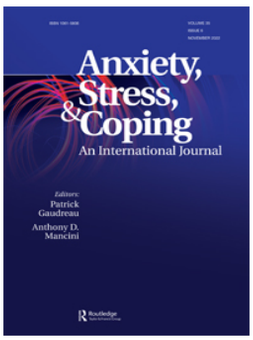

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A multilevel analysis of the links between daily emotional labor, daily spiritual experiences, and daily stress during the COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Background and objectives: The adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic both necessitate and obstruct emotional regulation and coping mechanisms. Despite growing interest in the connection between stress and spirituality, multilevel studies addressing day-level variance to understand how spiritual experiences and emotional regulation are linked with stress during this unique situation are scarce. This study aims to analyze how daily spiritual experiences (DSE) and daily emotional labor (EL) connect with the daily stress levels of employees during the pandemic.

Design and method: Data collected from 132 employees for five consecutive workdays (660 d-level, 132 person-level responses) were analyzed via Hierarchical Linear Modeling.

Results: Multilevel analysis provided evidence for the negative association between DSE and daily stress. The "faking emotions" and "hiding emotions" dimensions of daily EL were positively and significantly related to daily stress, while the "deep acting" dimension demonstrated no significant relationship. There was no evidence for the moderator role of DSE in the relationship between daily EL and stress.

Conclusion: The form of daily EL is crucial to understanding how it associates with daily stress. Although its buffering role on the adverse effects of EL is not significant, DSE directly relates to lower stress levels.

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COVID-19; daily stress; daily emotional labor; daily spiritual experiences

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the world, demanding rapid adaptation to new requirements across various life domains. Factors such as decreased social interaction and heightened economic concerns have served as severe stressors, threatening the psychological wellbeing of many individuals. Adverse conditions and forced change have generated high levels of pandemic-related stress, resulting in serious outcomes such as depression and anxiety (Kujawa et al., 2020). In face of this challenging period, the role of possible coping mechanisms, emotions, and emotional regulation has become more significant (Hamilton et al., 2021; Newcomb, 2021). The primary purpose of this study is to investigate how daily spiritual experiences (DSE) and daily emotional labor (EL) are associated with daily stress.

The link between spirituality and wellbeing has long been a subject of interest among scholars. Numerous studies – including Fabricatore et al. (2000) and Tuck et al. (2006) among others – have identified spirituality as an effective way to cope with stress. This link was also validated for work stress (Daniel, 2015). Furthermore, recent studies emphasize the role of spirituality in mitigating

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the adverse psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Coppola et al. (2021) report that people are experiencing lower levels of mental and spiritual wellbeing than they did before the pandemic, and that spirituality is an effective way to improve mental and physical health during this period. Büssing et al. (2021) indicate positive links between spiritual experiences, such as prayer and meditation, and wellbeing, while Lucchetti et al. (2020) demonstrate that private religious and spiritual activities are associated with better mental health, supporting Whitehead and Bergeman's conclusion that there is a negative association between DSE and stress (2012).

Moreover, the demands made by the pandemic exacerbate the strain individuals experience and negatively shape daily emotions. Emotional regulation is more demanding when there is a greater dissonance between one's genuine emotions and the emotions expected by one's job or organization (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Employees' perceptions regarding occupational stressors before and during the pandemic differ significantly (Wong et al., 2021). Qualitative analyses in the healthcare sector indicate increased EL as a result of the pandemic (Diogo et al., 2021). Additionally, employees working remotely must adapt to several new demands, such as balancing their work and family roles and learning to use new technology. Expressing positive emotions in the face of negative experiences is thus more challenging. Recent studies (e.g., Javed & Batoll, 2021) linking EL with wellbeing, specifically in a context characterized by increased emotional demands due to the pandemic, provide evidence for the significance of the concept as well as the complexity of such link, which change with the type of EL being performed. The methods employees use to cope with and regulate their emotions are critical for managing stress-related outcomes of the pandemic.

Studies adopting a multilevel approach to addressing EL, such as Judge et al. (2009) and Scott et al. (2012), report substantial within-individual variance and emphasize considering this dynamic structure for understanding the nature of its consequences. The same applies to the DSE construct as evidence suggests different results for daily and person-level assessments of the concept. For instance, Jackson (2010) indicated a buffering effect of day-level spiritual experiences on the impact of daily stress on negative affect. However, the same impact was not seen in a global (person-level) measure of spirituality. This pattern of findings emphasizes the importance of including intra-individual variance when investigating the links between spirituality, stress, and affect, – and considering the uniqueness and severity of the conditions shaped by the pandemic – the need to investigate daily coping methods and possible antecedents of daily stress during this process. Adopting a multilevel longitudinal research design, this paper aims to analyze the associations between daily EL, DSE, and daily stress levels of employees in the pandemic circumstances. The study will also test the buffering effect of DSE on the connection between daily EL and stress.

The value of the present study and its contributions to filling the gaps in the literature are threefold. First, the extraordinary and dynamic demands that the pandemic places on our lives necessitate new research that investigates the links between study variables from a multilevel perspective. The severe effects of the pandemic on the emotions and stress levels of employees make understanding these variables even more essential for the effective management of the process. Second, knowledge regarding the link between DSE and stress is limited, and addressing DSE as a possible coping mechanism and buffer for the daily stress experienced during the pandemic with a multilevel research design is a promising approach. The study also contributes to extant knowledge on this association by investigating this link under unique pandemic conditions and capturing both inter-individual and intra-individual variances. Finally, this study aims to further knowledge on the nature of the association between daily stress and EL in a period of extreme work demands regarding emotional regulation. As the effects of the pandemic are long-lasting and this "extreme" is becoming a "new normal", investigations that reexplore the links between study variables are vital.

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

The theoretical foundations of this study's research model can be traced back to the stress-coping model created by Folkman and Lazarus (1984). They proposed problem-focused and emotion-focused coping; the former refers to altering and managing the situation and making it easier to cope with, while the latter refers to cognitively rebuilding or reframing the situation. Accordingly, when employees perform genuine EL, they modify their feelings and restructure conditions to create lower levels of stress. Numerous studies, such as Kim (2020), support this postulated link between EL and stress with empirical evidence. Moreover, through spiritual experience, employees reshape the meaning of events that occur in their lives (Golparvar & Abedini, 2014). Seminal studies theoretically linking spirituality and work (e.g., Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002) emphasize the role of spirituality in employees' attitudes, and work experiences, and outcomes. Similarly, empirical evidence supports the negative link between meaning in work and stress (Daniel, 2015).

Daily emotional labor and daily stress

Emotional labor is a process of modifying and adjusting emotions through adornment, reconstruction, or fabrication to present the feelings expected by the norms of a given situation (Hochschild, 1979; Grandey, 2000). Early conceptualizations of EL divided the construct into two dimensions: surface acting involves fabricating or superficial changing expressed emotions through behaviors, body language, and appearance without changing one's internal emotions, while deep acting refers to the internal modification of genuinely felt emotions (Hochschild, 1983; Mann & Cowburn, 2005). An example of surface acting might be an employee displaying warm and friendly body language towards a customer, despite their internal anger or discomfort over said customer's refusal to wear a mask or maintain social distancing. Deep acting, on the other hand, would involve the employee modifying and internally reshaping this anger into genuinely positive emotions. Lee and Brotheridge (2011) categorized the surface acting dimension into two separate forms: hiding emotions and faking emotions. Hiding emotions refers to efforts to suppress emotions that would not be acceptable according to the norms of a given context. Faking emotions, on the other hand, is the fabrication and presentation of emotions that are not actually experienced (Glomb & Tews 2004).

Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that individuals feel discomfort when experiencing conflicting cognitions regarding emotions, attitudes, and behaviors; this discomfort motivates them to engage in psychological labor to reduce or eliminate the discrepancy (Festinger, 1957). Emotional labor can cause cognitive dissonance when the emotions felt and displayed are incompatible. Hiding or faking emotions can induce this dissonance by creating conflict between internal experience and external presentation of emotions. Hochschild (1983) refers to the discrepancy between genuinely felt emotions and the emotions displayed to conform to the organizational norms as "emotional dissonance" and defines it as a source of stress. When individuals are able to manage their emotions and rebuild them into new, genuine emotions expected of them by their job (deep acting), the dissonance is lessened, but if they simply modify their external emotional expressions without simultaneously modifying their internal emotions (surface acting), the dissonance is greater leading to increased negativity of outcomes (Gross & John, 2003).

The majority of studies addressing the psychological consequences of EL indicate adverse outcomes such as stress, burnout, and decreased wellbeing (e.g., Pugliesi, 1999; Erickson & Ritter, 2001). On the other hand, several studies argue possible positive consequences of EL (e.g., Grandey, 2000; Kruml & Geddes, 2000). One possible reason for this inconsistency is the fact that most studies do not capture day-level variations in EL. Emotions are highly malleable and dynamic state-like constructs. The affective state individuals experience can fluctuate daily, and research designs addressing intra-individual variations are critical to furthering our understanding of the matter.

Morris and Feldman (1996) suggested that another possible reason for the contradictory findings in the literature regarding the effects of EL is the different characteristics of its dimensions. Although it is generally considered to be a variable that produces adverse outcomes, it can also provide benefits depending on the type of EL being performed. Wharton (1999) supports this notion and suggests that some facets of the concept positively affect employee wellbeing while others have detrimental effects. For instance, deep acting is less likely to cause dissonance that might harm the psychological wellbeing of employees compared to surface acting (Hochschild, 1983). Empirical evidence supports this distinction, as it indicates that surface acting increases the risk of burnout, while deep acting reduces it (Lee et al., 2015). Studies that link surface acting with negative emotional wellbeing and report negative or nonsignificant associations with deep acting, such as Gürbüz and Dede (2018), Judge et al. (2009), and Scott and Barnes (2011), support the idea of a positive connection between stress and surface acting (hiding emotions and faking emotions) and a negative one with deep acting. Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) report that surface acting and hiding emotions show positive associations with negative affectivity, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization, while deep acting demonstrates no significant relationship to these variables. Moreover, deep acting positively relates to personal accomplishment, while surface acting and hiding emotions show no such association. Building on the stress-coping model, cognitive dissonance theory, and the pattern of findings in the literature, we propose the following:

H_1: Daily deep acting has a negative and significant relationship with daily stress.

H_2: Daily faking emotions has a positive and significant relationship with daily stress.

H_3: Daily hiding emotions has a positive and significant relationship with daily stress.

Daily spiritual experiences and daily stress

According to the job demands-resources model (Bakker et al., 2003), job stress is a consequence of unevenness between a job's demands and resources. A decrease on the resource side or an increase on the demand side of the equilibrium can create imbalance and cause stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The circumstances introduced by the pandemic threaten both sides of the equilibrium, as the "new normal" demands more from employees while consuming more from their resources (Thielsch et al., 2021). Employees can in turn strengthen their resources to better cope with the burden of the pandemic. Spiritual experiences such as meditation, mindfulness, and prayer can serve as resources to cope with burnout during the pandemic (Sokal et al., 2020). Daily spiritual experiences can increase an individual's inner resources (Woods, 2007) and help with the discrepancy between demands and resources. DSE can also enable employees to reframe their perceptions of both sides of the equilibrium.

Underwood and Teresi (2002, p. 23) refer to spirituality as the ways in which individuals approach and associate with "the transcendent (God, the divine)" in their lives. Although the terms "spirituality" and "religiousness" are often used interchangeably, a number of scholars have discussed the differences between the two concepts. Religion is frequently distinguished by its collective and systematic aspects, as it is associated with institutions or traditional belief systems, while spirituality is described as an individual connectedness to the transcendent (Worthington & Sandage, 2001; Saroglou & Muñoz-García, 2008). Hill et al. (2000) underscore the importance of avoiding the polarization of these concepts and emphasize the shared and intertwined characteristics of constructs. Underwood and Teresi (2002) conceptualize DSE as a component of both religiousness and spirituality that can explain wellbeing-related variables. Although the concepts of religiousness and spirituality are often addressed as stable constructs, there is evidence for substantial intra-individual day-level variance in both variables. A study evaluating religious and spiritual structures in a daily context related to chronic pain found that the variance due to intra-person factors ranged from 20.3% to 32.1% (Jackson, 2010, p. 9). Moreover, Underwood (2011) posits DSE as an appropriate construct for measuring change over time.

Empirical evidence links spiritual experiences with anxiety, depression, and wellbeing (Bovero et al., 2019). Rudaz et al. (2019) indicate that DSE is positively related to life satisfaction and positive affect and negatively linked with negative affect. Underwood and Teresi (2002) report that day-level spiritual experience is related to a better quality of life and a more positive psychosocial state. Holland and Neimeyer (2005) emphasize the role of spiritual experiences for employees working in highly stressful conditions by indicating negative associations between DSE and workplace burnout; spirituality can help people adopt a more positive perspective when dealing with the problems encountered in their lives. The findings of Hojjati et al. (2017) support the negative association between DSE and perceived stress and Kim and Seidlitz (2002) report that controlling for various coping strategies, spirituality provides an additional explanation for the effects of stress on negative emotions. Recent studies addressing spiritual experience and stress during the pandemic indicate significant links between the variables. Arslan and Yıldırım (2021) show that meaning-based coping and spirituality mitigate the negative impacts of pandemic-related stress on wellbeing. Spirituality helps individuals cope with psychological distress through increased engagement in religious experiences (Hamilton et al., 2021). Rias et al. (2020) reported significantly lower levels of pandemic-related anxiety in individuals with higher levels of spirituality. The job demands-resources model and the above pattern of evidence allow us to create the following hypothesis:

H_4: DSE has a negative and significant relationship with daily stress.

Daily spiritual experiences (DSE) as a moderator

Hobfoll's conservation of resources theory (2011) is widely used in the literature on EL (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2002), stress (e.g., Westman et al., 2004), and spirituality (e.g., Bickerton & Miner, 2021) as it provides a solid theoretical framework to explain the antecedents and pathways of stress. The theory suggests that individuals experience stress when their resources are depleted, and factors that restore these resources can therefore mitigate stress. Spirituality can provide the replenishment of resources that then enable individuals to experience fewer adverse outcomes of EL (Byrne et al., 2011). DSE can thus refresh the resources lost as a result of hiding and faking emotions and decrease their adverse outcomes. Empirical evidence indicates that DSE (both at the trait and state level) acts as a buffer mitigating the effects of daily stressors (Kent et al., 2021). The findings of Zou and Dahling (2017) demonstrate the buffering role of workplace spirituality on the detrimental effects of surface acting on wellbeing and support the moderating role of DSE on the relationship between daily EL and stress.

H_5: DSE has a significant moderating role, weakening the negative relationships between daily (a) faking emotions and stress, and (b) hiding emotions and stress.

Method

Sample and procedure

Data was collected from a convenience sample of employees working in various organizations and sectors across Turkey. Employees were recruited voluntarily from the network of researchers. All respondents were full-time employees actively working during the data collection period. The average age for the respondents was 37.6 (SD = 10.1, min 20; max 63). Seventy-nine of the participants (60%) were male and 39% were single. The majority of the participants (92%) graduated with a BSc or higher. We adopted a two-level analysis strategy, and daily responses were nested within individuals. Participants were instructed to respond to a short day-level survey at the end of each workday for five consecutive days and a longer person-level questionnaire after the day-level data collection period. The research group underscored the confidentiality of the data collection process. Questionnaires were delivered, and data was collected through online forms (Google

Forms). Data collected from participants who failed to provide complete five consecutive day-level responses (seven participants) or a person-level (Level 2) response (nine participants) on the requested time were excluded from the analysis following Ohly et al. (2010). The remaining 660 d-level and 132 person-level responses were used in the analyses. To compare the respondents included in the analysis with those who failed to provide five consecutive day level responses (excluded), we ran a series of difference tests (χ^2 and t-tests), and the results indicated no significant difference between the groups.

Measures

A single-item stress assessment tool developed and validated by Metzenthin et al. (2009) was used, though it was slightly modified to assess the daily stress levels of participants. The original item was "Please indicate the intensity of your stress at the time of sampling". We simply changed the time of the question to "today" and asked, "Please indicate the intensity of your stress today". Metzenthin et al. (2009) underscore the tool as a valid and useful measure for routine and repeated assessment of stress. Despite concerns about the power and validity of single-item measures, several scholars suggest that single item psychological measures are reliable, valid, and practical tools as they may mitigate the common method variance, and make the data collection process less demanding for participants (which may result in better data quality), and may be used effectively to assess several constructs (Gardner et al., 1998; Fisher et al., 2015). Notably, several authors preferred to use Metzenthin et al.'s single-item measure (2009) in their daily or multilevel studies (e.g., Conrad et al., 2012; Jaghult et al., 2013). Elo et al. (2003) indicated adequate content and construct validity for the scale.

We used the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES), which was developed by Underwood (2011) and adapted to Turkish by Akın et al. (2013). The wording of six of the ten original items was slightly modified to assess the spiritual experience levels of respondents that day. Items were selected according to two criteria: high factor loading among those more suitable for daily assessment, and the presence of aspects that can occur more frequently and on a daily basis. Modifications were limited to changing the time phrases in the items. For instance, "I *find* strength in my religion or spirituality" was changed to "I *found* strength in my religion or spirituality", with an emphasis on the instruction to consider the experiences on that day (by adding "today"). Other example items include: "I *found* comfort in my religion or spirituality" and "I *felt* deep inner peace or harmony"; ($\alpha_w = .93$, $\alpha_b = .94$). Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale.

We used the Emotional Labor Scale (Brotheridge & Lee 2003) that was redeveloped by Lee and Brotheridge (2011) and adapted to Turkish by Dursun et al. (2014) to measure the EL levels of respondents. Items were slightly modified by adding "today" and changing to past tense. Example items for the subscales include "*Today* I *concealed* what I'm feeling" for hiding emotions; "*Today* I really *tried* to feel the emotions I have to show as part of my job" for deep-acting; and "*Today* I *showed* emotions that are expected rather than what I feel" for faking emotions ($\alpha_w = .86$, $\alpha_b = .93$ for faking emotions, $\alpha_w = .86$, $\alpha_b = .88$ for hiding emotions, and $\alpha_w = .84$, $\alpha_b = .89$ for deep-acting).

Neuroticism can be defined as a disposition towards higher levels of adverse feelings and loss of control in the face of stressors (Barlow et al., 2014). Numerous studies, such as Mohiyeddini et al. (2015), have reported neuroticism as a significant predictor of stress. Findings regarding daily stress indicate the same relationship pattern (e.g., Gunthert et al., 1999). Moreover, the link between neuroticism and stress is supported by studies addressing the pandemic period (e.g., Liu et al., 2021). Demographics (such as gender and age) are significantly related to pandemic-related stress (Xiong et al., 2020). We, therefore, used demographics and neuroticism as control variables. The neuroticism levels of respondents were assessed in the person-level (one-time) questionnaire, using all eight items assessing neuroticism in the personality inventory developed by John et al. (1991) and adapted to Turkish by Sümer and Sümer (2003) and Sümer et al. (2005). Items include "can be tense", "worries a lot," and "gets nervous easily" ($\alpha_b = .80$). All scales used in the study

were scored on a five-point scale. Information regarding the demographics of the respondents was collected via categorical (gender, marital status, and education) and open-ended (age) questions.

Data analysis

To analyze within-person and between-person variance together, we used HLM 7 for Windows (Raudenbush et al., 2011). A series of multilevel models (see Kashdan & Nezlek, 2012) was conducted to test the hypotheses. Five days of level 1 data were nested in each person. Thus, level 1 (day-level) variables were group mean-centered, and level 2 variables (demographic variables, neuroticism, and aggregate scores of DSE and EL constructs) were included as grand mean-centered.

Results

Preliminary analysis

We tested whether there was sufficient within-person variance in the day-level variables of the study to investigate the adequacy of using multilevel analysis (Hox, 2002). Results demonstrated that 45% −73% of the variances in the study variables were at the within-person level, and multilevel analysis was appropriate for testing this study's hypotheses. Table 1 presents within-person and between-person variances and the mean values for the constructs.

The correlation analyses indicate significant relationships between study variables (Table 2). Findings show that neuroticism is significantly and positively related to stress, faking emotions, and hiding emotions, while it is negatively associated with DSE. Neuroticism remained a control variable in the further analysis, as it demonstrates significant relationships with study variables.

Hypothesis testing

To test the hypotheses of the study, we ran cumulative models. Day-level variables were used in the models as random coefficients. We compared the differences between the deviance scores of models and calculated their significance (Table 3). The null model, which only had the intercept and no predictor variables, provided a platform to examine how the addition of other variables affects variance. For simplicity, we did not depict the null model in Table 3. Model I included second-level variables, but none of the categorical demographic variables showed any significant relationship with the dependent variable, thus, we did not present them in Table 3. Neuroticism demonstrated a significant and positive relationship with stress (Model I), but this link was insignificant in Model II. Aggregated forms of DSE, faking emotions, and deep acting demonstrated no significant effects. Aggregate scores were significant only for the hiding emotions factor ($t = 3.88$, $p < 0.01$). The difference in the deviance between Model I and the null model was not significant indicating that Model I was not a better fitting model compared to the null model. The day-level independent variables were added to the analysis in Model II. Controlling for demographics, neuroticism, and aggregated scores of the independent variables, daily faking emotions ($t = 3.50$, $p < 0.01$) and daily hiding emotions ($t = 2.41$, $p < 0.05$) were positively related to stress. On the days when

Table 1. Variance components of within-person variables.

Variable	Intercept	Within-person variance	Between-person variance	Percent (within- person variance)	*M*	*SD*
Stress	2.74**	0.70	0.87	45	2.75	1.25
DSE	3.35**	0.90	0.34	73	3.35	1.11
Faking E.	1.85**	0.65	0.52	56	2.00	1.15
Deep Act.	3.37**	0.67	0.65	51	2.25	1.15
Hiding E.	2.00**	0.74	0.60	55	1.85	1.08

**$p < .01$. DSE = Daily Spiritual Experience. Deep Act. = Deep Acting, E. = Emotions

Table 2. Zero-order correlations among study variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Stress	1	−.08	.54**	.44**	.60**	−.09
2. DSE	−.15*	1	.10	.17	.08	−.09
3. Faking E.	.28**	−.04	1	.78**	.91**	−.06
4. Deep Act.	.14**	.00	.44**	1	.76**	−.18*
5. Hiding E.	.30**	−.01	.54**	.42**	1	−.07
6. DAYS	−.17**	.00	.02	−.22*	−.11*	1
7. Gender	.04	−.17	−.10	.04	−.06	−.07
8. Marital S.	−.00	−.11	.08	.08	.05	.06
9. Edu	.04	.02	−.03	−.19*	−.08	−.04
10. Age	−.17	.13	−.08	−.16	−.10	−.01
11. Neuroticism	.31**	−.17*	.19*	.17	.22**	−.00

Notes. DSE = Daily Spiritual Experience. E. = Emotions. Coefficients over the diagonal depict second-level correlations (N = 132). Correlations under the diagonal show within-person correlations processed in HLM (N = 660). Correlations with the control variable (neuroticism) were calculated using aggregated scores. Female is coded 0; male is coded 1. * for $p < .05$; ** for $p < .01$

participants engaged more in faking and hiding emotions, they experienced higher levels of stress. The relationship between DSE and stress was negative and significant ($t = -2.17$, $p < 0.05$). The difference in the deviance between Model I and Model II was significant indicating that Model II was a better fitting model. Level 1 and 2 variances and standard errors are also shown in Table 3. These results provide evidence for Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4. Daily forms of faking and hiding emotions were positively related, and DSE was negatively related to daily stress. Deep acting indicated no significant relationship with stress; thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported by the findings of the study. To test Hypothesis 5, we created another model with interaction terms. There was no sufficient evidence for the buffering role of DSE, although the moderation effect on hiding emotions and stress relationship was close to being statistically significant ($p = 0.053$).

Table 3. Results of multilevel analyses.

	Model I			Model II			Model III		
Variable	Est.	SE	t	Est.	SE	T	Est.	SE	t
Fixed effects									
Intercept	2.74	(.06)	44.63**	2.96	(.09)	31.79**	2.96	(.09)	31.87**
Neuro. L2	0.23	(.10)	2.19*	0.18	(.10)	1.84	0.18	(.10)	1.62
DSE A. L2	−0.08	(.06)	−1.16	−0.11	(.06)	−1.70	−0.11	(.06)	−1.63
Faking A. L2	0.05	(.21)	0.26	−0.01	(.19)	−0.04	−0.01	(.19)	−0.02
Deep A. L2	−0.04	(.13)	−0.35	−0.06	(.12)	−0.56	−0.06	(.12)	−0.50
Hiding A. L2	0.56	(.19)	2.93**	0.64	(.16)	3.88**	0.64	(.16)	4.00**
DSE L1				−0.17	(.07)	−2.17*	−0.17	(.07)	−2.23*
Faking L1				0.27	(.07)	3.50**	0.27	(.07)	3.39**
Deep Act. L1				0.01	(.06)	0.21	0.01	(.06)	0.25
Hiding L1				0.17	(.07)	2.41*	0.17	(.07)	2.22*
Time (days)				−0.07	(.02)	−3.07**	−0.07	(.02)	−3.01**
DSE x Faking							0.03	(.06)	0.50
DSE x Hiding							−0.12	(.06)	−1.93
Deviance		1956.12			1838.58		1842.42		
Diff. *df*		9			14		16		
Diff. Devi.		41.99			117.53**		3.84		
L 1 Variance		0.874 (.93)			0.536 (.73)			0.531 (.72)	
L 2 Variance		0.706 (.84)			0.433 (.65)			0.423 (.65)	
Random effects									
Faking					0.120 (.34)			0.126 (.35)	
Deep Acting					0.118 (.34)			0.126 (.35)	
Hiding					0.129 (.36)			0.140 (.37)	
DSE					0.402 (.16)			0.182 (.42)	

DSE = Daily Spiritual Experience. Neuro. = Neuroticism. Est = Estimate, SE = Standard Error, A. = Aggregated across 5 days. L1 = Level 1 (day level). L2 = Level 2 (person level). Time coded as days (1-5). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Discussion

A considerable number of studies indicates the severity of the pandemic's psychological consequences (e.g., Chew et al., 2020). Taylor et al. (2020) even coined the concept of "COVID stress syndrome" to describe the gravity of the situation. The pandemic requires coping and emotional regulation while also making these actions more challenging.

This problem pattern calls for investigations addressing the antecedents and coping methods for employee stress during the pandemic. This study aimed to investigate the relationships among daily EL, DSE, and daily stress levels of employees working in various organizations in Turkey during the pandemic. The results of the multilevel analysis demonstrate that DSE is significantly associated with lower daily stress levels. The deep acting dimension of EL showed no significant links, while faking and hiding emotions were positively related to daily stress. Results provided no significant evidence for the moderating role of DSE. Although the *p*-value was close to the significance threshold ($p = .053$), DSE's buffering effect on the negative relationship between daily stress and hiding emotions was not significant.

The study contributes to extant knowledge in several ways. Our knowledge of the connection between day-level spiritual experience, daily EL, and stress is limited. Furthermore, the study depicts the relationship between these variables in a revolutionary and unique process where the pandemic compels radical changes in every life domain. As the extraordinary pandemic conditions shape the "new normal", it is crucial to revisit and rediscover the links between stress and its antecedents. Moreover, variations in the stress levels of an individual can be rooted in interpersonal differences, and can also be an outcome of intra-individual processes. Including both levels of variations requires a nested multilevel research design. The variables addressed by the current research are subject to day-level fluctuations, and an increasing number of studies address them as day-level constructs and utilize multilevel research designs (e.g., Judge et al., 2009; Scott & Barnes, 2011; Scott et al., 2012). This study adopts a multilevel approach and demonstrates substantial within-person variation in the constructs. Analyzing the within-person aspects alongside the between-person variance is a critical contribution that can further our knowledge regarding the relationship between EL, DSE, and stress. Results showed lower levels of stress on the days employees performed higher levels of DSE. These findings are compatible with the propositions of the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker et al., 2003) and Hobfoll's conservation of resources theory (2011), as spiritual experiences increase individuals' resources (Woods, 2007) to cope with daily stress; as the imbalance between increased demands and decreased resources becomes smaller, individuals will experience lower levels of stress. This is in line with the conclusions of studies that point to spirituality as a helpful coping mechanism for the psychological consequences of the pandemic (e.g., Ribeiro et al., 2020). This study furthers this knowledge by supporting the relationship at the intra-individual level.

The results of present study underline how the type of EL performed determines its association with stress. In line with the formulated hypotheses, we found that on the days employees engaged more in faking and hiding emotions, they experienced higher stress levels. Faking and hiding emotions involves suppressing and masking actual feelings, rather than genuine modification of the real emotions (Mann, 1999), and because the felt emotions are not changed, the dissonance between real and expressed feelings is not reduced. On the other hand, deep acting involves the rebuilding of genuinely felt emotions (Hochschild, 1983) and does not cause high levels of dissonance. Findings indicating the different nature of associations regarding the dimensions of EL support the conclusions of Ekman and Friesen (1983), who emphasize the importance of the dissonance occurring between the felt and expressed emotions caused by EL over the extent of the EL itself.

Limitations

The design and findings of the study are correlational and do not provide causality. The convenience sampling strategy of the study limits the generalizability of the results. The difficulty and complexity

of the data collection process in multilevel longitudinal research design compelled us to recruit as many respondents as possible without criteria regarding sector or organization. Future studies addressing or comparing specific sectors and demographic groups can further our knowledge in this regard. Given the demanding nature of data collection in longitudinal and multilevel studies, the sample size was limited (660 d-level and 132 person-level responses), and larger samples recruited via random sampling can provide more generalizable findings. Since the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, these findings will need to be confirmed and investigated through the use of larger samples in the future.

Conclusion

This study is unique because it provides information regarding the relationship between DSE, EL, and daily stress during a period of the COVID-19 pandemic when lockdowns, travel restrictions, and attempts to move to remote working were prevalent. Our findings emphasize the importance of the strategies used to regulate emotions during this stressful period. Training and interventions can enhance the emotion regulation skills of employees for more frequent usage of deep acting, rather than hiding and faking emotions. Organizations fostering meaning and spirituality can better support their members during this period as DSE can be utilized as a coping mechanism against the negative consequences of the pandemic.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Data availability statement

All the data are available upon request from the corresponding author.

Ethical statement

The study involves human participants. The study protocol was accepted by the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Health (Protocol No: 2021-08-12T10_35_35.xml). Written consent was obtained from all participants before distributing the questionnaires.

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