

Work Stress, Coping Style and Three Hierarchic Subjective Well-Being in Couriers: A Structural Equation Model

Yang Chenfan^{1,2*}, MO Wen²

¹Guangdong Business and Technology University, Zhaoqing, China

²Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, China

*yang935988539@163.com

ABSTRACT

To explore the relationship between works tress and 3-hierarchy subjective well-being, and the multiple mediating effects in coping style. 348 couriers' work stress, Coping Style and 3 hierarchic subjective well-being were tested by the structural equation model. Results show that work stress had significantly negative correlations with survival subjective well-being, developing subjective well-being and transcendental subjective well-being. According to path analysis, work stress can influence subjective well-being of couriers via a mediating effect of positive and negative coping style. However, to different hierarchic subjective well-being the effects are different. These results suggest that different hierarchic subjective well-being can be influenced by work stress and coping style by different pathways.

Keywords

work stress; coping style; subjective well-being; structural equation model

Introduction

In recent years, with the progress of the society, individuals' work stress has risen sharply and has gradually becomes one of research hotspots. Wang S. (2008) emphasizes the consequences of work stress and defines it as an uncomfortable phenomenon of physiology, psychology and behavior by the influence of work or work related factors. Seňová and Antořová (2014) argue that work stress occurs when the demands of the working environment exceed the ability of employees to deal with or control them. Stress is not a disease, but if intense and taking a certain amount of time, it can lead to disruption of both, the mental and physical health. Stress can reach every employee at any level. As a result, it threatens both physical health and psychological health of an individual. This definition is similar to that of Xu Z. (1999). In our perspective, work stress contains not only stressors (when task overloads one's ability) but also consequences which are caused by work.

Too much work stress will not only reduce work performance (Jungwee, 2007), cause job burnout(Gong Y., 2011), but also reduce subjective well-being (SWB, Fortes-Ferreira, Peiró, González-Morales, & Martín,2006;Boshoff, Potgieter, Rensburg, & Ellis, 2014; Ojedokun & Idemudia,2014). However, the relationship between work stress and SWB can be complex:

researchers find that individual personality traits can affect the relationship between job stress and SWB (Hart, Wearing, & Headey, 1995; Federmann, Bäckström, & Goldsmith, 2010). Besides, some scholars have found that individuals' cognitive appraisal of stressors may lead them to take different coping styles and then cause different consequences (Gong Y., 2011; Tang S., Zhang J., Ling H., 2014; Shi R., 2013). This can be interpreted by the cognitive interaction theory (Smith & Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus argues that emotional activity must be guided by cognitive activities. Only in this way can people understand the significance of stimulating events and choose appropriate and valuable combination of actions which is called action response. In recent years, another variable has been found to be social support (Terry, Nielsen, & Perchard, 1993; Buchanan & McConnell, 2016). Social support can decrease individuals' improper responses to work stress, thereby affecting the relationship between job stress and SWB.

Considering the personality traits, social support, coping style of three variables, personality and social support all affect individuals' coping styles: For personality and coping style, Gárriz, Gutiérrez, Peri, Baillés and Torrubia (2015) find different personality traits tend to adopt different coping styles. In addition, Magnano, Paolillo, Platania and Santisi (2017)

find that besides four kinds of personality traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness) influence the individual coping strategy, and the courage plays an intermediary role; for social support and coping style, Yang C., Fu Y. and Wang W. (2014) find that college students can develop new coping skills through social support when they meet social problems. Besides, social support can also enhance their resilience and promote them to take more appropriate coping strategies. Therefore, in present study we select coping style as one of variables in that it may directly affect SWB. Coping styles are the behavioral and cognitive-psychological efforts individuals make to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events (Noorbakhsh, Besharat, & Zarei, 2010). Different coping styles have different influence on SWB: The positive coping style contribute to their SWB, while negative coping style are detrimental to their SWB (He J. & Fan F., 2014).

Although An L., Yin M. and Yang Y., (2016) have studied the relationship between work stress, coping style and SWB, their research is based on a single dimension. In recent years, many scholars have proposed that the SWB is multidimensional (Diener, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Miao Y., 2003). Mo W. (2013) puts forward that individual's SWB can be divided into 3 hierarchies based on previous studies and her empirical study. These 3 hierarchies are the survival SWB, the developmental SWB and the transcendental SWB. She argues this is because the SWB is the positive cognitive evaluation and emotional state after different levels needs have been satisfied. From the perspective of development, the hierarchy of needs follows the order of survival needs, development needs and transcendental needs. Accordingly, since the hierarchy of need determines the hierarchy of SWB, people's SWB should be divided into 3 hierarchies. There is a corresponding relationship between need and SWB: The survival SWB corresponds to survival need; the developmental SWB corresponds to developmental need; the transcendental SWB corresponds to transcendental need.

Above all, we chose work stress, coping style, survival SWB, developmental SWB and transcendental subjective SWB as variables and used structural equation modeling to analyze the effects of job stress on coping styles and SWB. The role and mechanism of coping style in the relationship between job stress and different hierarchies of SWB was examined.

The last problem is samples. According to the hierarchic theory of SWB, it is reasonable to assume that people with different social hierarchies have different degrees of influence on SWB of different hierarchies. However, there is no proper way to delaminate the hierarchies of different work. Therefore, this study selects the first-line couriers as the research sample because this group is representative, Who are generally young, low educational level, With undefined rest time, large span of working hours, so the pressure of survival is the main pressure they face. Thus, our hypothesis is that work pressure may directly affect their survival SWB but has little or no direct influence on developmental and transcendental SWB.

Method

Participants

The original sample was 380 couriers from Henan province (China). Questionnaires were excluded as invalid if the number of respondents was less than 50% or the same number of options was higher than 90%. At last 348 questionnaires were returned (effective questionnaire rate: 91.6%). 276 (79.3%) of those surveyed were male, 61 (17.5%) were female, 11 (3.2%) participants didn't write their gender. This proportion is reasonable and acceptable in that most couriers are male in real life. The age of more than half of the sample (51.9%) ranged between 18 and 33 years, and 40.6% were between 34 and 53 years old, and there were 26 (7.5%) missing data.

Measures

All the questionnaires were native editions in that all the participants were Chinese. These questionnaires were collected from previous studies. The use of them was approved by the authors.

Work stress. The “Enterprise Staff Work Stress Measurement” scale (39 items, Shi L., 2005) has 5 dimensions: Workload ($\alpha=0.85$); conflict with leadership ($\alpha=0.85$); company management ($\alpha=0.83$); conflict with colleagues ($\alpha=0.82$); stress response ($\alpha=0.92$). Likert’s 5-point scoring method is adopted in the scale. The split-half reliability is between 0.78 and 0.83.

Coping style. The “Simple Coping Style” scale (20 items, Xie Y., 1998) has 2 dimensions: No. 1-12 measure the positive coping style ($\alpha=0.89$) while No. 13-20 the negative coping style ($\alpha=0.78$). The scale is scored at 5 points of 0-4. The global α coefficient is 0.90.

Subjective well-being. The “Chinese Nationals’ Subjective Well-being” scale (41 items, MO W., 2013) has 3 parts. The Survival SWB scale (12 items, global $\alpha=.077$) has 3 dimensions: life satisfaction ($\alpha=0.66$); life vitality ($\alpha=0.67$); safety satisfaction ($\alpha=0.63$). The Developmental SWB scale (15 items, global $\alpha=.087$) has 3 dimensions: social respect ($\alpha=0.83$), friendly communication ($\alpha=0.81$), aesthetic cognition ($\alpha=0.58$). The Transcendental SWB scale (14 items, global $\alpha=.083$) has 3 dimensions: social value ($\alpha=0.68$), self value ($\alpha=0.66$), self actualization ($\alpha=0.71$). The scale is scored at 6 points of 1-6.

original data is completed by Epidata3.1, and the data are analyzed with SPSS 17 and AMOS 17.

In this study, the structure equation model (SEM) was constructed to analyze the mediating effect of coping style. The mediator effect is tested by the deviation correction percentile Bootstrap method: If the confidence interval does not contain 0 the mediator effect is considered to be significant (Fang J., Wen Z., Zang M. & Song P., 2014). For the parameters: when χ^2/df is between 2 and 5 this model can be accepted; when the REMSEA is below 0.1, it indicates that an acceptable fit; while less than 0.05 it indicates a good fit; NNFI, CFI values are usually between 0 and 1, the bigger the model is better, when all the numerical value go beyond 0.9 are regarded as acceptable model (see. Steiger, 1990).

Results

Common method biases

Because this research adopts the questionnaire survey method to collect data, a common method bias test was performed. Harman single factor test found that 24 common factors’ eigenvalues were greater than 1. The eigenvalue of the first factor was 21.92 with the percentage equaled 21.49%. It showed that the common method bias didn’t exist in this study (see. Podsakoff & Mackenzie, 2003).

Table.1 Correlations for the six observed variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. WS	93.849	22.062	1					
2. P-CS	23.388	5.979	-0.091	1				
3. N-CS	9.719	5.064	0.377**	0.032	1			
4. S-SWB	44.211	12.008	-0.312**	0.351**	-0.252**	1		
5. D-SWB	59.088	12.264	-0.147**	0.513**	-0.179**	0.651**	1	
6. T-SWB	58.200	12.819	-0.168**	0.494**	-0.191**	0.636**	0.794**	1

Note. WS, work stress; P-CS, positive coping style; N-CS, negative coping style; S-SWB, survival subjective well-being; D-SWB, developmental subjective well-being; T-SWB transcendental subjective well-being. ** $p<.01$

Data Analysis Procedure

In order to ensure the quality, the data was taken centralized distribution, to fill the spot after recovery approach. It took about 15-20 minutes to answer all 3 questionnaires. The input of the

The correlation analysis of work stress, coping style and subjective well-being

Work stress was significantly negative correlated with survival SWB, developmental SWB and

transcendental SWB (see in table 1). Thus we hypothesize that (1) work stress has a significant impact on subjective well-being; (2) different coping styles may play a mediating role between work stress and happiness. Based on these hypotheses, we constructed 3 SEMs regarded work stress as antecedent variable, 2 different coping styles as mediator variables and 3 types of SWB as outcome variables. The data is packed by the packing method of unidimensional questionnaire (Matsunaga, 2008). The positive coping style was randomly divided into two observation variables: positive coping 1 and positive coping 2 while the negative coping style was divided into negative coping 1 and negative coping 2 as observation variables.

SEM of work stress, coping style and survival SWB

Descriptive analysis was performed. The coefficients of skew are between -0.461 and 0.599 while the coefficients of kurtosis are between -0.957 and -0.054. It was proper to use the ML method to esteem all parameters (because skew<3 and kurtosis<8, see. Wu M. 2010). Thus a SEM was constructed (see fig. 1), $\chi^2=170.651$, $df=49$, $\chi^2/df=3.483$, $p<.001$, $TLI=0.891$, $CFI=0.919$, $RMSEA=0.085$, all parameters are acceptable. In addition, all the factor loadings were significant, $p < 0.001$, which supports the convergent validity of the indicators (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). For all four latent factors, latent factors were significantly connected ($p < 0.01$) except the connection between work stress and positive coping style ($p=.091$).

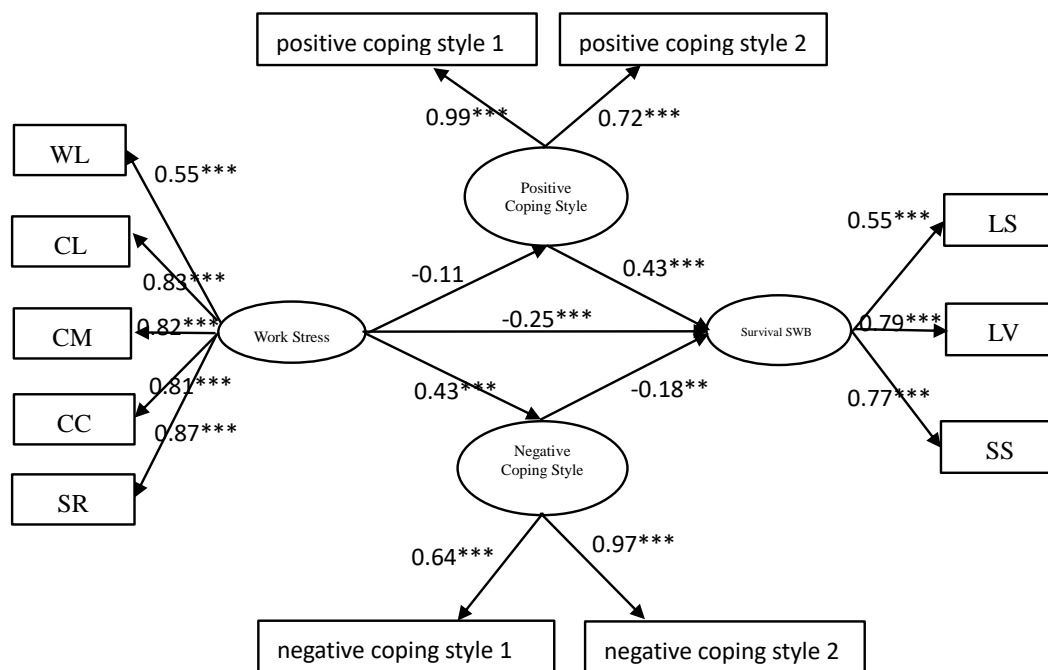


Figure 1. The SEM of work stress, coping style and survival SWB (N=348). Factor loadings are standardized. WL, Work load; CL, conflict with leadership; CM, company management; CC, conflict with colleagues; SR, stress response; LS, life satisfaction; LV, life vitality; SS, safety satisfaction; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

With percentile Bootstrap method with deviation correction we found that for work stress to survival SWB: total effect=-0.369 (95% CI[-0.494,-0.238]); direct effect=-0.249 (95% CI[-0.383,-0.104]); mediator (indirect) effect= -0.123 (95% CI[-0.221,-0.037]). The proportion of the mediator effect in the total effect was 33.06%, which meant that 33.06% of the influence of work

stress on the survival SWB via the positive coping style and the negative coping style. The mediating path of work stress, positive coping style and survival SWB significantly explained 12.7% of the variance. The mediating path of work stress, negative coping style and survival SWB significantly explained 20.8% of the variance. The roles of two coping styles were inconsistent: positive coping style was a buffer to reduce the harmful influence from work stress to survival SWB while negative coping style could exacerbate the harmful influence.

SEM of work stress, coping style and developmental

SWB

Descriptive analysis was performed. The coefficient of skew of each item is between -0.398 and 0.599 while the coefficient of kurtosis is between -0.957 and 0.539. It was proper to use the ML method to esteem all parameters. Thus a SEM was constructed (see fig. 2), $\chi^2=176.344$, $df=49$,

$\chi^2/df=3.599$, $p<.001$, $TLI=0.896$, $CFI=0.923$, $RMSEA=0.087$, all parameters were acceptable. In addition, all the factor loadings were significant, $p < 0.001$, which supports the convergent validity of the indicators (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). For all four latent factors, latent factors were significantly connected ($p < 0.01$) excepts the connection between work stress and positive coping style ($p=.091$).

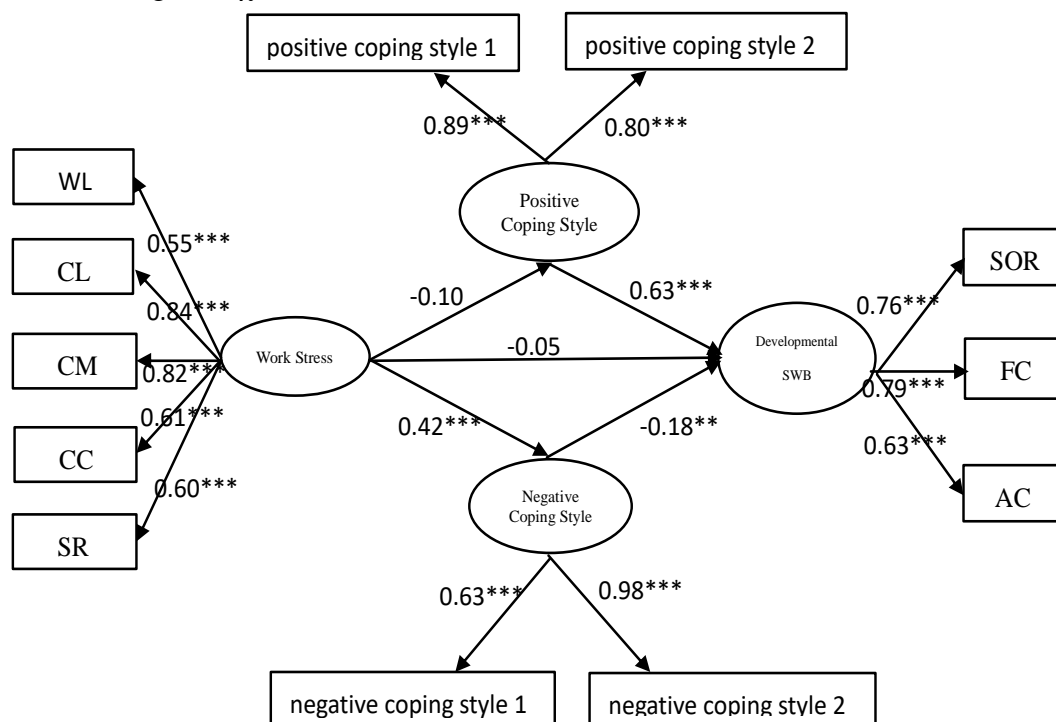


Figure 2. The SEM of work stress, coping style and developmental SWB (N=348). Factor loadings are standardized. WL, Work load; CL, conflict with leadership; CM, company

With percentile Bootstrap method with deviation correction we found that for work stress to developmental SWB: total effect=-0.185 (95% CI[-0.320,-0.048]); direct effect=-0.045 (95% CI[-0.181,0.099]); mediator (indirect) effect= -0.140 (95% CI[-0.254,-0.039]). The proportion of the mediator effect in the total effect was 75.68%, which meant that 75.68% of the influence of work stress on the developmental SWB via the positive coping style and the negative coping style. The mediating path of work stress, positive coping style and developmental SWB significantly explained 34.05% of the variance. The mediating path of work stress, negative coping style and developmental SWB significantly explained

39.5% of the variance. The roles of two coping styles were similar to survival SWB.

SEM of work stress, coping style and transcendental

SWB

Descriptive analysis was performed. The coefficient of skew of each item is between -0.465 and 0.599 while the coefficient of kurtosis is between -0.957 and -0.113. It was proper to use the ML method to esteem all parameters. Thus a SEM was constructed (see fig. 3), $\chi^2=175.688$, $df=49$, $\chi^2/df=3.585$, $p<.001$, $TLI=0.891$, $CFI=0.919$, $RMSEA=0.086$, with all parameters acceptable. In addition, all the factor loadings were significant, $p < 0.001$, which supports the convergent validity of the indicators (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). For all four latent factors, latent factors were significantly connected ($p < 0.01$) excepts the connection between work stress and positive coping style ($p=.091$).

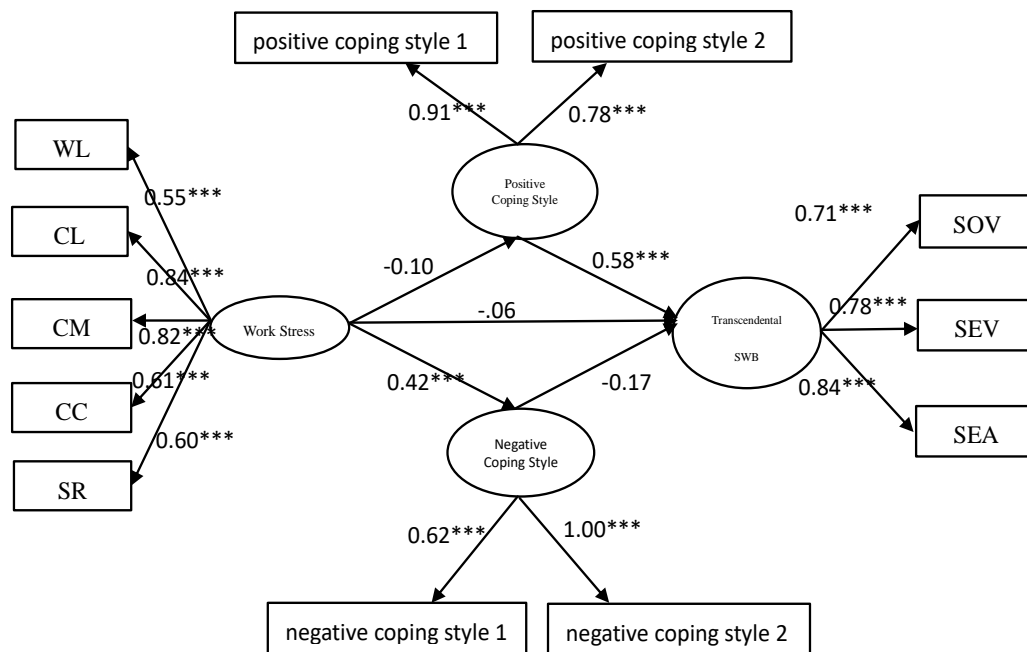


Figure 3. The SEM of work stress, coping style and transcendental SWB (N=348). Factor loadings are standardized. WL, Work load; CL, conflict with leadership; CM, company management; CC, conflict with colleagues; SR, stress response; SOV, social value, SEV, self value, SEA, self actualization; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Using percentile Bootstrap method with deviation correction we found that for work stress to transcendental SWB: total effect=-0.196 (95% CI[-0.318,-0.072]); direct effect=-0.064 (95% CI[-0.190,-0.062]); mediator (indirect) effect= -0.132 (95% CI[-0.229,-0.041]). The proportion of the mediator effect in the total effect was 67.35%, which meant that 67.35% of the influence of work stress on the transcendental SWB via the positive coping style and the negative coping style. The mediating path of work stress, positive coping style and transcendental SWB significantly explained 29.59% of the variance. The mediating path of work stress, negative coping style and transcendental SWB significantly explained 36.42% of the variance. The roles of two coping styles were similar to survival SWB.

Discussion

Work stress has significant negative correlations with three hierarchies of SWB. These results are similar to that of Hart, Wearing, Headey (1995) and Tang S., Zhang J. & Ling L. (2014). This may be because although the emergence of stressors does not improve life satisfaction, it will accelerate the recovery of psychological resources when an individual get rid of stressors

(1988), the correlation coefficient between work stress and SWB is -0.39 and -0.410 respectively (Wearing & Headey, 1995; Tang S., Zhang J. & Ling L.,2014), both showing up the medium correlations. These results are different from the present study: Although the correlation coefficient between work stress and survival SWB is medium ($r=-0.312$), work stress with the developmental SWB and transcendental SWB is all weak corrections ($r<-0.168$). Consistent with our hypothesis, the relationship between work stress and survival SWB is stronger for couriers. This phenomenon can be explained by Mo W.(2013)'s study. She finds that individuals in different hierarchies have different standards to SWB. Low hierarchies of folks pay more attention to the survival indexes (health, traffic conditions, economic income etc.), middle level people are more concerned about the developmental indexes (love, social status, self-esteem), high levels of people are more concerned about the transcendental indexes (self actualization and dedication etc.). In this study, the educational level of the couriers is not high (the cumulative percentage of high school and below is 75.9%, the total percentage of junior college and below is 97.7%) and the life stress is also high thus they cannot pay too much attention to developmental and transcendental needs so that the developmental SWB and the transcendental SWB

are not strongly correlated with work stress. Another explanation is that Stressors are divided into two types: challenge stressor and self handicapping stressor. The challenge stressor is positively correlated with job satisfaction, while the self handicapping stressor is negatively correlated with job satisfaction (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000). In this study, the work in delivery industry is simple and couriers don't have enough opportunities for self development, so it is difficult to produce the challenge stressor and they can hardly feel satisfied with their jobs, which leads to low developmental SWB and low transcendental SWB.

Another discovery of this study is the hierarchy of the mediating role to coping style. The results of SEM show that coping style only plays a partial mediating role in work stress and survival SWB, while in the other two models (developmental SWB and transcendental SWB), it plays a complete mediating role. That means in developmental SWB and transcendental SWB, too much work stress may force the couriers with inappropriate coping style, which affects the evaluation of their self esteem and self value (see. Albertsen et al. 2010; Kamdee, 2012), and further affects the two high hierarchic SWB (see. Huebner, Gilman, & Laughlin, 1999; Wilson, 1967; Wang H., Dou G. & Hang X., 2006).

Besides, coping style does have a mediating effect between the work stress of the courier and the SWB, but the effects of positive coping style and passive coping style are different. For work stress and survival SWB the total effect is 33.06% with 20.8% when it is negative; for work stress and developmental SWB, the total effect is 75.68% and 67.35% respectively, while 39.5% and 36.42% is negative respectively. This indicates that the main way for the couriers to release the work stress is passive avoidance. Lightsey(1994) finds that positive cognitive acts as both pressure buffers and emotional regulators. Therefore, we infer that in this study, the overuse of negative avoidance by couriers may be one of the reasons for lower high hierarchic SWB.

Since coping style plays a mediating role in three models (especially in the two high hierarchic

models it is a complete mediator), it is necessary to take better coping strategies for stress management. Enterprises are responsible for helping couriers learn some effective methods to deal with work stress. In addition to more positive coping strategies, they need to teach couriers to balance problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (see. Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001; Martinko, Gundlach & Douglas, 2002). In addition, the 3-hierarchy model reminds us to focus not only on the basic life events of the couriers, but also on the higher-level requirements. Changing the single working mode and long work time and give couriers more opportunities to self development seem to be an effective way to improve their SWB. Just as Oerlemans, Bakker and Demerouti(2014) argue, companies need to be vigilant for overwork, which leads employees to be unable to recover from long-time work, which not only affects their happiness, but also reduces their job performance.

Finally, we choose the courier as participants is because we assume work stress of the lower hierarchic folks will significantly affect their survival SWB, and this hypothesis is confirmed by the results. But we can't deduce that the work stress of higher hierarchic folks has a stronger predictive effect on higher hierarchic SWB. It is because research shows that low income can cause more emotional pain, but higher income does not bring more happiness (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). Thus work stress may not be much associated with a higher hierarchic SWB for high hierarchic folks. The relationship among job content, work stress and three hierarchic SWB needs to be further studied.

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