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The Mediating Effect of Self-Efficacy on the Relationship Between Career Satisfaction and Perceived Stress

Kariyer Tatmini ile Algılanan Stres Arasındaki İlişkide Öz-Yeterliliğin Aracı Etkisi

Mehmet Hakan DURUKAN[1]
[1]Başkent University, Business Administration, Ankara, Türkiye

Hamdullah Nejat BASIM[1]
[1]Başkent University, Business Administration, Ankara, Türkiye

ABSTRACT

Career satisfaction is a crucial determinant of employees' professional growth and long-term well-being. While career satisfaction is often associated with positive outcomes such as job commitment, loyalty, and personal fulfillment, the psychological mechanisms by which it influences stress perceptions have not been fully explored. This study, based on the Job Demands–Resources Model, tests the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between career satisfaction and perceived stress. The research was conducted using a quantitative research design, and data were collected from 319 sports managers using validated scales. Findings demonstrate that career satisfaction is significantly and negatively associated with perceived stress, indicating that employees with higher satisfaction levels are less likely to experience stress in their professional lives. Furthermore, self-efficacy partially mediates this relationship, suggesting that individuals with strong self-efficacy beliefs are better able to manage stress despite workplace demands. These findings highlight the importance of enhancing self-efficacy as a personal resource that directs the positive effects of career satisfaction towards psychological well-being. This study contributes to the literature by clarifying the mechanism by which career satisfaction enhances resilience and reduces stress through self-efficacy.

Keywords: Career Satisfaction, perceived stress, self-efficacy

ÖZ

Kariyer tatmini, çalışanların mesleki gelişiminin ve uzun vadeli iyi oluşunun kritik bir belirleyicisidir. Kariyer tatmini genellikle işe adanmışlık, sadakat ve kişisel tatmin gibi olumlu sonuçlarla ilişkilendirilse de, bunun stres algılarını nasıl etkilediğine dair psikolojik mekanizmalar tam olarak ortaya konulmamıştır. İş Talepleri–Kaynakları Modeli temel alınarak yürütülen bu çalışma, kariyer tatmini ile algılanan stres arasındaki ilişkide öz-yeterliliğin aracı rolünü incelemektedir. Araştırma, nicel bir araştırma deseni kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiş ve veriler 319 spor yöneticisinden geçerliliği kanıtlanmış ölçeklerle toplanmıştır. Bulgular, kariyer tatmininin algılanan stresle anlamlı ve ters yönde ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu da kariyer tatmini yüksek olan çalışanların mesleki yaşamlarında daha az stres yaşama eğiliminde olduklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, öz-yeterlilik bu ilişkide kısmen aracılık rolü göstermektedir, bu da öz-yeterlilik inancı güçlü bireylerin, iş yerindeki taleplere rağmen stresi daha iyi yönetebildiklerini göstermektedir. Elde edilen sonuçlar, kariyer tatmininin olumlu etkilerini psikolojik iyi oluşa yönlendiren kişisel bir kaynak olarak öz-yeterliliğin geliştirilmesinin önemini vurgulamaktadır. Bu çalışma, kariyer tatmininin öz-yeterlilik aracılığıyla dayanıklılığı artırma ve stresi azaltma mekanizmasını açıklığa kavuşturarak literatüre katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kariyer Tatmini, algılanan stres, öz-yeterlilik

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Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding author: Mehmet Hakan Durukan
E-mail: mhakandurukan@gmail.com
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Introduction

In today's highly competitive and unpredictable work environment, employees are frequently confronted with challenging situations resulting from intense job demands, heightened performance expectations, and rapid organizational changes. Such pressures often lead to elevated levels of perceived stress, a construct central to both psychological and organizational behavior research. From an individual standpoint, perceived stress is critical for understanding psychological states and cognitive processes, given its association with demotivation, burnout, and depression. Beyond individual consequences, stress affects organizational performance and effectiveness, highlighting its importance as more than a personal issue (Cooper, 1991; Edwards, 1992).

Stress can be represented as the physiological and psychological response to demands that exceed available resources. It is multidimensional, encompassing physiological, psychological, and behavioral dimensions (Arnold & Fletcher, 2021; Simpson et al., 2024; Wright et al., 2023). Physiological stress involves bodily reactions such as high blood pressure and fatigue; psychological stress manifests through worry, frustration, and anxiety; and behavioral stress appears in reduced productivity, aggression, or maladaptive coping. In organizational behavior, the behavioral dimension is particularly critical. Stress is shaped by both personal influences such as personality traits, low resilience, and work–family conflict and organizational factors including workload, role conflict, job insecurity, and strained relationships (Gaunt & Benjamin, 2007).

The consequences of stress can be defined at multiple levels. Psychologically, stress leads to depression, reduced well-being, and emotional exhaustion (Giebels & Janssen, 2020). Physiologically, it can cause illness, headaches, and sleep disorders (Theorell, 1999). At the organizational level, high stress reduces performance, motivation, and engagement, while increasing turnover, absenteeism, and healthcare costs (Arshadi & Damiri, 2013).

Perceived stress refers to individuals' subjective appraisal of the extent to which environmental demands exceed individual resources Cohen et al. (1983). Unlike objective stress elements, perceived stress emphasizes unpredictability, uncontrollability, and overload in daily life. Literature identifies two main dimensions of perceived stress: perceived helplessness (feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope) and perceived self-efficacy (confidence in managing challenges) (Consiglio et al., 2016; Rizvi & Sikand, 2020). With these sub-dimensions, perceived stress can be mitigated by some psychological constructs such as work engagement, well-being, occupational self-efficacy or career-related variables (van Mol et al., 2018).

Defined as employees' affective evaluation of their career achievements, progress, and future prospects, career satisfaction enhances well-being, motivation, and engagement (Hagmaier et al., 2018; Joo & Lee, 2017). It mitigates stress by providing optimism, resilience, and motivational resources, enabling employees to reinterpret challenges as opportunities rather than threats.

Although career satisfaction can mitigate perceived stress, this relationship can be further explained by the role of self-efficacy as a mediator. Career satisfaction reinforces confidence in personal abilities, which enhances self-efficacy which can be define one's ability to organize and execute tasks efficaciously (Karademas & Kalantzi-Azizi, 2004). Higher self-efficacy allows employees to manage job demands more effectively, thereby reducing stress perceptions. Thus, self-efficacy can mediate the relationship between career satisfaction and perceived stress.

The Relationship Between Career Satisfaction and Perceived Stress

Perceived stress represents employees' personal judgment that workplace pressures exceed the resources they possess to cope successfully (Andreou et al., 2011; Klein et al., 2016). Objective stressors such as unmanageable workplace situations, heavy workload, strict deadlines, or interpersonal conflicts influence employees' cognitive appraisal processes, which are subjectively interpreted by individuals. This subjective interpretation is defined as perceived stress in academic literature and is considered a central construct in organizational behavior research, since every employee may experience vastly different levels of stress depending on their subjective resources and perceptions. Employees frequently encounter challenges that surpass their internal capabilities, and these challenges may either be appraised as opportunities to overcome or perceived as threats to well-being.

Perceived stress is thus an essential organizational behavior issue, functioning as a bridge between external, objective organizational conditions and internal, subjective employee outcomes. Moreover, this construct is not static but rather dynamic and situational, reflecting the ongoing evolution of organizational demands. As organizational requirements change rapidly, employees' internal resources are either enhanced or depleted, directly influencing their coping capacities and long-term psychological resilience.

As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed, objective stressors are not the sole determinants of perceived stress; rather, the way individuals evaluate a situation and mobilize their internal resources to manage it is the critical factor. Similarly, Hobfoll (1989) argued that the loss of internal resources such as energy, recognition, social support, or time can trigger feelings of threat and anxiety, which ultimately result in stress. In line with this argument, uncertain or unexpected workplace situations that create a lack of control over job demands may heighten stress levels. When workloads exceed both personal and organizational capacity, negative outcomes such as workplace stress can emerge.

Furthermore, individuals' approach to their career constitutes a critical element in understanding perceived stress. Employees who evaluate their careers positively and experience satisfaction with their career trajectories are more likely to interpret organizational demands as manageable challenges rather than overwhelming threats. Thus, career orientation and career satisfaction provide an important lens through which perceived stress should be evaluated.

Career can be defined as individuals' experiences, activities, or work-related roles throughout their professional lives (Doherty et al., 2013). Career is a comprehensive construct encompassing continuous development, transitions, and learning across different roles and organizations. From an organizational perspective, a career is conceptualized as the interplay between organizational opportunities and individual perceptions (Arthur et al., 1989). Career thus has a dynamic and evolving nature shaped by continuous individual effort and organizational support over time. Accordingly, career satisfaction has a meaning of the positive evaluation of career progress, achievements, and benefits (Hojat et al., 2010; Joo & Lee, 2017).

Super (1957) emphasized that career is a lifelong process in which career satisfaction replicates the extent to which individuals perceive equivalence between their abilities, values, interests, and identities across different roles such as employee, manager, or retiree. Thus, when employees' job roles align with their individual perception of work, they tend to experience satisfaction in their careers, whereas misalignment may result in stress or burnout. Career satisfaction can be assessed through multiple dimensions, including satisfaction with career progression, goal attainment, hierarchical level, or income. Each of these dimensions yields positive consequences at both personal and organizational levels. Crucially, employees with higher levels of career satisfaction tend to experience reduced perceived stress in the workplace. For example, employees who have satisfaction with their career perceive job demands and challenges as more manageable. Career satisfaction further enhances individuals' self-confidence in their abilities, autonomy, and sense of control. When organizational goals align with employees' values, career satisfaction provides opportunities to interpret work tasks as avenues for self-development and progression rather than as stressors. Ultimately, career satisfaction fosters a positive psychological state characterized by motivation and optimism, which mitigates the detrimental effects of stressors that form perceived stress.

At this point, it is necessary to investigate the psychological mechanism underlying this study. In this respect, the Job Demands–Resources model provides a comprehensive framework for explaining how career satisfaction influences the relationship between job demands and perceived stress. As Bakker and Demerouti (2007) stated, every job entails specific demands and requires particular resources. Job demands comprise workload, time pressure, or role overload, whereas resources include autonomy, leader support, and career-related opportunities. As discussed, job demands require effort and the mobilization of abilities, often leading to psychological costs such as perceived stress. To sustain the effort necessary to meet job demands, career satisfaction can be acknowledged as critical personal resource. Perceived stress arises when job demands exceed employees' internal capacities, which they may interpret as threatening, harmful, and strain-inducing. In contrast, career satisfaction functions as a personal resource that enhances resilience, motivation, and work engagement. As Job Demands–Resources model proposed, career satisfaction equips individuals with the capacity to overcome challenging and stressful situations. Put differently, higher levels of career satisfaction can reduce perceived stress by shifting employees' perceptions from strain toward opportunities for development and growth.

Career satisfaction is one's perception of career in terms of progress, achievements or development. Employees satisfied

with their career can see themselves more competent, support and successful. These positive motivational terms can provide control and stability. According Nisar and Rasheed (2019), career satisfaction plays a mediating role between occupational stress and extra role performance of police employees. Similarly, Dodanwala and Santoso (2021) conducted a study in Sri Lanka and found that career satisfaction decreases job stress which in turn mediates the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention. In addition, Fiori et al. (2015) found that career adaptability increases job satisfaction which in turn lowers job stress. As studies found in the literature, career satisfaction and perceived stress is often negatively associated. Drawing on the preceding discussions and prior empirical studies concerning career satisfaction and perceived stress, first hypothesis is formed as follows:

$H_{1:}$ Career satisfaction is negatively associated with perceived stress.

Employees who derive greater satisfaction from their careers are commonly less likely to encounter elevated perceived stress; nevertheless, this relationship can be shaped by a range of organizational, behavioral, and cognitive factors. The connection between career satisfaction and perceived stress may be explained by a mediating construct linked to employees' psychological resources in the workplace. Specifically, self-efficacy emerges as a critical factor in clarifying how career satisfaction influences employees' ability to handle work-related pressures. Self-efficacy fosters confidence in one's capabilities, enhances feelings of control, and strengthens problem-solving skills, which collectively enable employees to respond more effectively to demanding work environments. Consequently, individuals with higher self-efficacy working in complex and dynamic settings may interpret challenges as manageable, thereby perceiving less stress and maintaining greater resilience.

The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy in the Relationship Between Career Satisfaction and Perceived Stress

Self-efficacy may be viewed as "an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute actions required to achieve desired outcomes" (Bandura, 1977). Grounded in social cognitive theory, self-efficacy refers to one's belief in their capacity to accomplish desired tasks. In this aspect, self-efficacy does not mean actual skills or abilities rather it originates from the cognitive world of individuals. Rather than broader constructs such as self-confidence or self-esteem, self-efficacy is domain and task specific. In other words, self-efficacy can have very specific application area. For organizations, employees can have higher self-efficacy on unique job specific tasks or lower self-efficacy on other duties.

Efficacy stems from Latin word efficere having meaning of accomplish and effect. In this aspect, employees can affect every duty under their responsibility with their self-efficacy which can be improved through training, feedback and organizational support.

Although self-efficacy can be influenced by organizational factors such as supervisor support, organizational climate, culture, or trust, it is also shaped by behavioral variables. Within the literature, self-efficacy is frequently discussed as a dimension of self-evaluations, encompassing confidence in action, motivational regulation, and resilience. Among organizational behavior variables, career-related variables including career development, career commitment, and career satisfaction are particularly influential. In line with the focus of this study, career satisfaction emerges as a significant determinant of self-efficacy. For example, employees who experience career satisfaction often develop a stronger professional identity, which reinforces their belief in their own abilities. Furthermore, career satisfaction is built upon past achievements and accumulated experiences, which strengthen confidence in handling similar tasks in the future and thereby enhance self-efficacy. Career satisfaction also fosters positive motivation and enjoyment in the workplace, enabling individuals to access and utilize personal resources such as skills, knowledge, and social support. Moreover, it can strengthen the perception of control over work-related circumstances, further consolidating the foundation of self-efficacy.

Career satisfaction has been shown to reduce perceived stress by fostering a more positive and supportive psychological state. Similarly, self-efficacy enhances individuals' sense of control, enabling them to believe they can cope effectively with challenges, thereby lowering perceived stress. In addition, self-efficacy promotes positive appraisal processes through which employees interpret difficult situations as opportunities rather than threats. Employees with higher self-efficacy are also more likely to seek social support and engage in teamwork, both of which buffer stress. Finally, self-efficacy contributes to improved performance, confidence, and resilience, which collectively reduce the stress levels experienced in the workplace. Even

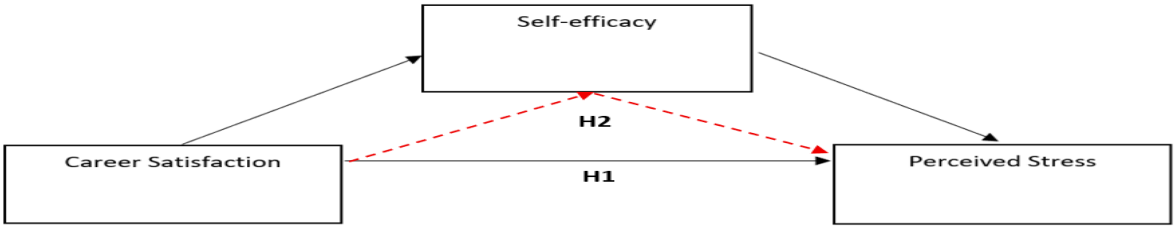
though career satisfaction can mitigate one's perceived stress, self-efficacy can act as a mediator in this relationship.

Based on the above discussions, the following hypothesis was formulated.

$H_{2:}$ Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between career satisfaction and perceived stress.

In line with the theoretical arguments outlined above, the proposed model and related hypotheses are displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Research Model



Methods

Sample

The study participants comprised 319 administrators serving in various sports federations affiliated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In this study, data were collected online using a convenience sampling method on a voluntary basis. This approach has a limited capacity to statistically represent the target population; therefore, caution is warranted when generalizing the findings in Turkiye and this limitation is acknowledged in the limitations section of the study. However, the primary aim of the research is to examine the relationships between specific variables. In studies focusing on relationship testing, it is widely accepted in the literature that convenience samples with sufficient sample size and variability can produce analytically meaningful results. The survey, administered in Turkish, took place between October and November 2025.

Measurement Instruments

For the purposes of this study, three measurement instruments comprising career satisfaction, self-efficacy, and perceived stress were utilized. These constructs are closely associated with employee performance, psychological well-being, and organizational effectiveness. They are also widely used in the sport management literature to explain outcomes such as burnout, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions in high-demand sport environments such as sports federations.

The Career Satisfaction Scale was originally developed by Greenhaus et al. (1990) and subsequently adapted into Turkish by Yüksel (2005) and later validated by Kızrak and Kibaroğlu (2021). The instrument consists of five items designed to assess individuals' overall satisfaction with their career progress, goals, and achievements. Responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Scale structure was unidimensional, no reverse-coded items were included, and total scale scores were used in all analyses.

The Self-Efficacy Scale was originally developed by Sherer et al. (1982) and Turkish adaptation was conducted by Yıldırım and İlhan (2010), who examined the scale's psychometric properties and confirmed its reliability and validity within Turkish samples. The instrument includes 17 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scale consisted of three sub-dimensions: Initiation, Persistence, and Sustained Effort. There were no reverse-coded items in the scale. Following the establishment of validity and reliability, a total score was calculated and used in the analyses.

The Perceived Stress Scale was developed by Cohen et al. (1983) and adapted into Turkish by Eskin et al. (2013). The

Perceived Stress Scale, used in this study, includes 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scale consisted of two sub-dimensions: Perceived Distress and Perceived Lack of Self-Efficacy. There were four reverse-coded items in the scale. Following the establishment of validity and reliability, total scores were calculated and used in the analyses.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 and AMOS. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed for each scale to evaluate construct validity, using CMIN/DF, GFI, AGFI, CFI, NNFI, IFI, and RMSEA as fit indices. Internal consistency was assessed via Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and average variance extracted. Pearson correlations and descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. To test the mediation model, the PROCESS Macro3.5.3 (Hayes, 2017) was employed with 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. Ethical approval was obtained from the related Başkent University Ethics Committee (Date: November 5, 2025, Decision No: 510941).

Results

Demographic Information

Of the respondents 47% were male and 53% were female. Regarding marital status, 52% were married and 48% were single. In terms of education, 87.5% held a bachelor's degree, 9.4% a master's degree, and 3.1% a doctoral degree.

With respect to experience, 26.6% of participants had 1–5 years, 27.2% had 6–10 years, 39.5% had 11–20 years, and 6.7% had 21 years or more of total work experience. The majority of participants (approximately 90%) were between 24 and 45 years of age, which reflects the natural demographic composition of the participants who voluntarily took part in the study (Table 1).

Table 1.
Demographic Information

	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	47
	Female	53
Marital Status	Married	52
	Single	48
Education	Bachelor's	87.5
	Master's	9.4
	Doctoral	3.1
Experience	1–5 years	26.6
	6–10 years	27.2
	11–20 years	39.5
	21+ years	6.7

Means, Standard Deviation and Correlations

Calculations were made for descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the study variables. It was summarized in Table 2. This analysis aimed to examine the distinct effects of the investigated factors. Normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values, which fell within the acceptable range of ±2, supporting the assumption of normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010). Furthermore, the bivariate correlations among the main variables of the model were all statistically significant. Demographic variables (gender, marital status, education, sector, experience, and age) were included in the correlation matrix for descriptive purposes only and were not entered as control variables in the mediation analysis.

Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion; the square root of the AVE for career satisfaction (0.76) and perceived stress (0.77) both exceeded the highest inter-construct correlation ($r = -.738$), confirming the distinctiveness of the two constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2.

Means, Standard Deviation and Correlations

	Mean	SD	Gend	MarS	Edu.	Sector	Exp.	Age	CS	SE	PS
Gen.	1.53	.50	1								
Mar.S	1.48	.50	.112*	1							
Edu.	2.30	.61	.063	-.021	1						
Sect.	2.06	.566	.042	-.091	-.064	1					
Exp.	10.69	6.81	-.034	-.006	.165*	-.107	1				
Age	37.55	7.37	.049	-.055	-.016	-.070	.083	1			
CS	3.77	.85	-.063	-.032	-.097	-.315**	.016	-.070	1		
SE	3.56	.81	-.029	-.022	.051	-.063	.007	-.035	.504**	1	
PS	1.9	.81	.093	-.012	-.072	.405**	.161	.112*	-.738**	-.458**	1

Notes: Gender (1 = male, 2 = female), Marital Status (1=Married, 2=Single), Education (1 = diploma, 2 = bachelor, 3 = master,4 = PhD), Sector (1=Public, 2=Private, 3=Freelance) Variables: CS = Career Satisfaction, SE = Self-efficacy, PS = Perceived stress,*p < .05 and **p < .01

Validity, Reliability And Model Goodness-of-Fit Values

The findings revealed that all three constructs career satisfaction, self-efficacy, and perceived stress exhibited strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.92, 0.92, and 0.94 respectively.

The career satisfaction model demonstrated a good fit with indices of GFI = .990, AGFI = .969, CFI = .996, IFI = .985, and a CMIN/DF = 1.669, indicating a solid model–data consistency. The RMSEA = .046 also reflected a good fit.

The self-efficacy model showed acceptable fit values (CMIN/DF = 1.886, GFI = .928, AGFI = .905, CFI = .961, NNFI= .935, IFI = .948) and a RMSEA = .051 confirming a satisfactory structural alignment.

The perceived stress model yielded a good overall fit, with CMIN/DF = 1.959, GFI = .965, AGFI = .940, CFI = .987, NNFI = .946 and IFI = .984. The RMSEA = .054 also indicated an acceptable fit level.

The career satisfaction model indicated good fit as RMSEA = .046 ≤ .050 (MacCallum et al., 1996), while the self-efficacy and perceived stress models demonstrated acceptable fit as .051 and .054 within the .051–.080 range, respectively (Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

The composite reliability (CR) values for the three constructs were 0.87 for career satisfaction, 0.92 for self-efficacy, and 0.93 for perceived stress. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) values were 0.58, 0.51, and 0.59, respectively. These results indicate that all three constructs demonstrate strong internal consistency and acceptable convergent validity. Although the AVE for self-efficacy is marginally above this threshold, the high CR (0.92) confirms strong internal consistency, a pattern commonly observed in longer scales where CR accumulates across items. See Table 3.

Harman's single-factor test revealed that a single factor accounted for 36.57% of the total variance, well below the 50% threshold, suggesting that common method bias is not a serious concern in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Regression Analysis

For the mediation model examining the direct effect of career satisfaction on perceived stress, SPSS version 26 and the PROCESS macro (version 3.5.3) by Hayes (2017) were utilized. This macro facilitates the estimation of both direct and indirect effects within mediation models through bootstrapping procedures. In this analysis, 5,000 bootstrap samples were employed to ensure robust estimation.

It was posited by Hypothesis 1 that career satisfaction will have a negative effect on perceived stress. The analysis revealed that career satisfaction explained 38% of the variance in perceived stress in the direct effect model (R^2 = .38), indicating a large effect size according to Cohen's (1988) criteria. Both the regression coefficient and the constant of the model were statistically significant. Specifically, career satisfaction demonstrated a significant negative relationship with perceived stress

(β = –0.6545 $p < .001$). These findings, summarized in Table 4, provide empirical support for Hypothesis 1.

Table 3.

Reliability. validity and model goodness-of-fit values

Variables	CA	CMIN/SD	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NNFI	IFI	RMSEA	χ2	df	*p*
CS	.92	1.669	.990	.969	.996	.925	.985	.046	8.493	5	.131
SE	.92	1.886	.928	.905	.961	.935	.948	.051	216.927	115	.000
PS	.94	1.959	.965	.940	.987	.946	.984	.054	62.68	32	.001

Notes: CA: Cronbach Alpha, CMIN/DF (Minimum Discrepancy/Degrees of Freedom): Acceptable if $3 < \chi^2/df \leq 5$, good if ≤3, GFI (Goodness of Fit Index): Acceptable if ≥0.90, good if ≥0.95, AGFI (Adjusted GFI): Acceptable if ≥0.85, good if ≥0.90, CFI (Comparative Fit Index): Acceptable if ≥0.90, good if ≥0.95, NNFI (Non-Normed Fit Index): Acceptable if ≥0.90, good if ≥0.95, IFI (Incremental Fit Index): Acceptable if ≥0.90, good if ≥0.95, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation): Acceptable if ≤0.08, good if ≤0.05, χ^2 = Chi-Square Value, df = Degrees of Freedom, P = Significance level. Variables: CS = Career Satisfaction, SE = Self-efficacy, PS = Perceived stress, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01

Table 4.

Direct effect of career satisfaction on perceived stress

Coefficient	se	t	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
-.6545	.0418	-15.65	.000	-.7367	-.5722

Secondly, Hypothesis 2 proposed that self-efficacy will mediate the relationship when career satisfaction has an effect on perceived stress. The mediation analysis demonstrated that the indirect effect of career satisfaction on perceived stress through self-efficacy was statistically significant (β = –0.0559, BootLLCI = –0.1081, BootULCI = –0.0048), as the confidence interval did not include zero. This finding indicates that self-efficacy serves as a significant mediator. Specifically, career satisfaction positively influenced self-efficacy (β = 0.3491, $p < .001$), and higher self-efficacy was related with decreased degrees of perceived stress (β = –0.1601, $p < .01$). Additionally, the direct effect of career satisfaction on perceived stress remained significant (β = –0.6545, $p < .001$), suggesting a partial mediation effect. Detailed results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.

Indirect effect of career satisfaction on perceived stress

Coefficient	se	t	*p*	BootLLCI	BootULCI
-.0559	.0261	-2.64	.000	-.1081	-.0048

The total effect analysis revealed that career satisfaction had a significant reverse influence on perceived stress (β = –0.7104, SE = 0.0364, t = –19.49, $p < .001$). The 95% confidence interval (LLCI = –0.7821, ULCI = –0.6387) did not include zero, enhancing the robustness of this relationship. These findings indicate that individuals with higher levels of career satisfaction tend to experience lower levels of perceived stress when both direct and indirect effects are considered simultaneously. See Table 6.

Table 6.

Total effect of career satisfaction on perceived stress

Coefficient	se	t	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
-.7104	.0364	-19.49	.000	-.7821	-.6387

Figure 2.
Results of the research

Discussion

The findings revealed that career satisfaction significantly and negatively affects perceived stress (β = –0.6545, $p < .001$), indicating that employees who are satisfied with their career progress and achievements tend to experience lower levels of stress. This finding is consistent with Jung et al. (2024), who reported a negative association between job satisfaction and job stress among sports education leaders. This suggests that a positive perception of one's career serves as an internal psychological resource that buffers against work-related tension and emotional exhaustion. Moreover, self-efficacy was found to partially mediate this relationship, showing that individuals who have stronger confidence in their abilities are more capable of managing occupational demands and maintaining emotional balance under pressure.

The direct effect of career satisfaction on perceived stress was large ($R^2 = .38$), suggesting a practically meaningful relationship. However, the indirect effect through self-efficacy was relatively small (β = −.056; BootCI [–0.1081, –0.0048]), indicating that self-efficacy is one of several potential mechanisms through which career satisfaction reduces stress. This finding is also supported by Wang and Tan (2025), who demonstrated that self-efficacy operates as a critical cognitive resource among sports practitioners, regulating the relationship between work-related variables and well-being outcomes.

These results provide further empirical support for the Job Demands–Resources framework, emphasizing that career satisfaction operates as a key personal resource that strengthens employees' coping capacity and psychological resilience. In this process, self-efficacy acts as a cognitive mechanism through which career satisfaction translates into reduced perceived stress and enhanced well-being. Altogether, the study highlights the intertwined roles of satisfaction and self-efficacy in protecting employees from the negative consequences of stress in modern organizational settings as proposed in current literature by Nixdorf et al., 2021.

Sports managers in public organizations face distinctive stressors that differ from those in corporate settings, including performance-driven accountability, seasonal workload fluctuations tied to competition calendars, bureaucratic constraints within institutions (Liu et al., 2024). These specific demands make career satisfaction and self-efficacy particularly salient psychological resources for sports managers, as the ability to derive meaning from one's career may be especially protective against the chronic stress inherent in sports.

In the context of sports management, sports organizations face unique stressors including performance pressure, limited resources, and high public accountability. Employees working within federations may particularly benefit from structured career development pathways and merit-based promotion systems. Given the demanding nature of sports administration, fostering self-efficacy through targeted coaching and mentoring programs can serve as an effective organizational strategy to buffer occupational stress and sustain managerial well-being.

The study contributes to the growing body of literature on occupational stress and psychological resources by integrating career satisfaction and self-efficacy within the Job Demands–Resources model. It provides empirical evidence that career satisfaction operates not only as a motivational factor but also as a psychological buffer that reduces stress perceptions.

Moreover, the mediating role of self-efficacy underscores its value as a transferable psychological resource that can transform satisfaction into resilience. These findings extend theoretical understanding of how personal resources interact with career-related variables to shape employees' psychological well-being.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study concluded that career satisfaction significantly reduces perceived stress (R^2 = .38) and that self-efficacy partially mediates this relationship. While the direct effect was large, the indirect effect through self-efficacy was small in magnitude, suggesting that self-efficacy operates as one of multiple pathways linking career satisfaction to reduced stress. Theoretically, this study extends the Job Demands–Resources model to the sports management domain by demonstrating that career satisfaction operates as a personal resource that reduces perceived stress through self-efficacy.

Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design, convenience sampling, and self-report measures are the limitations of this study. Future studies can focus on diverse cultural contexts, while exploring additional mediators such as organizational support and work engagement in sport contexts.

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