction, and overall hospital outcomes. High performing employee's doctors, nurses, administrators, and support staff provide timely, accurate, and compassionate care. Poor performance can lead to medical errors, delayed treatments, and reduced patient trust (Hajjali et al., 2022).

2.2 Concept of Job Embeddedness

Job embeddedness (JE) encompasses various influences that affect whether employees choose to stay with their organization. It is conceptualized as a web that can hold individuals in place by shaping their decisions to remain or exit. Mitchell et al. (2001) explained JE using two primary forms: on-the-job (organizational) embeddedness and off-the-job (community) embeddedness. Their framework, structured as a 2×3 matrix, identifies six aspects of JE: job-related links, external links, job fit,

community fit, job sacrifice, and community sacrifice. The extent to which employees become integrated into their work setting and community is determined by these dimensions. Holtom et al. (2006) further explained that job embeddedness consists of three core elements: links, which represent the formal and informal relationships an employee has with people or institutions; fit, which reflects how well an employee feels aligned or comfortable with their organization and surroundings; and sacrifice, which refers to the material or psychological losses an employee expects if they leave the organization. According to Wang et al. (2024), when JE is high, employees become more engaged in their job roles, whereas low JE may lead employees to disengage, develop negative job attitudes, or even consider leaving.

The study defines job embeddedness as the extent to which employees feel connected, attached, and rooted in their workplace and community. It explains why employees stay in their jobs rather than why they leave. Job embeddedness is usually shaped by three key components. In public hospitals, employees form strong professional bonds through teamwork, multidisciplinary collaboration, and long-term working relationships. These links increase commitment and reduce the desire to leave.

2.2.1 Dimensions of Job Embeddedness

2.2.1.1 Psychological Attachment

Performance is a major outcome examined in attachment theory research. Employees with secure attachment typically feel confident in facing challenges and are more willing to trust colleagues and supervisors (Vîrgă et al., 2019) In contrast; those with insecure attachment may experience ongoing worries due to unmet attachment needs. These concerns can distract them at work and negatively impact their job

performance. Many studies highlight the positive association between secure attachment and extra-role behaviors such as job performance, organizational citizenship, and prospects for promotion (Yip et al 2018). Employees such as doctors, nurses, and administrative staff work in high-pressure environments where patient needs, resource limitations, and workload demands can be intense. This is because when employees feel psychologically attached to their hospitals, it shows stronger commitment to patient care, even when conditions are challenging. Such employees may go beyond formal job responsibilities, such as helping coworkers, showing empathy to patients, and contributing to hospital improvements (Vîrgă et al., 2019).

For the purpose of this study psychological attachment is the emotional bond, sense of belonging, and personal connection an employee develops with their organization. In the context of public hospitals, psychological attachment plays a critical role in shaping staff attitudes, motivation, and performance. The workers may persevere despite constraints, because they feel emotionally connected to the hospital's mission and purpose. Performance is one of the primary outcomes that is investigated in the attachment literature (Harms, 2011). Secure attachment makes people feel capable of taking on challenges and increases their inclination to trust others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). People with insecure attachment tend to have concerns related to unmet attachment needs. These concerns affect their concentration at work and have a disruptive effect on job performance (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). In most attachment studies, the primary focus is on the positive relationship between secure attachment and extra-role performance, such as organizational citizenship behavior (Little, Nelson,

Wallace, & Johnson, 2011) or job performance and job promotion.

2.2.1.2 Social Connection

The expectation of being welcomed and accepted by colleagues, or even treated intimately like a member of a family has effects on the behaviour of organizational actors (Euerby & Burns, 2014). Social connection is an umbrella term that refers to the ways in which one can connect to others physically, behaviourally, cognitively, and emotionally. Social connection can be thought of as a continuum of high social connection (large social network, high social support, relationship satisfaction) to low social connection (or social disconnection, social isolation, loneliness, poor quality relationships (Holt-Lunstad, 2018). Organizations can benefit by employees being more socially connected, workplace support from co-workers, supervisors, and the organization, and increases work engagement, a psychological state which includes dedication and absorption with work (Maciel & Camargo, 2016).

The study defines social connection as quality of interpersonal relationships, sense of belonging, and interactions among employees within an organization. This means that organizations can benefit when employees and leaders are engaged at workplace, as work engagement and workplace friendships are associated with increased organizational commitment (an employee's willingness to work and desire to stay with the organization), improved performance outcomes, and employee psychological safety. For instance, in public healthcare delivery system, strong social connection among doctors, nurses, administrators, and other healthcare workers are critical because healthcare delivery depends heavily on teamwork, communication, and collaboration (Maciel & Camargo, 2016).

2.2.1.3 Career Alignment

Deci and Ryan (2000) define career alignment as the extent to which a job supports an individual's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are satisfied, individuals experience higher intrinsic motivation and well-being at work. This means when a person's career role accurately reflects their evolving self-concept, abilities, and life goals. Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) described career alignment is as the compatibility between an individual's knowledge, skills, values, and long-term goals and the demands and rewards of their job role. Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) emphasize that strong person job fit positively influences performance, satisfaction, and organizational commitment. That is the extent to which an individual's personality, interests, and values correspond with the characteristics of their work environment. When career alignment is low, several negative outcomes are common such as job dissatisfaction, counterproductive work behaviour and higher turnover intention (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In this context, career alignment is refers to the extent to which the roles, responsibilities, and career trajectories of healthcare professionals match their competencies, professional values, motivations, and long-term career goals within public health organizations. This is so because public health organizations such as government hospitals, primary healthcare centres, and regulatory health agencies operate in environments characterized by high service demands, limited resources, complex patient needs and amongst others (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

2.3 Moderating Role of Job Stress

Stress can be understood as a multifaceted psychological and physical response to

situations where personal limits are stretched beyond control. Job stress occurs when there is a mismatch between assigned tasks and an employee's abilities or resources, leading to potentially damaging emotional and physical outcomes (Montano & Llorens). Job stress is a state of emotional and physical strain that arises when job tasks, demands, or expectations do not match an employee's skills, personal needs, or available resources. This misalignment results in harmful psychological and physiological consequences for the individual and can negatively affect organizational outcomes (Schaufeli & Taris, 2021). Job embeddedness has been widely recognized as a predictor of employee performance, retention, and wellbeing (Mitchell et al., 2001; Dukhaykh et al., 2023; Schmidbauer, 2025).

However, emerging evidence suggests that the strength and direction of this relationship are contingent upon the level of job stress experienced by employees. High job stress can deplete personal resources and energy, thereby weakening the normally positive effect of job embeddedness on outcomes such as performance and wellbeing. Conversely, when job stress is low, employees are better able to leverage their embeddedness through organizational fit, formal and informal links, and perceived sacrifices leading to enhanced productivity and effectiveness (Mitchell et al., 2001). Based on these theoretical and empirical insights, job stress is introduced as a moderating variable in the conceptual model. This aligns with moderation logic in organizational research, where a moderator is a variable that affects the direction or strength of a predictor outcome relationship (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Introducing job stress as a moderator allows the study to capture boundary conditions of job

embeddedness effects and offers practical insights into when and how embeddedness contributes to optimal employee performance.

2.4.1 Review of Empirical Studies

2.4.1.1 The Effect of Psychological Attachment and Employee Performance

Aggarwal and Singh (2024) examined how emotional attachment and perceived social support influence the well-being of young adults, using a sample of 162 college students and applying correlation and regression analyses. Their results revealed a significant link between emotional attachment and well-being, with both variables showing a negative association. However, perceived social support did not exhibit a statistically significant correlation with well-being. The study's sample of 162 college students is small and narrowly defined, making it difficult to generalize the findings to all young adults. Factors such as academic stress, life transitions, or cultural context may have uniquely influenced the results.

Sagone et al. (2023) investigated the links between psychological attachment style, psychological well-being, and relationship status through a cross-sectional study involving 393 Italian young adults. Results indicated that young adults in committed relationships experienced higher psychological well-being than their single counterparts. Singles were more likely to show attachment patterns reflecting avoidance, discomfort with closeness, and treating relationships as secondary. In this group, psychological well-being was moderately and positively predicted by a confident attachment style but strongly and negatively predicted by an approval-seeking style. For participants in stable relationships, the need for approval also strongly and negatively predicted psychological well-being. The constructs

psychological attachment style, well-being, and relationship status were assessed through self-report scales. This may increase the risk of social desirability bias, especially when reporting sensitive issues such as relationship closeness or avoidance. This could inflate or distort observed associations.

Virgă et al. (2019) psychological attachment styles and employee performance: The mediating role of burnout with a sample size of 201 Dutch employees and 178 Romanian working students. The structural equation modelling to test this mediation model and its possible invariance across both samples. The results showed that attachment related anxiety was positively related to burnout, which was in turn negatively related to job performance. Attachment-related avoidance was not significantly associated with burnout or performance. The study combined 201 Dutch employees and 178 Romanian working students, two groups with potentially different work demands, cultural norms, and role expectations. While the authors tested invariance, differences in employment status, professional experience, and cultural context may still influence the mediation model, complicating direct comparisons.

2.4.1.2 The Effect of Social Connection and Employee Performance

De Oliveira and Camargo (2016) in their study social connection in organizations: the effects of local ties on job engagement and performance. The study carried out the survey with 249 respondents. The results show that only cognitive engagement and performance are influenced by degrees of intra-organizational social connection. These results are explored in the conclusions of the article. While the study concludes that intra organizational social connections influence performance, it does not

examine how or why this occurs. Potential mechanisms such as knowledge sharing, trust building, or social support are not empirically tested, limiting theoretical contribution.

Ashraf and Javed (2014) conducted a study impact of social connection on employee performance drawn participant from three major manufacturing companies at Ewekoro in Ogun state, Nigeria with a total of 106 respondents were purposively selected for study. The study data obtained was analysed using Pearson product moment correlation. Findings revealed that majority of the responded that social needs through recognition has a strong positive effect on employee performance; also empowerment has a positive influence on employee performance, finally job autonomy and participation affect employee performance. Although the study identifies relationships between recognition, empowerment, autonomy, and performance, the theoretical framework linking these constructs to "social connection" is weak. A stronger grounding in social capital theory or organizational behaviour theory would enhance coherence.

2.4.1.3 The Effect of Career Alignment and Employee Performance

In a study the impact of career alignment on organizational performance: The case of Ethiopian universities conducted by Gede and Huluka (2023) with total of 365 sample size drawn from employees in the institution using structural equation modelling of PLS for the analysis. The findings revealed that, goal clarity, role clarity, and process clarity all have a significant and favourable effect on organizational performance in higher education. Findings of the study reveal also that organizational performance varies among study institution based on implementation level of strategic alignment. Gede and Huluka (2023) uses

goal, role, and process clarity as indicators of career alignment, but this narrow focus overlooks broader elements such as career organization fit, employee development, and long term career paths making it oversimplify the concept.

Alvi et al. (2020) in their study relationship of career alignment and organizational performance through the path of business strategy conducted with a total sample size of 303 of retail customers in the banking sector of Lahore, Pakistan. The study used structural equation modelling (SEM) using SmartPLS to test the proposed hypotheses. Findings showed significant impacts of Business Strategy on career success and organizational performance and for impact of these two kinds (Business Strategy Prospectors and Business Strategy Defenders) on organizational performance. The impact of two other factors (Business Strategy Analysers and Business Strategy Reactors) on organizational performance was insignificant. Career success has positive significant effect on organizational performance. Career success partially mediates with Business Strategy (with its two kinds Business Strategy Prospector and Business Strategy Defender) with organizational performance. From the findings the studies used SmartPLS, the authors do not elaborate on assessments of multicollinearity, measurement validity, or common method bias, limiting the confidence in the results.

De Vos and Cambré (2017) Career alignment in high performing organizations: A set-theoretic approach with sample size of 293 human resource directors' organizations using structural equation modelling (SEM). The SEM analyses suggested that only supportive and developmental practices are positively associated with high performance. However, organizational

career management is associated with high performance. The most prevalent configuration combined supportive and developmental practices with I-deals and individual responsibility for career management. The study uses a set-theoretic approach but still employs SEM. It is not entirely clear how the authors integrate the SEM results with set-theoretic logic (which normally aligns with fsQCA rather than SEM). This raises questions about methodological coherence.

2.4.1.4 The Moderating effect of Job Stress and Employee Performance

Sagadavin and Basit (2017) investigated impact of job stress on employee with 136 respondents using regression analysis. The study found that time pressure and role ambiguity have significant and negative influence on employee performance. The other two factors of workload and lack of motivation do not have any significant influence on employee performance. While regression is useful, the study may have benefitted from more robust analytical approaches (e.g., SEM) to examine potential indirect effects or interactions among stressors. Relying solely on regression may oversimplify the stress–performance relationship.

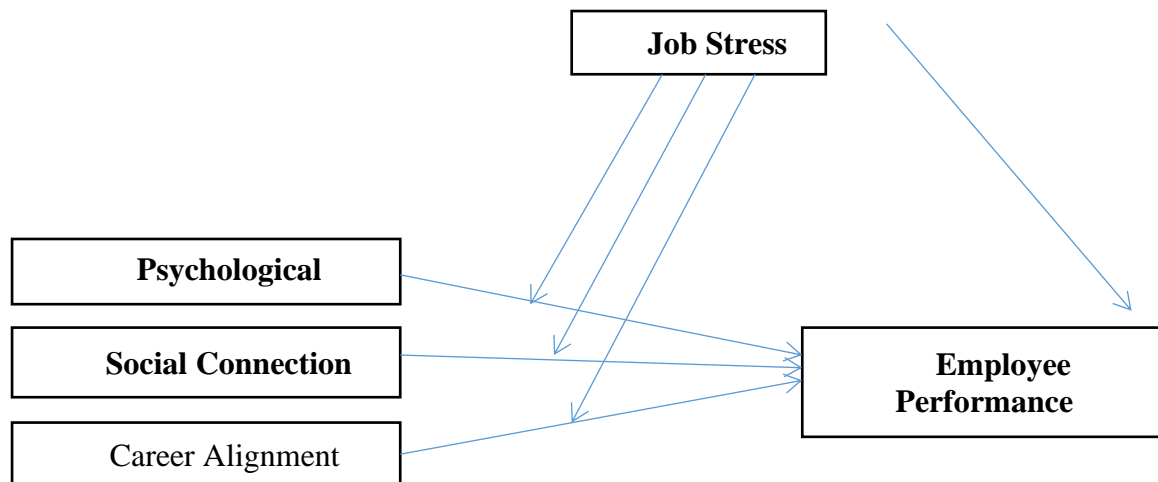
Jalagat (2017) conducted study determinants of job stress and its relationship on employee job performance among employees at Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Al-Bahja Center, using regression analysis. The findings indicated that, there is significant relationship between job stress and employee performance. Results also revealed that both independent variables: underutilization of skills and work overload significantly correlates to employee, while there was no significant relationship between role ambiguity and employee performance. The study frames job stress in terms of

skill underutilization, work overload, and role ambiguity, but it does not clarify whether these variables represent job stress dimensions or separate constructs influencing performance. This lack of conceptual clarity can blur interpretation. Khuong and Yen (2016) investigate the effects of job stress on employee job performance-a case study at Dong Xuyen industrial zone, Vietnam. with total samples size of 378 respondents. The study used multiple regression, and path analysis. Findings revealed that working factors had significant and positive influence on job stress and in contrast, job stress had negative influence on employee job performance. In addition, this research also found that career development did not directly affect employee job performance, but indirectly proposed relationship model.

through job stress. Like the other studies, this research uses a cross-sectional design, preventing causal inferences. Longitudinal data would better capture how job stress evolves and affects performance over time.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study presents the hypothesized relationships among the study variables. Job Embeddedness (JE) is positioned as the independent variable with a direct influence on Employee Performance (EP), the dependent variable. Job Stress (JS) is incorporated as a moderating variable that affects the strength and direction of the relationship between Job Embeddedness and Employee Performance, thus providing a comprehensive representation of the p



(Source: Researcher, 2025)

Figure 2.5 depicts the conceptual framework for the study, highlighting the hypothesized relationships among the variables. Job embeddedness (JE) functions as the independent construct and is represented by psychological attachment, social connection, and career alignment. Employee performance (EP) is the dependent construct, while job stress (JS) is modelled as a moderating variable

that conditions the effect of job embeddedness on employee performance.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory as its theoretical foundation. The rationale for this choice is that COR Theory provides a robust framework for explaining the relationship between job embeddedness and employee performance, with job stress serving as a moderating variable. Within this perspective, the dimensions of

job embeddedness psychological attachment, social connection, and career alignment constitute valuable resources, including emotional commitment, social support, professional identity, and career development opportunities. The theory posits that the availability and accumulation of such resources enhance employees' capacity to cope with job demands and perform their duties effectively

Despite its wide application in organizational and stress-related research COR Theory has attracted several scholarly criticisms. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argued that COR Theory emphasizes objective resource loss and gain but pays limited attention to how individuals subjectively interpret or appraise stressors. Ganster and Rosen (2013) critic that stress reactions are not solely driven by resource loss but also by individual perceptions and meaning-making processes.

However, the theory best fit the study because it provides a strong theoretical basis for understanding job stress as a moderator and conceptually links job embeddedness to employee performance. According to COR Theory, psychological attachment is an important emotional and personal resource, reflecting employees' sense of belonging and commitment to their organization. Healthcare professionals with strong attachment draw on emotional and cognitive resources that boost motivation, resilience, and task performance. Social connection represents key social resources such as teamwork, trust, collegial support, and interpersonal networks, which enhance cooperation, knowledge sharing, and emotional support, thereby improving coordination of care and reducing role ambiguity in federal medical centres. Career alignment, from a COR perspective, strengthens employees' resource

caravans by aligning skills and career goals with organizational roles, increasing job meaningfulness, motivating development, and improving performance. Job stress moderates the link between psychological attachment and performance, with manageable stress supporting performance, while excessive stress depletes resources and weakens its positive effect.

Research hypothesis

The following null hypothesis will be tested in this study:

H01: There is no relationship between career alignment and employee performance of some selected public Hospitals in North-central, Nigeria

H02: There is no relationship between job stress and employee performance of some selected public Hospitals in North-central, Nigeria

H03: There is no relationship between psychological attachment and employee performance of some selected public Hospitals in North-central, Nigeria

H04: There is no relationship between social connection and employee performances of some selected public Hospitals in North-central, Nigeria

H05: Job stress does not significantly moderate the relationship between psychological attachment and employee performance of some selected public Hospitals in North-central, Nigeria

H06: Job stress does not significantly moderate the relationship between social connection and employee performance of some selected public Hospitals in North-central, Nigeria

H07: Job stress does not significantly moderate the relationship between career alignment and employee performance of some selected public Hospitals in North-central, Nigeria.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a cross-sectional approach,

which is appropriate for obtaining information on the variables of interest. This method is efficient because data are gathered at a single point in time, making it a more economical and less time consuming option compared to longitudinal designs that involve repeated measurements.

The study's target population consists of 7,503 medical personnel including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, and others from five Federal Medical Centres (FMCs) in North-Western Nigeria: FMC Jabi-Abuja (FCT), FMC Bida (Niger State), FMC Makurdi (Benue State), FMC Wase (Plateau State), and FMC Keffi (Nasarawa State), based on figures from the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (FMHSW, 2024). The selection of FMCs is justified by their role as tertiary-level hospitals that deliver advanced and highly specialized healthcare services, necessitating a dedicated and stable workforce. This study selecting FMCs across these states in the North-western Nigeria to ensures coverage of diverse socio economic and demographic settings, improving the representativeness of the findings. The study employed a total sample of 380 medical professionals drawn from five Federal Medical Centres in North-western Nigeria; with the sample size determined using the Yamane (1967) formula to ensure adequate and representative population coverage. The justification of using this formula is because it produces a sample size that is neither too small to compromise statistical power nor too large to waste

resources, as it strengthens the reliability and validity of the study results. The study adopted a simple random sampling method, ensuring that each individual had an equal probability of being chosen, which reduces sampling bias and improves representativeness.

To mitigate potential non-response bias and enhance statistical power, the study increased the calculated sample size by 30%, yielding a total of 114 respondents making it a total of 494. These respondents were drawn from across the five federal medical centres. The study collected data through a validated self-administered questionnaire containing closed-ended questions rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). The instrument was developed specifically for this research. Demographic data were analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of simple percentages, whereas the hypothesized relationships were examined using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with Smart-PLS 4.

4. Results and Discussion

Rate of Response

The study distributed 494 questionnaires, of which 425 were returned, yielding an overall response rate of 86%. After screening the returned questionnaires, 45 were excluded due to incomplete responses. Consequently, 380 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis, representing a usable response rate of 77%, which is considered acceptable for organizational research (Dillman et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2019).

Table 1 Response Rate of the Questionnaires

Response Rate Category	Frequency / Rate
No. of distributed questionnaires	494
Returned questionnaires	425
Usable questionnaires	380
Excluded questionnaires	45
Questionnaires not returned	69
Overall Response Rate	86%
Valid (Usable) Response Rate	77%

(Source: Self-made by the author, 2025)

Descriptive analysis of respondent and business characteristics

The gender distribution of respondents was balanced, with 192 males (50.5%) and 188 females (49.5%) out of 380 valid responses. Most respondents were within the economically active age groups, particularly those aged 41–50 years (134; 35.3%) and 31–40 years (109; 28.7%), while 88 (23.2%) were aged 51–60 years and 49 (12.9%) were aged 18–30 years, indicating that about 77% were 50 years and below. Regarding professional experience, respondents with 11–19 years of experience constituted the largest group (98; 25.8%), followed by those

with 6–10 years (95; 25.0%), 20–28 years (80; 21.1%), 29–35 years (59; 15.5%), and 1–5 years (48; 12.6%). Nurses and midwives formed the largest professional cadre (126; 33.2%), followed by medical doctors (90; 23.7%), medical laboratory scientists (58; 15.3%), pharmacists (53; 13.9%), and physiotherapists (53; 13.9%). In terms of qualifications, 166 respondents (43.7%) held MBBS/BSc/BNSc, 79 (20.8%) held a Master’s degree in Medicine, 72 (18.9%) had diploma qualifications, 32 (8.4%) possessed a PhD, and 31 (8.2%) held fellowship or professional certifications.

Table 2 Descriptive Results of Demographic Variables

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Gender				
Male	192	50.5	50.5	50.5
Female	188	49.5	49.5	100
Total	380	100	100	
Age				
	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
18-30	49	12.9	12.9	12.9
31-40	109	28.7	28.7	41.6
41-50	134	35.3	35.3	76.8
51-60	88	23.2	23.2	100.0
Total	380	100	100	
Years of professional Exp				
	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1-5	48	12.6	12.9	12.9
6-10	95	25.0	25.0	37.6
11-19	98	25.8	25.8	63.4
20-28	80	21.1	21.1	84.5
29-35	59	15.5	15.5	100

Total Professional Cadre	380	100	100	100
Medical Doctor	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Medical Doctor	90	23.7	23.7	23.7
Nurse / Midwife	126	33.2	33.2	56.8
Pharmacist	53	13.9	13.9	70.8
Medical Lab Scientist	58	15.3	15.3	86.1
Physiotherapist	53	13.9	13.9	100.0
Total	380	100.0	100.0	
Qualification	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
PhD	32	8.4	8.4	8.4
Master in Med	79	20.8	20.8	29.2
BSc/MBBS, BSc, BNSc,)	166	43.7	43.7	72.9
Diploma	72	18.9	18.9	91.8
Fellowship / Prof. Cert	31	8.2	8.2	100.0
Total	380	100.0	100.0	

(Source: Self-made by the author, 2025)

Internal Consistency Reliability

The reliability of the measurement model was examined using Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability to ensure internal consistency among the measurement indicators. Cronbach’s alpha assumes equal indicator loadings, whereas composite reliability allows for heterogeneous loadings across indicators (Hair et al., 2014). The simultaneous use of these reliability measures follows established methodological recommendations and strengthens the

credibility of the study’s findings (Hair et al., 2022). As shown in Table 2, all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.947 to 0.960 (Nunnally, 1978; Hair et al., 2014). Similarly, rho_A and rho_C values between 0.947 and 0.958, along with composite reliability values ranging from 0.959 to 0.965, confirm satisfactory internal consistency across all constructs (Hair et al., 2014, 2018, 2021).

Table 2 Individual Item Reliability, Internal Consistency Reliability, Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity

Variab	Outer	Cronba	Composite	Composite	Average
es	loading	ch's	reliability	reliability	variance
	s	alpha	(rho_a)	(rho_c)	extracted (AVE)
CA		0.956	0.957	0.965	0.821
CA1	0.910				
CA2	0.915				
CA3	0.900				
CA4	0.906				
CA5	0.905				
CA6	0.902				
EP		0.958	0.958	0.966	0.826

EP1	0.883				
EP2	0.914				
EP3	0.906				
EP4	0.916				
EP5	0.922				
EP6	0.911				
JS		0.958	0.969	0.966	0.826
JS1	0.918				
JS2	0.911				
JS3	0.906				
JS4	0.897				
JS5	0.911				
JS6	0.909				
PA		0.960	0.961	0.968	0.834
PA1	0.921				
PA2	0.917				
PA3	0.905				
PA4	0.912				
PA5	0.902				
PA6	0.922				
SC		0.947	0.947	0.958	0.790
SC1	0.887				
SC2	0.887				
SC3	0.890				
SC4	0.887				
SC5	0.884				
SC6	0.897				

Source: Author’s Computation (2025) using Smart PLS 4.0.9.9 released 2023
The estimated PLS-SEM output results for the model specified in equation 1 are

depicted in Figures1 and 2 below. The estimations were carried out using the Smart PLS statistical software

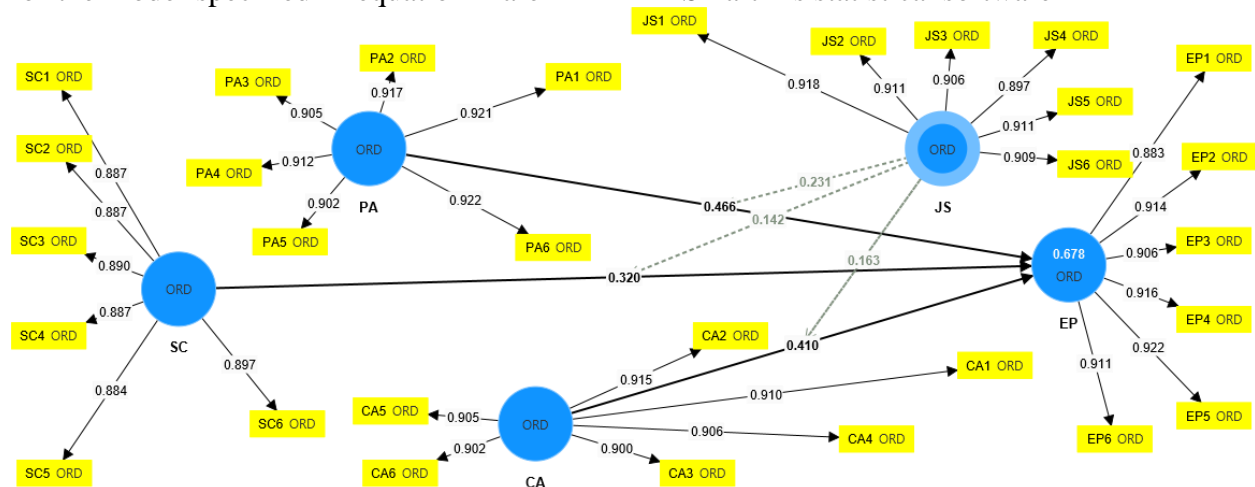


Figure 1: Path Diagram of Measurement (Outer) Model

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity assesses whether the indicators associated with a latent construct exhibit strong intercorrelations

and collectively measure the same conceptual domain (Hair et al., 2022; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The present study evaluated convergent validity using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), derived from the squared standardized loadings of the indicators. According to Hair et al. (2014), an AVE value of at least 0.50 is indicative of satisfactory convergent validity. The results presented in Table 2 reveal that all constructs achieved AVE values between 0.790 and 0.834, explaining approximately 81.2% of indicator variance and providing robust evidence of convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

The assessment of discriminant validity focuses on determining whether latent

constructs are empirically distinct and free from excessive conceptual overlap. In this study, discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT), as recommended in the PLS-SEM literature (Hair et al., 2014). Prior research suggests that discriminant validity is achieved when indicators load more strongly on their assigned constructs than on alternative constructs (Hair et al., 2022; Henseler et al., 2015). Additionally, the Fornell–Larcker criterion requires that the square root of each construct’s AVE surpasses its correlations with all other constructs in the model.

Table 3 Depicting Discriminant Validity- Fornell-Lacker Criterion

	CA	EP	JS	PA	SC
CA	0.906				
EP	0.475	0.909			
JS	-0.001	0.150	0.909		
PA	0.075	0.513	0.083	0.913	
SC	0.030	0.362	0.055	0.016	0.889

Source: Author’s Computation (2025) using Smart PLS 4.0.9.9 released 2023

From Table 3 the Fornell–Larcker assessment indicates satisfactory discriminant validity, as the square roots of AVE for Career Alignment (0.906),

Employee Performance (0.909), Job Stress (0.909), Psychological Attachment (0.913), and Social Connection (0.889) all exceed their respective inter-construct correlations.

Table 4 Discriminant Validity- Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	CA	EP	JS	PA	SC
CA					
EP	0.496				
JS	0.031	0.154			
PA	0.077	0.534	0.086		
SC	0.041	0.379	0.059	0.040	

Source: Author’s Computation (2025) using Smart PLS 4.0.9.9 released 2023

Similarly, from Table 4 the correlations among constructs range from 0.031 to 0.534, with the highest observed between Employee Performance and Psychological Attachment (0.534), and the lowest between Career Alignment and Job Stress (0.031), suggesting acceptable

discriminant validity and minimal multicollinearity concerns.

Structural (or Inner) Model

Following the establishment of measurement model reliability and validity in Section 4, the structural model was evaluated to examine the effects of job embeddedness dimensions

psychological attachment, social connection, and career alignment on employee performance. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was conducted using data from 380 respondents, in line with methodological recommendations

by Hair et al. (2011, 2012, 2014, 2017) and Henseler et al. (2012). The structural model was assessed using path coefficients (β), t-values, p-values, R^2 , Q^2 , and f^2 to determine explanatory power and predictive relevance.

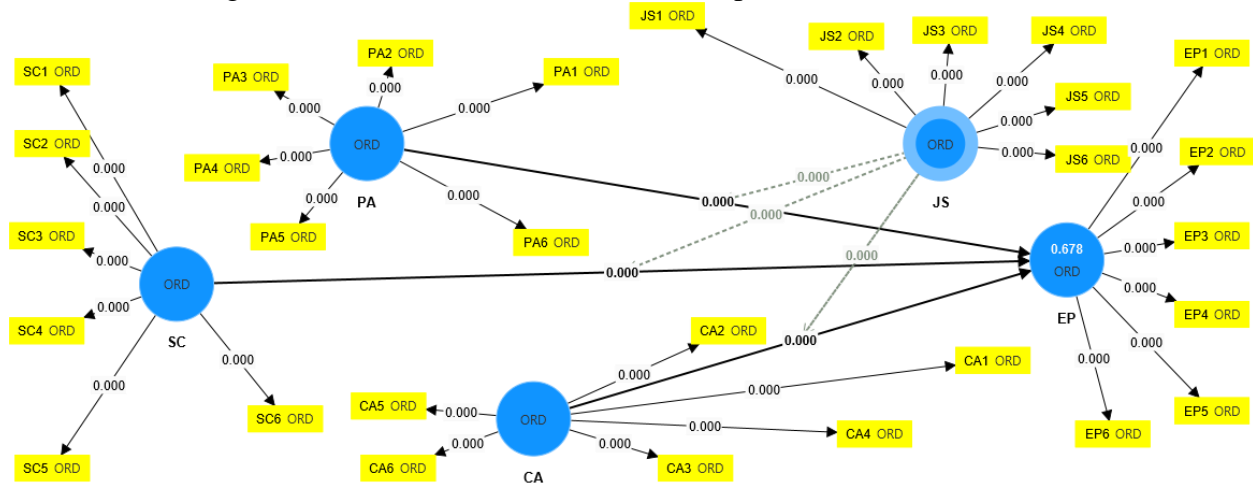


Figure 2: Path Diagram of Structural (Inner) Model

Hypothesis Testing for Direct Relationship

This section focuses on the assessment of the direct effects linking the exogenous construct of job embeddedness to the endogenous construct of employee performance. As specified in the research

hypotheses, Table 5 summarizes the estimated path coefficients, t-values, and significance levels for these direct associations. The null hypothesis (H_0) assumes that the effects of psychological attachment, social connection, and career alignment on employee performance, as represented by the path coefficients (β), are not statistically significant.

Table 5 Path Coefficients for Direct Effects in the Inner Model

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Remarks
CA -> EP	0.410	0.410	0.030	13.644	0.000	Rejected
JS -> EP	0.095	0.095	0.032	2.980	0.003	Rejected
PA -> EP	0.466	0.467	0.031	15.059	0.000	Rejected
SC -> EP	0.320	0.321	0.029	10.926	0.000	Rejected

Source: Author’s Computation (2025) using Smart PLS 4.0.9.9 released 2023

The study hypothesized (H1) that job embeddedness, proxy psychological attachment, social connection, and career alignment would exert a significant and positive influence on employee performance, opposing the null hypothesis (H_0). However, the empirical results in Table 5 demonstrate that **H01**: Career Alignment has a positive and

significant effect on Employee Performance with ($\beta = 0.410$, $t = 13.644$, $p < .001$). Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that there is statistically significant relationship between Career Alignment and Employee Performance among medical professionals in federal medical centres in the North-central Nigeria. The positive

beta coefficient implies that an increase in career alignment is associated with an increase by 0.410 in employee performance. **H02:** Job stress has a positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance in this study with ($\beta = 0.095, t = 2.980, p < .001$). Based on the analysis, the null hypothesis is rejected, demonstrating a significant positive relationship between job stress and employee performance among medical staff in North-Central Nigeria's Federal Medical Centres. The β value of 0.095 indicates that higher levels of Job Stress are associated with a slight increase in employee performance. **H03:** Psychological attachment has the strongest positive effect on employee performance among the job embeddedness dimensions with ($\beta = 0.466, t = 15.059, p < .001$). The findings reject the null hypothesis, confirming that psychological attachment significantly influences on employee performance among medical professionals in Federal

Medical Centres in North-Central Nigeria. The positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.466$) implies that increases in psychological attachment are linked to a corresponding increase of 0.466 in employee performance. **H04:** Social connection is positively and significantly related to employee performance with ($\beta = 0.320, t = 10.926, p < .001$). The null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a statistically significant relationship between Social connection and Employee Performance among medical professionals in Federal Medical Centres in North-Central Nigeria. The positive path coefficient ($\beta = 0.095$) suggests that a unit increase in social connection corresponds to a 0.095 increase in employee performance.

Hypotheses Testing for the Moderating Relationship

Table 6 shows the model specification analysing the moderating effect as hypothesized as follows:

Table 6 Path Coefficients for Indirect Effects in the Inner Model

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Remarks
JS x PA -> EP	0.231	0.229	0.031	7.455	0.000	Rejected
JS x SC -> EP	0.142	0.142	0.030	4.702	0.000	Rejected
JS x CA -> EP	0.163	0.160	0.030	5.459	0.000	Rejected

Source: Author's Computation (2025) using Smart PLS 4.0.9.9 released 2023

H05: From the results of the statistical analysis in table 6, the structural model shows that job stress significantly moderate the relationship between Psychological attachment and employee performance with ($\beta = 0.231, t = 7.455, p < .001$). The null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that job stress significantly moderates the relationship between psychological attachment and employee performance. The positive interaction coefficient ($\beta = 0.231$) suggests that the

effect of psychological attachment on employee performance ($\beta = 0.466$) strengthens as job stress increases. **H06:** job stress significantly moderate the relationship between Social connection and employee performance with ($\beta = 0.142, t = 4.702, p < .001$). The null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that job stress significantly moderates the relationship between Social connection and employee performance. The positive statistics suggests that as social

connection increases, the employee performance also increase by 0.142 with job stress strengthens. **H07:** Finally from the results of the statistical analysis in table 6, the structural model shows that job stress significantly moderate the relationship between Career Alignment and employee performance with ($\beta = 0.163$, $t = 5.459$, $p < .001$). The null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that job stress significantly moderates the relationship between career alignment and employee performance. The β value of 0.163 indicates that higher levels of career alignment are associated with a

slight increase in employee performance as job stress strengthened

Coefficient of Determination: R-Squared

The coefficient of determination, known as R^2 , measures the explanatory capability of a regression model by showing how much variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable(s). An R^2 of 0.00 implies no explained variation, whereas an R^2 of 1.00 indicates full explanation. Hair et al. (2022) suggest that R^2 values of about 0.75 are substantial, 0.50 are moderate, and 0.25 are weak.

Table 7 Coefficient of Determination: R-Squared

	R-square	R-square adjusted
EP	0.678	0.672

Source: Author's Computation (2025) using Smart PLS 4.0.9.9 released 2023

The results in Table 7 show that the model explains 67.8% of the variance in employee performance, reflecting strong explanatory power. The minimal reduction in the adjusted R^2 value confirms that the explanatory strength of the model is not overstated.

The f-square (f^2) statistic was employed to assess the relative contribution of each exogenous construct to the explained variance in customer retention by examining the change in explanatory power when a predictor is included in the model.

F-square effect size

Table 8 Depicting the Effect size- f-square

Relationship	f-square	Size
CA -> EP	0.515	Large effect
JS -> EP	0.028	Small effect
PA -> EP	0.665	Large effect
SC -> EP	0.316	Medium effect

Source: Author's Computation (2025) using Smart PLS 4.0.9.9 released 2023

As shown in Table 8, the f^2 results indicate the individual contribution of each independent variable to employee performance. Psychological Attachment ($f^2 = 0.665$) and Career Alignment ($f^2 = 0.515$) exhibit large effects, reflecting strong explanatory power. Social Connection ($f^2 = 0.316$) demonstrates a moderate effect, while Job Stress ($f^2 = 0.028$) has a small effect. In general, PA and CA are the most influential drivers of employee performance, SC contributes

moderately, and JS has a relatively minor impact.

Discussion of the Findings

The aim of this study was to explore whether job stress moderates the relationship between job embeddedness and employee performance in selected public hospitals in North-central Nigeria. Job embeddedness was measured through its dimensions: Psychological Attachment (PA), Social Connection (SC), and Career Alignment (CA). Using hypothesis testing and the moderation

theory by Hair et al. (2014), the study assessed the indirect effects of these dimensions on employee performance through the moderator, job stress.

Career Alignment has a positive and significant effect on Employee Performance. This means that career alignment is a strong predictor of employee performance. The empirical support suggests that hospitals that invest in aligning employees' career aspirations with organizational goals can enhance performance, reduce turnover, and improve overall service delivery. In the context of healthcare, where performance directly affects patient outcomes, fostering career alignment among medical professionals is particularly critical. The study findings aligned with Goal-Setting Theory which stated that when employees' career goals are aligned with organizational goals, they are more focused, committed, and likely to achieve higher performance outcomes. The current study corroborated (Alvi et al., 2020; De Vos & Cambré, 2017; Gede & Huluka, 2023) who opined that career alignment has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

Job stress has a positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance in this study. This suggests that among medical staff in Federal Medical Centres in North-Central Nigeria, higher levels of job stress are associated with a slight increase in employee performance. Empirical studies have supported that moderate levels of job stress can enhance employee motivation and performance, particularly in high-demand roles such as healthcare. In the hospital context, where staff faces critical and time-sensitive tasks, a manageable level of stress may push employees to perform more efficiently and attentively (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Podsakoff et al., 2007). These findings are consistent with previous studies (Jalagat,

2017; Khuong & Yen, 2016; Sagadavin & Basit, 2017), which reported that job stress has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This current study also explains the activation theory as it stated that Low activation leads to boredom and low performance, while moderate activation (stress) enhances alertness and productivity, which is critical in medical emergencies

Psychological attachment has the strongest positive effect on employee performance. This means that from a theoretical standpoint, this finding aligns with Job Embeddedness Theory (Mitchell et al., 2001), which posits that employees who are emotionally and psychologically attached to their organization are more likely to engage in positive work behaviours, including improved performance. Psychological attachment strengthens the "fit" between employees and their roles, enhancing motivation, commitment, and persistence in achieving organizational goals. The previous studies (Sagone et al., 2023; Vîrgă et al., 2019) are consistent with present study for the positive link between Psychological attachments on employee performance with the Self-Determination Theory, argued that psychological attachment satisfies basic psychological needs autonomy, competence, and relatedness leading to intrinsic motivation.

Social connection is positively and significantly related to employee performance. This shows that medical professionals in Federal Medical Centres in North-Central Nigeria who maintain strong interpersonal relationships with colleagues tend to perform better. This highlights the importance of fostering strong workplace relationships among medical professionals to enhance productivity and accomplish organizational objectives. The findings are consistent with previous studies (Ashraf & Javed, 2014; De Oliveira &

Camargo, 2016), which reported a positive and significant relationship between social connection and employee performance.

From the results of the statistical analysis in the structural model shows that job stress significantly moderate the relationship between Psychological attachment and employee performance. The results highlight the importance of fostering psychological attachment while managing job stress to optimize employee performance in high-demand environments such as hospitals. Job stress acts as a positive moderator, strengthening the relationship among psychological attachment, career alignment, social connection and employee performance. This implies that employees who are strongly attached to their work may respond to job stress in ways that enhance their productivity and organizational effectiveness.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study established that job embeddedness dimensions, career alignment, social connection and psychological attachment including job stress have positive and significant relationship with employee performance while the indirect effect of job stress significantly moderate among career alignment, social connection and psychological attachment on employee performance. This means that increases in any of these factors are associated with improvements in employee performance among medical professionals. In light of these results, the following recommendations are suggested.

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Recommendation

1. Public hospitals in North-Central Nigeria should create structured career development plans, including training, mentoring, and opportunities for advancement, to ensure employees' career goals align with organizational objectives.
2. Public hospitals in North-Central Nigeria should implement strategies to maintain optimal levels of job stress among medical staff. This can be achieved by providing time management training, workload balancing, and supportive supervision to ensure stress remains challenging but manageable, thereby enhancing motivation and performance without causing burnout.
3. Public hospitals should implement initiatives that enhance employees' psychological attachment to the organization. This can include fostering a supportive work environment, recognizing and rewarding contributions, promoting organizational values, and encouraging employee involvement in decision-making.

Public hospitals should promote strong social connections among medical staff by encouraging teamwork, collaborative projects, peer mentoring, and social or team-building activities. Creating opportunities for positive interpersonal interactions can strengthen workplace relationships, enhance communication, and ultimately improve employee performance.

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