

# Perceptions of absence legitimacy: Effects of job stress, organizational commitment and perceived organizational support

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between job stress and organizational commitment on employees' perception of absence legitimacy. The moderating effects of organizational support on the espoused relationships are also examined. Data were collected from 298 employees working in Ghana. Job Stress and organizational commitment were significantly related to absence legitimacy. Additionally, organizational support moderated the relationships between the antecedent factors and absence legitimacy but not in the predicted directions. Perceived absence legitimacy has been shown to be a viable concept in the comprehension of employee absenteeism. The current study adds to a small but growing scholarly research in this research stream. Employees' perception of absence legitimacy is informed by organizational characteristics and employees' identification with and involvement in their organizations. Knowledge of why employees perceive absenteeism as a legitimate behavior would be insightful in developing effective absence management programs to reduce the cost of the behavior. Additionally, it is one of the few but growing body of research that examines employees' attitudes based on data from a developing country. Furthermore, some unexpected results provide for interesting theoretical advancements. The main limitations of this study are the use of cross-sectional data and lack of actual absence data.

**Keywords:** Absence legitimacy, Absenteeism, Perceived organizational support, Organizational commitment, Job stress

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Absenteeism is a complex multifaceted behavior with an estimated annual cost that ranges anywhere from \$100 to \$150 billion per year in the United States (Grossman, 2011). Due in part to work and/or non-work related factors, sporadic absences are inevitable. It can be argued that inevitable absences may be legitimate and could be mutually beneficial to organizations and employees. Nevertheless, what may be perceived as a legitimate reason for absenteeism differs at the individual, occupational, and cultural level. Thus, while a broken finger might be perceived as a legitimate reason for a concert pianist to miss work it would not necessarily be the case for a singer (Nicholson and Payne, 1987). Additionally, Harvey and Nicholson (1999) found that employees tended to perceive minor illnesses as legitimate reasons for absences. At the cultural level, a comparative study of Chinese and Canadian employees (Johns and Xie, 1998) Canadians and Chinese ranked the legitimacy of reasons for absence and attendance fairly similarly, but ratings showed that Canadians were less likely to endorse domestic reasons for absence, whereas Chinese were less likely to endorse illness, stress, and depression. Generally, illness is a readily accepted and a seldom questioned reason for absenteeism (Edwards and Whitston, 1993, Harrison and Martocchio, 1998, Johns and Xie, 1998, Judge and Martocchio, 1996).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW ANND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1.The Legitimacy of Absenteeism

Although these studies provide evidence that a variety of reasons for absenteeism may be perceived as legitimate, Addae and Johns (2002) theorized that employees' perception of the legitimacy of the behavior itself may influence their absenteeism and could be a precursor of the behavior. They defined absence legitimacy as the extent to which employees believe that absenteeism is a legitimate work behavior and is embedded within a social context. Legitimacy is socially constructed conventions of acceptable and reasonable behavior. As such, we argue that employees' perception that absenteeism is a legitimate behavior, could reveal their absence intentions and actual absenteeism.

According to the theory of planned behavior, individuals' intentions to engage in a behavior and perceived behavioral control can directly affect the behavior. Perceived behavioral control are perceptions about the existence of factors that enable or inhibit the enactment of a given behavior. The theory also postulates that individuals' intention to engage in a behavior would increase to the extent that individuals hold favorable attitudes towards the behavior, consider the behavior is supported by others, and is normative. Additionally, individuals' beliefs about the likely consequences of performing the behavior would determine if they engage in it ([Ajzen, 1991, 2005](#); Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Drawing on the theory of planned behavior, we contend that employees' perception of absenteeism as a legitimate behavior could be used as barometer of their intentions to be absent and/or engage in absenteeism.

Extant research on absenteeism espouses two main types of absenteeism- namely, voluntary and involuntary absences. Voluntary absenteeism is associated with an employees' motivation to attend work and therefore perceived to be within employees' control and thus illegitimate. Conversely, involuntary absenteeism refers to employees' ability to attend work and is perceived as impediments to work and therefore beyond employees' control (Steers & Rhodes, 1978; Driver & Watson, 1989). Since voluntary absences may be perceived as individually induced behavior, and less legitimate, such absences would not be socially acceptable or sanctioned and would elicit accountability than involuntary absences. Absenteeism has mildly deviant connotations (Johns, 1994; 2003). Thus, although absences in general tend to have dysfunctional

effects on organizations, voluntary ones are more likely to be attributed to deviance.

Addae and Johns (2002) operationalized absence legitimacy as a two dimensional construct - the extent to which absence is perceived as acceptable work behavior and the extent to which people should be held accountable for their absences. In the current paper, we investigate the latter dimension. A small body of research shows the potential of perceptions of absence legitimacy as a meaningful construct for comprehending absence behavior.

For example, in a study of employees in Singapore, Addae and Fang (2010) found that those with higher levels of professional commitment believed employees ought to be made accountable for their absences. Using employed graduates of a large Canadian university business school representing a variety of organizations, Johns (2011) established that respondents who viewed absenteeism as more legitimate, and therefore should not be penalized for the behavior, reported more sick days, more total absence days, and fewer presentism days. Interestingly, the author also found that women as well as employees' whose jobs were more easily replaced, measured as the extent to which someone else can fill in for them in case of their absence, perceived absenteeism as a more legitimate.

In another study, Patton (2011) asserted that reasons for absence, based on its perceived legitimacy, will significantly influence the extent to which absentees are held responsible, will engender feelings of anger and sympathy of co-workers towards absentees, and co-workers' willingness to help or punish absentees. He found employees' absences due to illness were perceived as more legitimate, were held less responsible for their absence than workers who are absent due to child-care duties, stress, or inequity perceptions. Accordingly, absence episodes that were considered illegitimate, elicited anger, reduced sympathy, increased intentions to punish, and lowered intentions to help absentees.

In a study of retail bankers in Ghana, Gyensare et al. (2015) found an inverse relationship between employees' turnover intentions and their perceptions of absence legitimacy. This finding suggests that when employees are inclined to leave their organizations, they are less likely concerned about being made accountable for their absences.

In a nine nation exploratory study, Addae, et al. (2013) investigated the two dimensions of absence legitimacy – acceptable and accountable, at the individual and national level of analysis. They found that individuals with external locus of control, polychronic time orientation, lacking social support, and those endorsing gender role differentiation tended to view absence as more legitimate. Results of the study also demonstrated between-country variance. For example, mean scores for acceptable absence legitimacy were highest for employees in Pakistan, India, and Trinidad, and lowest for employees in Japan. Conversely, employees in Japan, Canada, and Pakistan reported the highest mean scores for accountable absence legitimacy while those in Ghana provided the lowest scores. Evidently, while employees in Pakistan felt that absenteeism is inevitable, they also believed that employees ought to be made accountable for them. Employees in Japan on the other hand, did not endorse absenteeism as a legitimate behavior and sanctioned accountability of employees' absences.

The preceding studies provide evidence of the viability of absence legitimacy in different settings. The objective of this study is to investigate the links between employees' perceptions of absence legitimacy in Ghana using job stress and organizational commitment as antecedent factors. Additionally, we explore the potential moderating role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between the antecedent factors and absence legitimacy. Although, respondents from Ghana have been used in a couple of the studies on absence legitimacy, generally a significant amount of management theories and research emanate from North America and other Western countries. Nevertheless, in part due to globalization with its concomitant need to understand

similarities and differences in work attitudes and behaviors across nations, there is a growing trend in research to include developing countries.

This study contributes to the absenteeism literature in a couple of ways. First, obtaining valid absence data from organizations is fraught with constraints. Legal considerations as well as inconsistencies in data collection methods within and between organizations are among the many challenges researchers encounter. Investigating employees' perceptions of the legitimacy of absenteeism provides an avenue for investigating their cognitive evaluation of the behavior. With continued research in this area, we can better understand how legitimacy perceptions may affect the dynamics of absenteeism. Second, since absenteeism can be defined and operationalized in a culture-free way, perceptions of the legitimacy of absenteeism can be assessed in various settings to contribute to our broader understanding of the behavior and mitigate against its high costs.

## **2.2. Job Stress and Absence Legitimacy**

Job stress is an individual's reactions to characteristics of the work environment that are likely to threaten the emotional and physical well-being of the individual (Jamal, 2005). Due to health and economic implications of stress at work to both the individual and the organization, (Dunham 2001; Landsbergis 2003; Macik-Frey et al., 2009), the phenomenon has received a substantial amount of consideration from researchers and practitioners. A number of studies have linked job stress to job involvement, job dissatisfaction, organizational commitment, personality, performance, turnover, and absenteeism e.g., (Addae and Xiaoyun, 2006, Harzer and Ruch, 2015, Karasek, 1979, Karasek and Theorell, 1992, Verhaeghe et al., 2003).

For the purposes of this study, we conceptualize stress in terms of psychological states associated with time pressure originating in the work environment (Parker and DeCotiis, 1983). This conceptualization of stress is predicated on the premise that work-related stress may lead to dysfunctional consequences. As such, employees who experience high levels of job stress who might use absenteeism as a coping mechanism are likely to have elevated absence (De Lange et al., 2003, van Woerkom et al., 2016). Thus, such employees may perceive absenteeism as a legitimate behavior to mitigate against any dysfunctional effects of job stress.

However, it is anticipated that even though employees may perceive absenteeism as a legitimate behavior, faced with stress, they may expect individuals to be held accountable for their absences. This is because evidence suggests that absenteeism increases the workload of attending co-workers and potentially affecting their job stress (Allisey et al., 2016). Moreover, Johns (1997), postulated that stress absence can be viewed as either a matter of illness or withdrawal. In fact, Lewig and Dollard (2001) indicated that studies have shown that managers often do not view stress as authentic but often used as an excuse for absences. As such, stress absenteeism is likely to be regarded as less legitimate than illness absence.

The current ethos in absence research demonstrates that absenteeism is a social behavior that affects others, and is therefore susceptible to normative pressures. In the context of time pressures, employees might estimate that better time management may attenuate those situations. For example, [Kruglanski and Webster \(1991\)](#) found that individuals rejected co-workers whose absences cause delays when deadlines are tight. Additionally, Patton (2011) found that with high work demands associated with difficult deadlines and time pressure, individuals are expected to show up even if they are sick and stress absences were deemed unacceptable.

Based on the above argumentation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 1:** There will be a positive relationship between employees' job stress and their perception of accountable absence legitimacy.

### **2.3. Organizational Commitment and Absence Legitimacy**

Organizational commitment is defined as individuals' psychological identification with the values and goals of their organization. A number of conceptualizations of organization commitment have been advanced but by far, the most prominent is Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model. Although, they advocated affective, normative, and continuance dimensions of organizational commitment, affective commitment has been frequently studied and related to several work outcomes. In fact, Mercurio (2015) argues that it is an important "core essence" of organizational commitment.

Affective commitment represents an individual's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Affective commitment stimulates individuals to view their job and its characteristics more favorably (Meyer et al., 2004). In a meta-analysis, (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990, Meyer et al., 2002) found significant relationships between affective commitment and variables such as turnover intentions, job satisfaction, performance, organizational citizen behavior, and absenteeism.

Studies used in the meta-analysis as well as subsequent research findings (Harrison et al., 2006, Luchak and Gellatly, 2007, Park and Rainey, 2007, Solinger et al., 2008) found that employees with higher levels of affective commitment exhibited low levels of absenteeism. Indeed, a negative relationship between affective commitment and absence from work has been found, regardless of whether absenteeism was measured with data from organizational records (Burton et al., 2002) or with self-reports (Meyer et al., 1993, Sagie, 1998).

In view of these findings, and the premise that individuals with high affective commitment have a strong attachment to the values and goals of their organizations, we expect that they may most likely not perceive absenteeism as a legitimate work behavior. Additionally, such individuals could believe that employees should be made accountable for their absences. Thus, we advance the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** There will be a positive relationship between employees' affective commitment and their perception of accountable absence legitimacy.

### **2.4. Role of Perceived Organizational Support as Moderator**

The preceding hypothesized relationships between job stress as well as affective commitment and perceptions of absence legitimacy. In spite of the hypothesized direct relationships, we contend that perceived organizational support may condition these relationships. Eisenberger et al. (1986) defined organizational support as the extent to which employees perceive that their organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being. Based on social exchange and norms of social reciprocity theories, it can be argued that there could be a symbiotic relationship between employers and employees to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship (Eisenberger et al., 1986, Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002, Shore and Shore, 1995).

Thus, employees who perceive that their organizations, exemplified through supervisors and management, value them and their contributions have exhibited lower levels of absenteeism (Bacharach et al., 2010, Biron and Bamberger, 2012, Cropanzano et al., 2003). Furthermore, job stress has been found to be inversely associated with perceived organizational support (Panaccio

and Vandenberghe, 2009, Stephens and Long, 2000). In fact, in a recent meta-analysis, Kurtessis et al. (2015) found a negative relationship between perceived organizational support and absence behavior as well job stress. In light of these findings, it is expected that the relationships between both affective commitment and job stress and perceived absence legitimacy will be strengthened when levels of perceived organizational support are greater. As such, we offer the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 3:** The positive effect of employees' job stress on their perception of accountable absence legitimacy will be stronger (i.e. become more positive) when levels of perceived organizational support are greater.

**Hypothesis 4:** The positive effect of employees' affective commitment on their perception of accountable absence legitimacy will be strengthened (i.e. become more positive) when levels of perceived organizational support are greater.

### 3. SAMPLE SELECTION AND RESEARCH METHOD

#### 3.1 Sample

Data were collected in 2014 from employees working in the public and private organizations in the manufacturing and service sectors in Ghana. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed. Overall, 298 responses were received yielding an 85 percent response rate. Forty-nine percent of the respondents were females and the average age and tenure were 33 and 6 years respectively. Employees worked in private and public sectors organizations in the manufacturing and service industries. In the private sector, fifty-six percent of the employees worked in the services industry. In the public sector, fifty-seven percent worked in the services industry. Forty-seven percent of the respondents indicated they were employees and thirty-one and twenty-two percent indicated they were in supervisory and managerial positions respectively.

#### 3.2 Measurement

*Accountable absence legitimacy.* Accountable absence legitimacy was measured with Addae, Johns, and Boies' (2013) seven-item scale. The measure was scored on a five-point scale with a high score indicating an endorsement of absenteeism as a legitimate work behavior. The internal consistency of the scale was .77. "To ensure that absenteeism is controlled, employees who are absent should be penalized" is an example of the scale's items.

*Job stress.* Job stress was measured with Parker and DeCotis' (1983) 6-item stress scale time urgency dimension. The scores ranged from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) with a high score indicating a high level of job stress. The reliability of the measure was .93. An example of the items in the scale is "Working here makes it hard to spend enough time with my family".

*Organizational commitment.* Organizational commitment was measured with Meyer and Allen's (1990) six-item affective commitment scale. A five-point scale with scores ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used. The internal consistency of the scale was .77. "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me" is an example of an item in the scale.

*Perceived organizational support.* Eisenberger et al., (1986) perceived organizational support shortened eight-item scale was used to measure organizational support. A seven-point scale with scores ranging from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The reliability of the



measure was .78. An example of an item in the scale is “The organizational fails to appreciate any extra effort from me”.

*Position.* Respondents were asked to indicate their position in the organization by indicating whether they were in managerial or supervisory positions or employees.

*Control variables:* Gender, age, and tenure are three of the most frequent demographic correlates of absenteeism. Women have been found to be more absent and inverse relationships between age and absenteeism and between tenure and absenteeism have also been reported ([Côté & Haccoun, 1991](#); [Hackett, 1990](#); [Ng & Feldman, 2008](#)). As such, we expected that these variables might also affect perceptions of absence legitimacy thus, they served as control variables. In fact, in a study of absence legitimacy, Johns (2011) found that women perceived absenteeism more legitimate than their male counterparts. Additionally, we included position at work as a control variable because, although few studies have examined the dynamics of position at work and absenteeism, we contend that employees in higher level positions are less likely to perceive absenteeism as a legitimate work behavior that should be permitted to go on with impunity.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Measure Validation

We performed the Harman one factor test to assess any potential common method bias problem (Podsakoff et al. 2003). In this direction, we estimated a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) model in which all items were modeled indicators of a single bias factor. We obtained unsatisfactory results, indicating that common method bias does not pose a serious problem for our dataset. For measure development and model testing, a two-stage analytical approach was used whereby the measurement and structural models were tested consecutively (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). We first performed a CFA to test for the reliability and validity of all our constructs. The first-order measurement model included multi-item measures that job stress, affective organization commitment, organizational support and accountable absence legitimacy. Given the cross-national nature of our study, we first tested for the reliability and validity of the measures. In using Bagozzi and Yi (2012) model fit assessment criteria, we obtained overall good fitness indices: chi-square ( $\chi^2$ )/DF = 222.22/113; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .05; Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) = .94; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .95; and Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR) = .04. In addition, the factor loadings for each indicator on its respective construct were statistically significant at 1% level, and because we observed no evidence of cross-loading, we argue that our constructs demonstrate unidimensionality. Additionally, found that the smallest composite reliability value is .76, which exceeds Bagozzi and Yi’s (1988) .60 recommendations. We also observed evidence of discriminant validity for each construct because the lowest Average Variance Extracted is .52, which is not only larger than the recommended .50 threshold but also greater than the highest shared variance between any pair of constructs. Details of these findings are reported in Table 1. Although, not all items of the measures were retained, Anderson et al. (1987) contended that if an original measure is unidimensional, then in principle, eliminating items should not change the construct validity of the measure, because with unidimensional measures, items are conceptual replicates of one another. Any subset of items should therefore lead to the same interpretation.

**Table 1: Details of Measures and Results of Validity Tests**

Constructs and their measures	Standardized Loadings†	$\alpha$	CR	AVE
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<b>Job Stress</b>		<b>.92</b>	<b>.90</b>	<b>.62</b>	
Working here leaves little time for other activities	.72				
I spend so much time at work I can't even take a simple walk to relax	.75				
I frequently get the feeling I am married to the institution	.79				
I sometimes dread the telephone ringing at home because the call might be job-related	.74				
My job gets to me more than it should	.85				
I have too much work and too little time to do it	.80				
<b>Organizational Support</b>		<b>.78</b>	<b>.83</b>	<b>.56</b>	
The organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me (R)	.70				
The organization would ignore any complaint from me (R)	.68				
Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice	.74				
The organization shows very little concern for me (R)	.72				
<b>Affective Organizational Commitment</b>		<b>.77</b>	<b>.82</b>	<b>.54</b>	
I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization (R)	.71				
This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me	.74				
I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization(R)	.66				
<b>Accountable Absence Legitimacy</b>		<b>.77</b>	<b>.78</b>	<b>.55</b>	
Employee absenteeism should not be tolerated by managers	.55				
To ensure that absenteeism is controlled, employees who are absent should be penalized	.82				
Letting employees who are absent from work go unpunished is negligent	.71				
Punishing employees for being absent from work is justifiable	.71				
<b>Fit Indices:</b>					
Chi-square/DF	p-value	RMSEA	SRMR	NNFI	CFI
222.22/113	.01	.05	.041	.94	.95

† = All factor loadings are significant at 1% level; α = Cronbach's Alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted

**Table 2:** Descriptive statistics correlations between the key constructs

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	33.48	6.92								
2. Gender†	.51	.49	.07							
3. Tenure#	6.08	5.29	.12*	.24**						
4. Position at Work	2.20	.77	-.06	-.14*	-.14*					
5. Job stress	4.21	1.76	.04	.13*	.07	-.12*				
6. Organizational support	4.77	1.32	.08	.12*	.04	-.05	-.04			
7. Affective commitment	4.00	1.43	.00	.10	.16**	.03	.05	.08		
8. Accountable absence legitimacy	3.96	1.52	.13*	.09	.06	-.03	.13*	.50**	.14*	

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level; \*\* at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

† = Percentage of male and female in the sample

SD = Standard Deviation

# = Number of years working with an organization

Position - management = 1; supervisor = 2; and employee = 3



## 4.2 Structural model specification

Having demonstrated the reliability and validity of the measures of our constructs, we estimated our hypothesized relationships using hierarchical moderated regression analyses and ordinary least square estimation method. In following Aiken and West (1991), we reduced model complexity by creating single indicants for each multi-item construct. For the constructs that were used for multiplicative interactive analysis, the scores were mean-centered, helping to minimize any multicollinearity problem. Subsequently, a series of three nested models were estimated and compared to test the hypotheses. In Model 1, we estimated the two control variables freely while constraining all remaining paths to take on the value of zero. Results showed that Model 1 does not fit the data well. In Model 2, we added the controls and the direct effect variables to the model. We found that Model 2 produced very good fit to the data: F-statistics = 14.99 ( $p < .01$ ); and explained twenty-nine percentage of the total variance in accountable legitimacy, a significant improvement over Model 1.

In Model 3, we estimated the controls and the direct effect paths together with the product-terms for job stress and organizational support, and job stress and organizational commitment, which produced an excellent fit to the data: F-statistics = 12.76 ( $p < .01$ ); and an  $R^2$  value of 31%, which is an additional 2% variance more than the variance explained in Model 2. Accordingly, we relied on Model 3 for the interpretation our findings. Details of these findings are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Results of hierarchical moderated regression analyses for accountable absence legitimacy

Independent Variables	Accountable Absence Legitimacy		
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
<i>Control paths</i>			
Age	.12 (2.12)**	.09 (1.78)**	.09 (1.75)**
Gender	.09 (1.38)*	.01 (.15)	.01 (.11)
Tenure	-.04 (-.04)	-.05 (-.05)	-.05 (-.99)
Position at work	-.02 (-.39)	-.00 (-.03)	-.00 (-.02)
Accountable absence legitimacy	-	-	-
<i>Hypothesized Direct effect paths</i>			
H1: Job stress (JS)		.15 (2.92)***	.15 (2.99)***
H2: Affective organizational commitment (AO)		.10 (2.02)**	.09 (1.49)*
H3: Organizational support (OS)		.49 (9.83)***	.50 (9.83)***
<i>Hypothesized Moderating effect paths</i>			
H3: JS x OS			.09 (1.89)*
H4: AO x OS			-.10 (-2.08)**
<i>Goodness of fit indicators:</i>			
$R^2$	.02	.29	.31
Adjusted $R^2$	.01	.27	.28
$\Delta R^2$	-	.25	.02
F-statistics	1.41	14.99***	12.76***

\*\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*  $p < .10$ ; Critical t-values for hypothesized paths = 1.65 (10%, two-tail test)

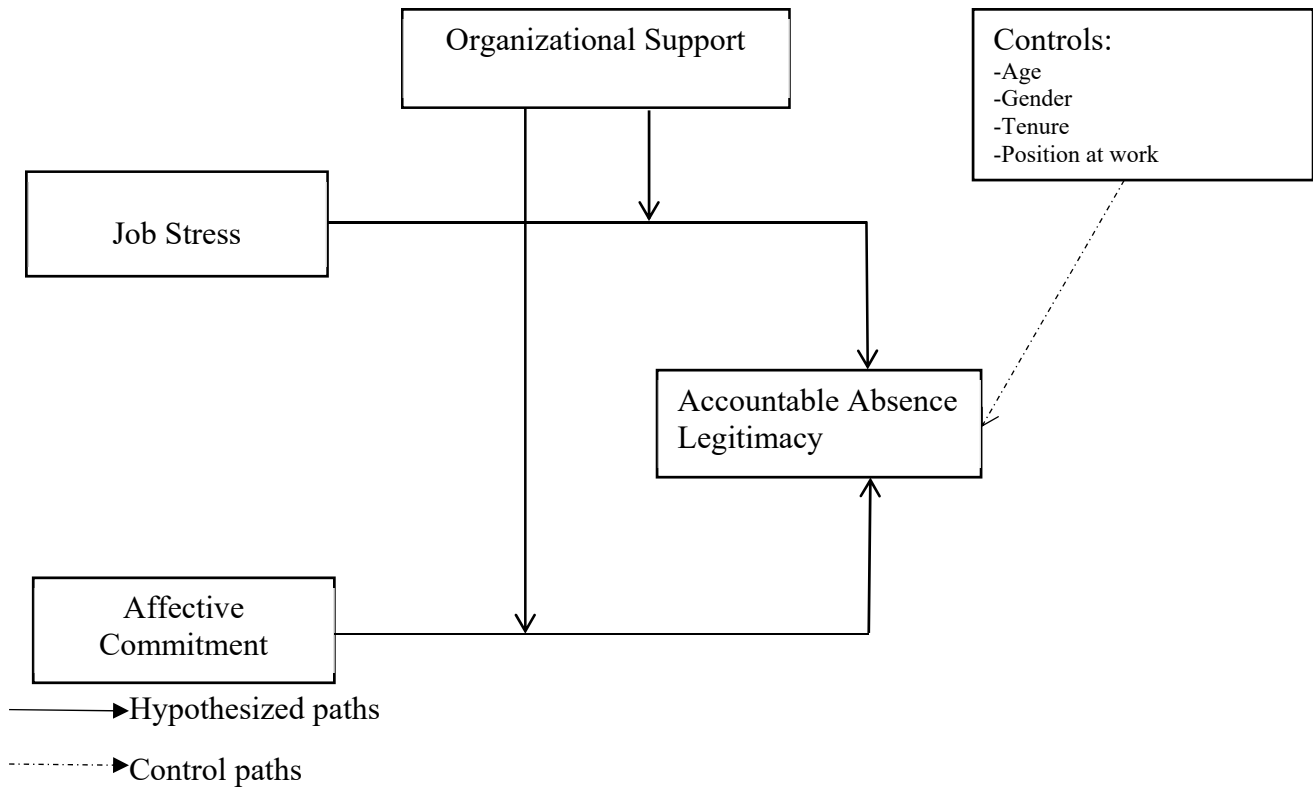
Hypotheses 1 focused on the accountable absence legitimacy outcome of job stress, where we argued that job stress is positively associated with accountable absence legitimacy. Findings showed that job stress is positively related to accountable absence legitimacy at 1% significant level ( $\beta = .15$ ;  $t = 2.92$ ;  $p < .01$ ). We argued in Hypothesis 2 that increases in affective

organizational commitment will be associated with increases in accountable absence legitimacy. The argument for a positive association between commitment and accountable absence legitimacy was supported in our data at 10% level ( $\beta = .09$ ;  $t = 1.49$ ;  $p < .10$ ). We predicted in Hypothesis 3 that the positive effect of job stress on accountable absence legitimacy will be strengthened when organizational support is higher but will be weakened when organizational support is lower. Our findings indicate that the impact of job stress on accountable absence legitimacy is positive and stronger when levels of organizational support are higher but this relationship is only significant at 10% level ( $\beta = .09$ ;  $t = 1.89$ ;  $p < .10$ ), hence H3 is supported at 10% level (one-tailed test).

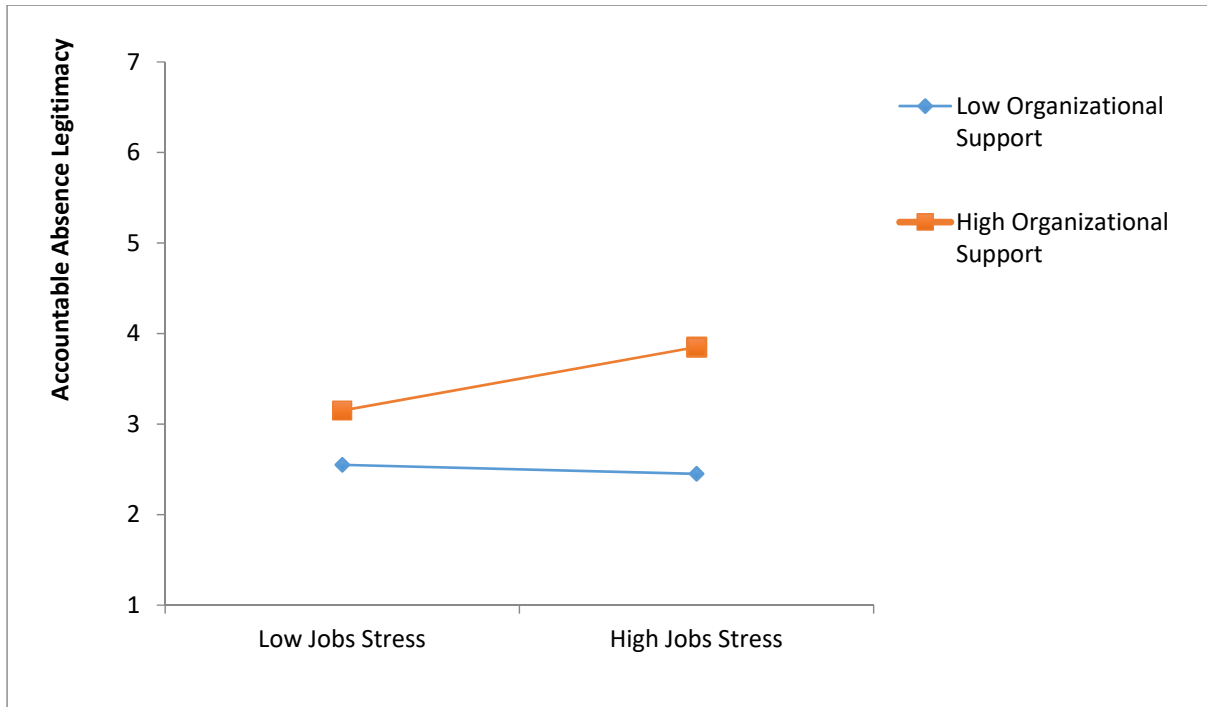
In Hypothesis 4 we argued that the positive effect of affective organizational commitment on accountable absence legitimacy will be strengthened when levels of organizational support are higher. Results showed that higher levels of organizational support are associated with a weaker relationship between affective organizational commitment and accountable absence legitimacy ( $\beta = -.10$ ;  $t = -2.02$ ;  $p < .05$ ), rejecting H4. In other words, increases in levels of organizational support and higher levels of affective organizational commitment are associated with decreases in accountable absence legitimacy.

To examine the interaction effect relationships further, the interaction terms were decomposed. We then followed Aiken and West (1991) and Dawson (2014) to compare the effects of job stress and affective commitment on accountable absence legitimacy at one standard deviation below and above the mean value of organizational support. In Figure 2, results show that the positive effect of job stress on accountable absence legitimacy becomes more positive as organizational support takes on a higher value above the mean. As Figure 3 shows, findings show that as levels of organizational support increase the impact of affective commitment on accountable absence legitimacy becomes negative. In sum, evidence from the study suggests that the relationships between job stress and organizational commitment, and accountable absence legitimacy is conditional upon levels of organizational support, with organizational support accentuating the effect of job stress while at the same time attenuating the effect of organizational commitment on accountable absence legitimacy.

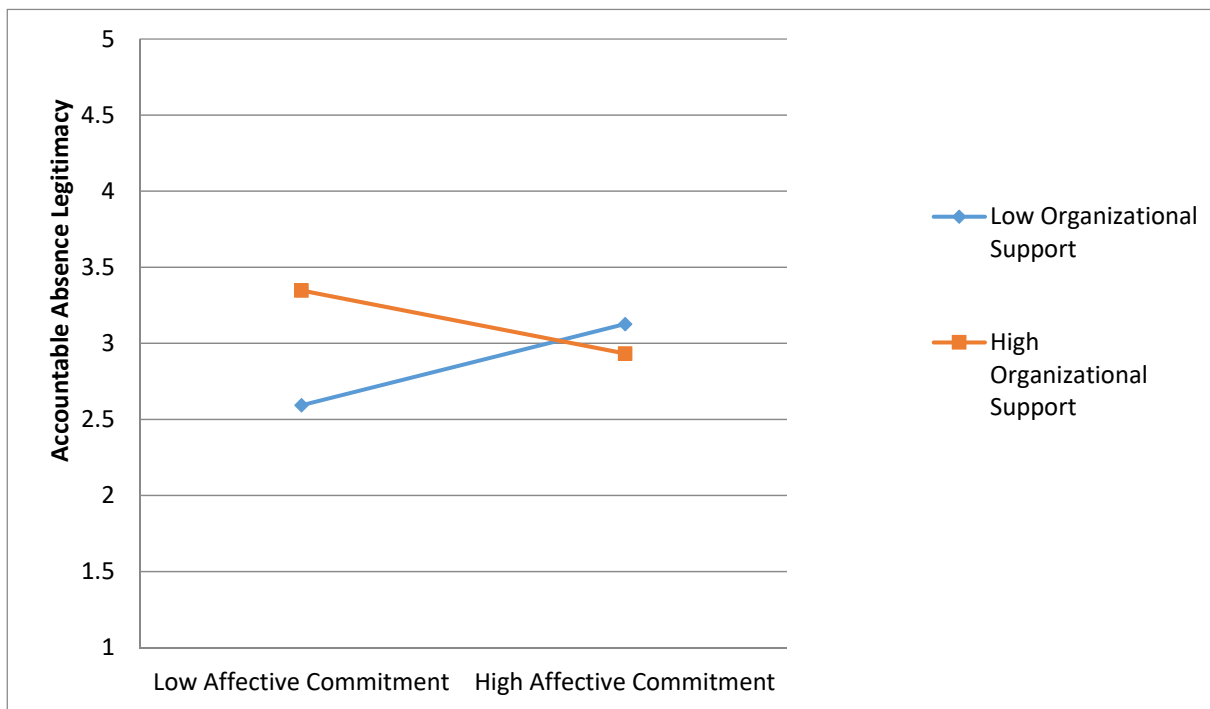
**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**



**Figure 2: Interaction between job stress and organizational support**



**Figure 3:** Interaction between affective organizational commitment and organizational support



**5. Discussion**

In this study, we investigated the effects of job stress and affective organizational commitment on employees' perception of accountable absence legitimacy. In addition, we examined the moderating effect of perceived organizational support on the effect of job stress and affective commitment on absence legitimacy. The results of the study demonstrated significant positive effects of job stress and affective commitment on accountable absence legitimacy. Thus, employees who experienced higher levels of job stress were likely to perceive that employees ought to be accountable for their absences. Although employees may engage in absenteeism as a coping mechanism to alleviate job stress (Karasek, 1979), it does not necessarily mean that they would perceive absenteeism as a legitimate behavior which should not be accounted for.

Similarly, employees with higher levels of affective commitment suggests higher degrees of emotional investment in, and identity with, their organization. Accordingly, such employees may perceive that the organization's well-being is intertwined with theirs. Therefore, absenteeism could be mutually detrimental and not be perceived as a legitimate work behavior.

Contrary to previous studies that found significant negative relationships between stress and perceived organizational support, we did not find any significant correlation between the two variables. We speculate that respondents in this study did not perceive their organizations valued their contribution or cared about their well-being them. Therefore, their organizations would not institute assistance programs to alleviate their stress.

Furthermore, results indicate that the job stress-accountable absence legitimacy relationship is strengthened with higher levels of perceived organizational support. Interestingly, contrary to our assertion that higher levels of perceived organizational support may strengthen the relationship between affective commitment and accountable absence legitimacy, we found that increases in perceived support attenuated the relationship.

This negative moderating effect of organizational support on the relationship between affective commitment and accountable absence legitimacy may be explained in several ways. First, Frink et al. (2008) articulated that accountability is pervasive in social systems and is used to control and predict behavior. Second, Breux et al. (2009) defined felt accountability as the expectation that employees' job duties and compliance with organizational norms will be evaluated by others. Consequently, in cases where individuals believe that organizations value their contributions and care about their well-being, it can be inferred that they may comply with attendance expectations and norms.

Nevertheless, we speculate that for individuals with higher levels of affective commitment, increased perceived organizational could engender mutual trust, thus weakening the belief that one ought to account for their absences. For such individuals absenteeism may not be perceived as deviant behavior. Conversely, the affective commitment- accountable legitimacy is strengthened with lower levels of perceived organizational could be explained in terms of failed reciprocity which might lead to less trust and thus more scrutiny and accountability. Alternatively, according to Meyer et al. (2004) employees with stronger affective commitment to a target, in this case their organization, will experience greater intrinsic motivation and more self-directed forms of external regulation.

Drawing on Deci and Ryan's (1985) cognitive evaluation theory which argues that extrinsic motivation undermines intrinsic motivation, strengthening extrinsic motivation (through organizational support) will weaken intrinsic motivation (antecedent to affective commitment). Thus, it is plausible that perceived organizational support could weaken the link between commitment and absence accountability. This is because perceived support substitutes for one's perceived personal support of the organizational goals and its welfare. Such perceived personal

support for the organization's values reinforces affective commitment and the personal sense of responsibility that one should be accountable for one's absence. Therefore, perceived organizational support will weaken this relationship because the focus has shifted from personal to organizational.

It is safe to assert that employees with low levels of affective commitment may not be emotionally invested in or be highly involved in their organization. It is therefore plausible that such employees' may pursue a transactional relationship that is built on compliance to gain rewards and avoid punishments. Moreover, employees who experience stress are more likely to exhibit lower levels of affective commitment (Glazer and Kruse, 2008).

## 6. Implications and Limitations

A majority of research conducted on absenteeism tend to investigate the links among various antecedent factors and consequences of the behavior. Due to legal, reporting inconsistencies within and between organizations, actual absence data has been subject to concerns of accuracy. Since self-reported absences are comparatively easy to obtain, it has been often substituted with actual absence data. The use of self-reported absences is not without controversy. As Johns and Miraglia (2015: page 1) point out, self-reports are 'prone to a variety of biases encompassing inaccurate memory, inflated self-presentation, and self-delusion'.

In view of the challenges associated with both actual absence and self-reported data, we contend that perceptions of absence legitimacy could make a considerable contribution to understanding of absenteeism. As a construct absence legitimacy solicits employees' perceptions of the *behavior*. Such perceptions relate to employees feelings and cognitions towards absenteeism and could be an insightful precursor of their actual behavior.

From a practical perspective, the findings of our study suggest that even though employees believe that absenteeism may be inevitable, it should not be condoned with impunity. Organizations should be cognizant of factors that might lead employees to perceive absenteeism as a legitimate work behavior and attempt to mitigate against them. In fact, knowledge of legitimacy perceptions could aid in the development and management of absence programs. Effective absence management programs are important for organizations because even a small decrease absenteeism may mean large financial savings. A main limitation of the study is the lack of actual absence data to determine whether perceptions of legitimacy is a precursor to absenteeism. Absence legitimacy is a promising construct in the understanding of absence dynamics. In fact results from Addae et al. (2013) demonstrated its feasibility in examining absenteeism both at the individual and national level as well as within and between nations. Future research could investigate the extent to which people in various professions and cultures could perceive absenteeism as a legitimate work behavior. For example, should absenteeism be perceived as a legitimate work behavior for employees in the protective services if they experience deplorable working conditions? Would both employees and the general public who use their services perceive absenteeism as a legitimate behavior under such conditions?

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