

# DEALING WITH TEACHERS' ROLE STRESSORS AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMATOLOGY: DOES GENDER IMPACT ON THE BUFFERING EFFECT OF EMOTION REGULATION ABILITY?



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## INTRODUCTION

Teaching is considered as a risk profession according to the impact of work-related factors on teachers' health and well-being. Certain work-related stressors as role ambiguity and role conflict have been traditionally linked to negative outcomes regarding job performance or motivation. For instance, previous studies have extensively examined the consequences of role stressors on mental health outcomes such as depression (Schmidt, Roesler, Kusserow & Rau, 2014). Recent studies has focused on the moderating effect of personal resources in the association between role stressors and work attitudes (Ghorpade, Lackritz & Singh, 2011). Nevertheless, it remains unclear the paper of emotional abilities concerning the impact of role stressors on mental health outcomes.

Among the four core abilities considered in the Emotional Intelligence framework (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), Emotion Regulation Ability (ERA) has showed robust associations with numerous mental health outcomes. Additionally, gender differences have been found in relation to Emotional Intelligence, ERA and its impact on psychological adjustment and well-being (Brackett, Mayer & Warner, 2004; Extremera & Rey, 2015; Salguero, Extremera & Fernández-Berrocá, 2012).

The purpose of our study was twofold. Firstly, we attempted to extend our understanding of the links between ERA and mental health outcomes considering teachers' work-related stressors. Secondly, we aimed to extend previous research by exploring the gender-specific impact of ERA in regard to role stressors and depressive symptomatology.

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

The original sample comprised 351 Spanish teachers. The responses provided by sixteen participants were dropped from the study due to missing data. Hence, the final sample consisted of 336 teachers (55.10% were female) from different grade level taught in Malaga: elementary teachers (3.6%), intermediate teachers (22.6%), secondary teachers (27.1%), university teachers (22%) and teachers with unreported grade level taught (24.7%). The mean age was of 42.96 years (SD = 10.02; Range = 22 – 68 years). Teaching experience ranged from six months to 46 years. Participants were recruited through the help of Psychology students at University of Malaga (incidental sampling).

### Instruments

-Role stressors were assessed using two subscales: Ambiguity Role and Conflict Role (Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970). These dimensions composed by 14 items assess ambiguity and conflict role problems with a Likert-type scale. We used a well-validated Spanish version (Peiró, Meliá, Torres & Zurriaga, 1986).

-Emotion-Regulation Ability was measured with the managing emotions section of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Scale (MSCEIT Version 2.0; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso & Sitarenios, 2003). This subscale is composed by 29 items with emotion management and emotional relationships tasks. We used a well-validated Spanish version (Extremera, Fernández-Berrocá & Salovey, 2006). Split-half reliability for the subscale was 0.85.

-Depressive symptomatology was assessed with the depression subscale from the 21-item Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). This subscale consists of seven item with a Likert-type scale designed to measure negative emotional states of depression in the past week. We used a well-validated Spanish version (Bados, Solanas & Andrés, 2005).

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## RESULTS

Table 1. Gender differences in study variables.

	Total Sample N = 336 M (SD)	Female N = 185 M (SD)	Male N = 151 M (SD)	p	d
Emotion Regulation Ability	100.36 (14.48)	102.47 (14.37)	97.77 (14.25)	.003	-.033
Role ambiguity	2.56 (.99)	2.52 (.90)	2.60 (1.10)	.45	-
Role conflict	3.62 (1.35)	3.58 (1.40)	3.66 (1.29)	.61	-
Depression	5.82 (7.59)	5.57 (7.49)	6.12 (7.72)	.51	-

Table 2. Intercorrelations among measures separately for females and males.

	1	2	3	4
1. Role ambiguity	-	.089	-.055	.211**
2. Role conflict	.220**	-	-.258**	.263**
3. Emotion Regulation Ability	-.337**	.160*	-	-.325**
4. Depression	.458**	.255**	-.395**	-

N = 336; \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01.

Coefficients above the diagonal are for females (N = 185), those below the diagonal are for males (N = 151).

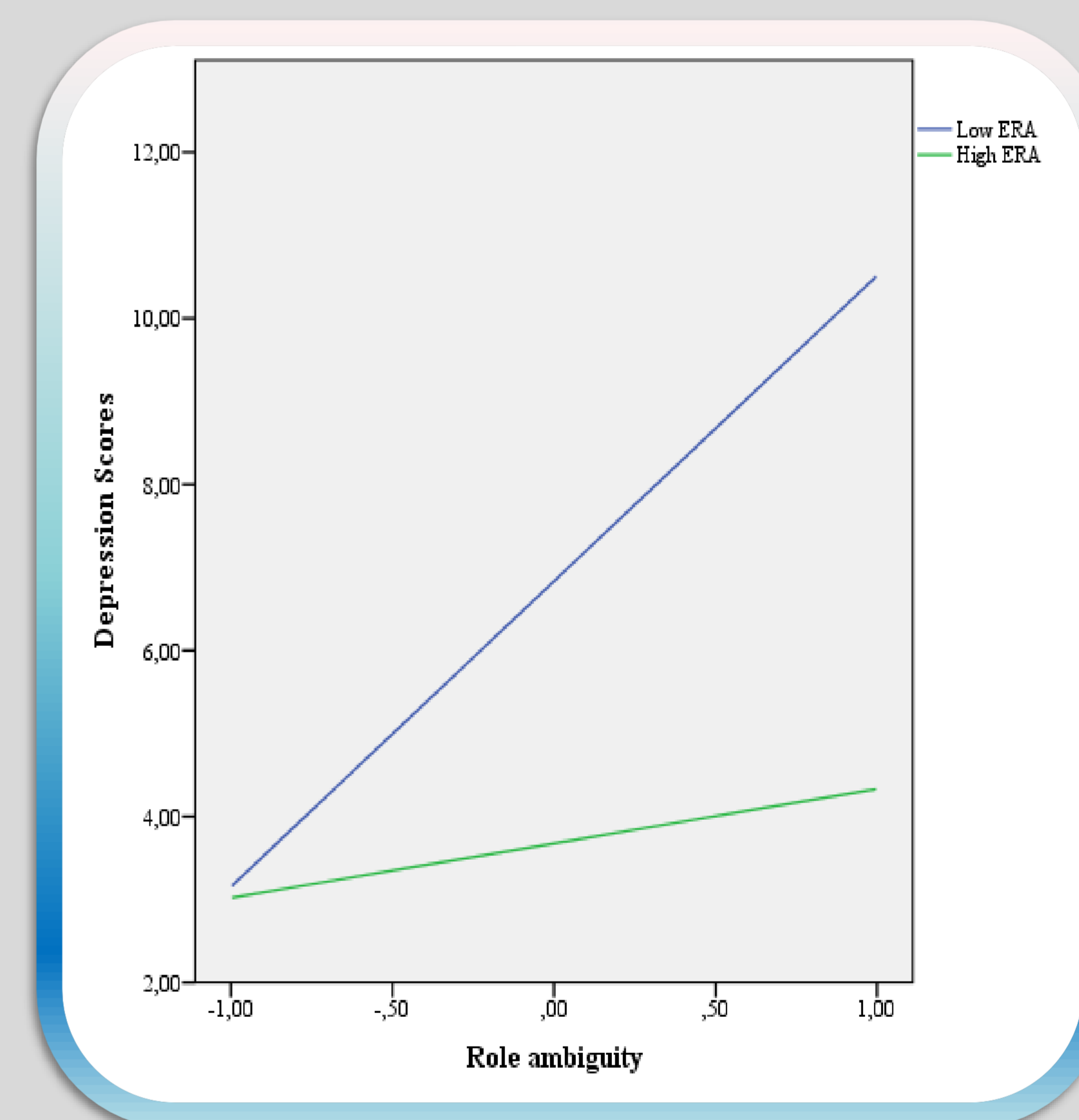


Figure 1. Relationship of role ambiguity and ERA for predicting depression scores in males.

## DISCUSSION

With respect to our principal results regarding gender differences, females scored higher in ERA than males. These findings are consistent with previous studies where women showed higher scores in ERA as well as overall emotional intelligence (Brackett et al., 2004; Extremera & Rey, 2015; Salguero et al., 2012). Regarding correlation analysis, our results showed that both role ambiguity and role conflict were positively associated with teachers' depressive symptomatology. In this sense, a recent meta-analytic review has provided extensive evidence on this relationship (Schmidt et al., 2014). Additionally, we found that teachers who were more skilled in managing emotions reported lower levels of depressive symptomatology than their low ERA counterparts. These results are in line with prior research that found negative associations between ERA scores and depression (Extremera & Rey, 2015). Further analyses separated by gender showed that the relationship between role ambiguity and depression was moderated by ERA only in males.

One plausible reason for the moderating effect of ERA exclusively in males concerns the possible existence of a threshold effect (Brackett et al., 2004) together with the implication of the unmeasured mediators and moderators (Extremera & Rey, 2015). Undoubtedly, further research are required to clarify the explanatory mechanisms in the association among role stressors, ERA and mental health outcomes. Accordingly, future studies should consider some limitations of this work such as the cross-sectional design, the exclusion of relevant factors or the purposive sampling.

Despite these limitations, our findings have implications for research and practical directions in educational settings. Our results may shed some light on showing on testing gender-specific models including work-related factors, emotional abilities and mental health outcomes in teaching. For instance, the design of stress management programmes in education could focus on the impact of role stressors on depression and the importance of ERA. Finally, our findings might provide guidance in developing further teachers' emotional training considering gender perspective.