WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND BURNOUT IN FRONTLINE SERVICE JOBS: DIRECT, MEDIATING AND MODERATING EFFECTS

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Introduction

Employees in frontline service jobs are in frequent face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with customers and are the main actors in the provision of superior services to customers. Effective management of these boundary-spanning personnel is imperative for success in today's competitive environment [6]. Frontline employees often face stressful and demanding situations in the workplace including heavy workloads, role stress, emotional dissonance, and antisocial work hours [20-21]. In addition, they experience difficulties in balancing the demands of their work and family roles [28, 40] or work-family conflict, which refers to 'a form of interrole conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with performing family-related responsibilities, [29, p. 401]. Worse yet, frontline

employees are susceptible to burnout [23-24], which is a psychological response to stressors on the job.

Against this background, in this study we develop a model (see Figure 1) and test eight hypotheses that are based on the precepts of the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory [16]. As shown in Figure 1, we contend that work overload is a predictor of work-family conflict which influences the two dimensions of burnout (exhaustion and disengagement). In other words, our model proposes that work-family conflict acts as a full mediator between work overload and the burnout dimensions. According to our model, positive affectivity moderates the effect of work overload on work-family conflict and it also plays a moderating role concerning the effects of work-family conflict on exhaustion and disengagement. Con-

Fig. 1: Conceptual Model
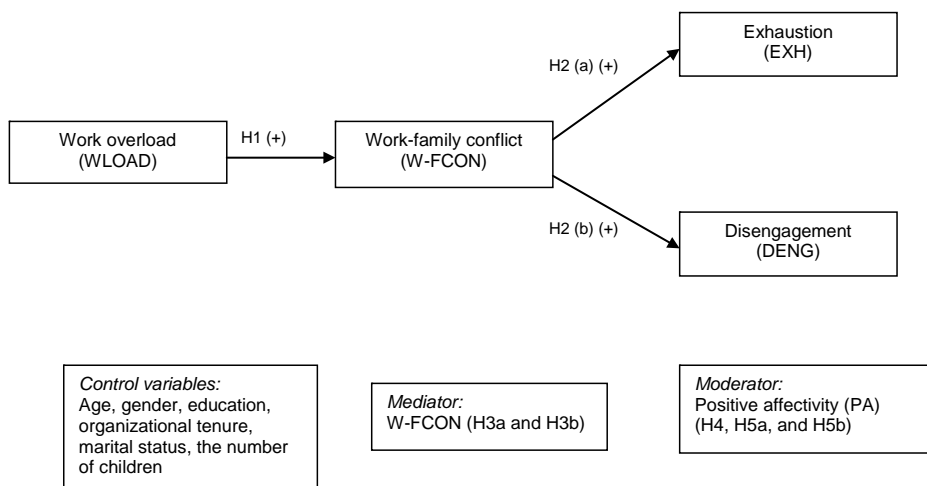
Source: own

sistent with extant research [e.g., 22, 25, 40], we include age, gender, education, organizational tenure, marital status, and the number of children as control variables in our model. We use data gathered from a sample of full-time frontline hotel employees in Turkey to test our model.

An empirical study testing the above outlined model is relevant and significant. First, there is a paucity of research on work-family conflict as a potential mediator between work demands and emotional exhaustion/burnout [27, 36]. Second, and more importantly, this study responds to the calls continuously made to broaden our knowledge base on the role of personality variables as moderators of the detrimental effects of work-family conflict on various job outcomes [11, 25, 35]. Past studies using affectivity in this context have focused on negative affectivity and paid little attention to positive affectivity [22, 42]. This is surprising considering the trend in management research away from the 'negative psychology/negative organizational behavior' which dominated research in the area [42] towards 'positive psychology/positive organizational behavior' [37]. Besides filling in the gaps in the extant research, we also expect our results to yield useful implications for practice.

In the remainder of the paper, we present our hypotheses. This is followed by discussions of the method and findings of our empirical study. We conclude with implications of the results and directions for future research.

1. Research Hypotheses

1.1 Direct Effects

Work overload defined as "the perceived magnitude of work-role demands, and the feeling that there are too many things to do and not enough time to do them" [32, p. 280] is one of the problems frontline employees face. Basing our reasoning on the COR theory, we contend that, because heavy workloads consume a larger share of an individual's emotional and mental resources, frontline employees experience difficulties in juggling work and family responsibilities. The COR theory states that fundamental resources can be categorized into four categories (object, personal, condition, and energy resources) and individuals seek to acquire, maintain and pre-

serve such resources [16]. Stress in the workplace occurs when individuals (a) are confronted with the threat of loss of resources, (b) lose their resources or (c) invest resources and do not harvest what they have expected in return [17]. We reason that heavy workloads might drain employees' available resources and leave them with fewer resources for dealing with family demands or fulfilling family responsibilities [cf. 15]. Thus, we posit that:

H1: Work overload increases work-family conflict.

Conflict between work and family domains and burnout are prevalent among employees in frontline service jobs [22, 41]. Employees who cannot manage work and family responsibilities effectively experience heightened burnout. In this study, we use exhaustion and disengagement components promulgated in the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) as the two components of burnout [9-10]. Exhaustion refers to 'a consequence of intensive physical, affective, and cognitive strain, for example as a long-term consequence of prolonged exposure to certain demands, [9, p. 500]. Disengagement, in turn, is defined as 'distancing oneself from one's work, and experiencing negative attitudes toward the work object, work content, or one's work in general, [9, p. 501].

The COR theory states that 'resource loss is disproportionately more salient than resource gain, [17]. Frontline employees invest their scarce resources expecting that they will receive positive outcomes in return. Despite such an investment, they may still have difficulties in managing both work and family demands/responsibilities. Once they recognize that work-family conflict threatens their resources or resources are lost in the process of juggling work and family roles, they face burnout. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

H2: Work-family conflict increases (a) exhaustion and (b) disengagement.

1.2 Mediating Effects

As depicted in Figure I, work-family conflict functions as a mediator between work overload and burnout. This is again consistent with the COR theory. That is, individuals are in need of adequate resources to meet the continuing demands of work and family and to shield themselves from burnout [36]. However, while trying to cope with excessive work demands, frontline employees may drain their

energies and may not fulfill their responsibilities in the family domain resulting in work-family conflict. Under these circumstances, they experience burnout. Empirically, using a large heterogeneous sample of employees in the Netherlands, Geurts et al. [14] showed that work-family conflict fully mediated the effects of workload on depressive mood and health complaints and had a partial mediating role on the relationship between work overload and work-related negative affect. Peeters et al. [33] reported that work-family conflict partially mediated the effects of job demands on burnout. We posit that frontline employees who face heavy workloads cannot fulfill the requirements of work and family domains simultaneously and thus experience burnout. Therefore, we expect that work-family conflict fully mediates the effect of work overload on burnout and propose the following hypotheses:

H3. Work-family conflict fully mediates the impacts of work overload on (a) exhaustion and (b) disengagement.

1.3 Moderating Effects

Positive affectivity 'reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert, [38, p. 1063]. High positive affectivity entails full concentration, enthusiasm, high energy, excitement, pleasurable engagement and determination [8, 12, 39]. Low positive affectivity, on the other hand, reflects lethargy, fatigue, and apathy [8, 38]. Individuals high in positive affectivity tend to perceive events and individuals in a generally more positive manner [18], while the opposite is true for individuals in low positive affectivity.

The COR theory states that '... people must invest resources in order to protect against resource loss, recover from losses, and gain resources, [17, p. 349]. According to the theory, individuals may benefit from their personal resources in order to circumvent the loss of other resources and protect themselves from stressors and strains. In this context, individual differences can be considered as resources in lessening the impacts of stressors on strains [15] and we surmise that positive affectivity as a personal resource buffers the effect of work overload on work-family conflict and reduces the impacts of work-family conflict on exhaustion and disengagement. Hence, we posit the following hypotheses:

H4. Positive affectivity moderates the impact of work overload on work-family conflict such that

the impact will be weaker among frontline employees higher in positive affectivity.

H5. Positive affectivity moderates the impacts of work-family conflict on (a) exhaustion and (b) disengagement such that that the impacts will be weaker among frontline employees higher in positive affectivity.

2. Method

2.1 Sample and Procedure

Data for this study were gathered from a sample of full-time frontline employees of three-, four-, and five-star hotels in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. All the employees (e.g., front desk agents, concierges, food and beverage servers, guest relations representatives, and door attendants) we surveyed had frequent face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with customers.

According to the information obtained from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism at the time of the study, there were 11 five-star, 27 four-star, and 38 three-star hotels in the research location. The total number of rooms in these hotels was 6432. The ownership structures of the hotels ranged from international/national chain hotels to independently/family-owned and-operated hotels. Prior to data collection, the managements of the hotels were contacted and permission was granted by 32 three-star, 22 four-star, and 10 five-star hotels. These hotels had a total number of 1339 frontline employees. The research team then distributed the questionnaires to these employees. Each questionnaire included a cover letter promising complete anonymity and confidentiality to the respondent. By the cut-off date for data collection, 620 questionnaires were retrieved, yielding a response rate of 46.3 percent.

About 45 percent of the respondents were between the ages of 18-27, 39 percent between 28 and 37, and the rest were older than 37. Approximately 55 percent of the respondents were male. Approximately 48 percent of the respondents had secondary and high school education, 2 percent had primary school education, 24 percent had two-year college education, 24 percent had college degrees and the rest had graduate degrees. About 47 percent of the respondents had tenures of 1-5 years, 30 percent had tenures of 6-10 years and 7 percent over 11 years. The rest of the respondents had been with their hotels less than one year. The majority of the respondents

(52 percent) were single or divorced, while the rest were married. About 52 percent of the respondents had no children and nearly 46 percent had 1 or 2 children. The rest had more than 2 children.

2.2 Measurement

Positive affectivity was operationalized via three (3) items from Agho et al. [1]. Work overload was measured using four (4) items from Price [34]. Five (5) items from Boles et al. [5] and Netemeyer et al. [29] were used to measure work-family conflict. The OLBI was used to measure exhaustion and disengagement [10] where each consisted of eight (8) items. Reponses to positive affectivity, work overload, and work-family conflict were obtained on five-point scales ranging from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). Responses to exhaustion and disengagement items were recorded on four-point scales ranging from 4 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). Items were scored in such a way that in each case, higher scores indicated higher levels of each construct (e.g., higher work-family conflict, work overload, exhaustion).

Age and organizational tenure were measured using four-point scales. Education was measured via a five-point scale. The number of children was measured via a three-point scale. Higher scores indicated older age, more education, longer tenure, and more children. Gender was coded as a binary variable (0=male and 1=female). Marital status was also coded as a binary variable (0=single or divorced and 1=married).

The items in the questionnaire were initially prepared in English and then translated into Turkish using the back-translation method [31]. To ensure that the item contents were cross-linguistically comparable and generated the same meaning, two faculty members of a Turkish university fluent in both languages further checked the questionnaire. The questionnaire was pretested with a pilot sample of thirty (30) employees and no problems were detected.

3. Results

3.1 Measurement Results

The perceptual measures were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using LISREL 8.51 [19] in order to assess their dimensionality, and convergent and discriminant validities. Internal consistency reliability coefficients were evaluated against the.70 benchmark [30].

An examination of the distributions of item scores revealed a nonnormal distribution pattern with the exception of positive affectivity items. Research indicates that item parceling (or partial disaggregation) of items reduce bias in parameter estimates when distributional assumptions are violated [2-3]. Therefore, we created two composite indicators for each construct by averaging item scores of subscales, which were formed by randomly dividing each scale into two equal numbers of items. Positive affectivity scale items remained intact since their distributions were normal.

The sample covariance matrix of the composite indicators of work overload, work-family conflict, exhaustion and disengagement, and indicators of positive affectivity was used as input to LISREL 8.51 [19] to test a five-factor measurement model. The CFA results indicated that the five-factor measurement model fits the data reasonably well (χ^2_{34} =181.12, RMSEA = .083, NFI=.93; NNFI=.90; CFI=.94; SRMR=.053). All factor loadings were significant (t > 2.00) and the magnitudes of standardized loadings ranged from .67 to .96. The average variance extracted (AVE) by the underlying latent variables ranged from .513 (positive affectivity) to .765 (work-family conflict), while squared correlations among the underlying latent variables (ϕ^2) ranged from .004 (between work overload and positive affectivity) to .381 (between exhaustion and disengagement). Since none of the AVEs is larger than the squared correlations among latent variables and all AVEs are greater than .50, the measures exhibit strong psychometric properties in terms of both discriminant and convergent validity [13].

The perceptual measures were also examined for potential common method variance using Harman's one-factor test [26]. We compared the preceding CFA results from the five-factor measurement model with the results from a single-factor model in which all indicators were forced to load on one underlying latent variable. The fit statistics for the single-factor model (χ^2_{44} = 1545.44, RMSEA = .24, NFI = .38, NNFI = = .23, CFI = .38, SRMR = .17) indicated that this

Tab. 1: Scale Reliabilities, Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Study Variables

Variables	# of items	Coeff. Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	-	-	1.000										
2. Gender	-	-	-.055	1.000									
3. Education	-	-	.004	.216**	1.000								
4. Organizational tenure	-	-	.603**	-.051	.029	1.000							
5. Marital status	-	-	.503**	.057	.073	.390**	1.000						
6. The number of children	-	-	.525**	.001	-.008	.485**	.639**	1.000					
7. Work overload	4	.65	.032	.007	-.035	.000	.025	.008	1.000				
8. Work-family conflict	5	.83	.005	.030	-.042	.007	.041	.041	.418**	1.000			
9. Exhaustion	8	.78	-.070	-.148**	-.156**	-.131**	-.101*	-.078	.043	.219**	1.000		
10. Disengagement	8	.75	-.038	-.080*	-.177**	-.059	-.059	-.041	.063	.246**	.459**	1.000	
11. Positive affectivity	3	.76	-.080*	-.037	.114**	-.065	-.053	-.085*	.045	-.109**	-.082*	-.365**	1.000
Mean	-	-	1.74	.46	2.77	2.28	.48	.50	3.77	3.65	2.28	2.57	3.08
Standard deviation	-	-	.78	.50	.91	.81	.50	.54	.62	.76	.53	.48	.91

Notes: Composite scores for each measure were obtained by averaging scores across items representing that measure. The scores for work overload, work-family conflict, and positive affectivity range from 1 to 5, while the scores for exhaustion and disengagement range from 1 to 4. Age and organizational tenure were measured using four-point scales. Education was measured using a five-point scale. The number of children was measured via a three-point scale. Higher scores indicated older age, more education, longer tenure, and more children. Gender was coded as a binary variable (0=male and 1=female). Marital status was also coded as a binary (0=single or divorced and 1=married).
* Correlations are significant at the .05 level.
** Correlations are significant at the .01 level. Correlations without any asterisks are not significant.

Source: own.

Tab. 2: Regression Results: Direct and Mediating Effects

Independent variables	Dependent variables and standardized regression weights							
	Work-family conflict		Exhaustion			Disengagement		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
(I) Control variables								
Age	-.03	-.05	.03	.02	.04	.00	.00	.01
Gender	.04	.03	-.12**	-.12**	-.13**	-.05	-.05	-.06
Education	-.05	-.04	-.12**	-.12**	-.11**	-.16***	-.16***	-.15***
Organizational tenure	.00	.01	-.13*	-.13*	-.13**	-.05	-.04	-.05
Marital status	.04	.03	-.05	-.05	-.06	-.02	-.03	-.03
The number of children	.03	.04	.00	.00	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.02
(II) Work overload		.42***		.04	-.06		.06	-.05
(III) Work-family conflict		-			.25***			.27***
F	.62	129.24***	6.23***	1.04	34.64***	3.93**	2.15	39.34***
R^2 at each step	.01	.18	.06	.06	.11	.04	.04	.10
ΔR^2	-	.17	-	.00	.05	-	.00	.06

Sobel test for:
WLOAD → W-FCON → EXH   4.95***
WLOAD → W-FCON → DENG   4.95***

Source: own.

Notes: Age and organizational tenure were measured using four-point scales. Education was measured using a five-point scale. The number of children was measured using a three-point scale. Higher scores indicated older age, longer tenure, more education, and more children. Gender was coded as a binary variable (0=male and 1=female). Marital status was also coded as a binary variable (0=single or divorced and 1=married). WLOAD=Work overload; W-FCON=Work-family conflict; EXH=Exhaustion; DENG=Disengagement. The results regarding variance inflation factors were below 2.1 and did not demonstrate any problems of multicollinearity.
$*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$

model is not tenable. In fact, a χ^2 difference test indicated that the single-factor model fit is significantly worse than the proposed five-factor measurement model ($\Delta\chi^2_{10}$ = 1545.44 – 181.12 = = 1364.32, p < .01). This suggests that common method bias may not pose a problem in this study [7].

The means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities, and correlations among the study variables are shown in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, with the exception of the work overload scale, all coefficient alphas are well above the commonly accepted minimum value of .70.

3.2 Tests of Hypotheses

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used for testing the research hypotheses. The mediation and moderation hypotheses were tested following the guidelines provided by Baron and Kenny [4].

Table 2 shows the direct and mediating effects for testing H1 through H3. The results indicate that work overload has a significant positive influence on work-family conflict (β = .42, p< .001). Therefore, H1 is supported. As shown in Table 2, work-family conflict has significant positive impacts on exhaustion (β = .25, p< .001) and di-

Tab. 3: Regression Results: Positive Affectivity as a Moderator of the Effect of Work Overload on Work-Family Conflict

	Dependent variable and standardized regression weights			
	Work-family conflict			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Independent variables				
(I) Control variables				
Age	-.03	-.05	-.05	-.05
Gender	.04	.03	.02	.02
Education	-.05	-.04	-.02	-.02
Organizational tenure	.00	.01	.01	.00
Marital status	.04	.03	.03	.02
The number of children	.03	.04	.04	.05
(II) Work overload		.42***	.42***	.42***
(III) Positive affectivity			-.13**	-.12**
(IV) Work overload * positive affectivity				-.07
F	.62	129.24***	11.45**	3.38
R² at each step	.01	.18	.19	.20
ΔR²	-	.17	.02	.00

Notes: Age and organizational tenure were measured using four-point scales. Education was measured using a five-point scale. The number of children was measured using a three-point scale. Higher scores indicated older age, longer tenure, more educated, and more children. Gender was coded as a binary variable (0=male and 1=female). Marital status was also coded as a binary variable (0=single or divorced and 1=married). The results regarding variance inflation factors were below 2.1 and did not demonstrate any problems of multicollinearity.
*p< .05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: own.

Tab. 4: Regression Results: Positive Affectivity as a Moderator of the Effects of Work-Family Conflict on Exhaustion and Disengagement

	Dependent variables and standardized regression weights							
	Exhaustion				Disengagement			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Independent variables								
(I) Control variables								
Age	.03	.03	.03	.03	.00	.01	-.01	-.02
Gender	-.12**	-.13**	-.14**	-.14**	-.05	-.06	-.08*	-.08*
Education	-.12**	-.11**	-.10**	-.10*	-.16***	-.15***	-.11**	-.10**
Organizational tenure	-.13*	-.13**	-.13**	-.13**	-.05	-.05	-.05	-.05
Marital status	-.05	-.06	-.06	-.05	-.02	-.03	-.03	-.02
The number of children	.00	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.02	-.03	-.03
(II) Work-family conflict		.22***	.22***	.22***		.24***	.21***	.23***
(III) Positive affectivity			-.06	-.06			-.34***	-.34***
(IV) Work-family conflict * positive affectivity				-.03				-.09*
F	6.23***	33.39***	2.48	.44	3.93**	40.03***	86.09***	5.93*
R^2 at each step	.06	.11	.11	.11	.04	.10	.21	.22
ΔR^2	-	.05	.00	.00	-	.06	.11	.01

Notes: Age and organizational tenure were measured using four-point scales. Education was measured using a five-point scale. The number of children was measured using a three-point scale. Higher scores indicated older age, longer tenure, more education, and more children. Gender was coded as a binary variable (0=male and 1=female). Marital status was also coded as a binary variable (0=single or divorced and 1=married). The results regarding variance inflation factors were below 2.1 and did not demonstrate any problems of multicollinearity.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Source: own.

sengagement (β = .27, $p <$ .001). Hence, H2a and H2b are also supported. The control variables do not have any significant effects on work--family conflict.

The results in Table 2 show that work overload does not have a significant direct impact on exhaustion and disengagement. However, Sobel tests [4] show that the indirect effects of work overload, through work-family conflict, on exhaustion (t = 4.95, $p <$ .001) and disengagement (t = = 4.95, $p <$ .001) are both significant. Collectively, these results indicate that work-family conflict *fully* mediates the impact of work overload on exhaustion and disengagement. Therefore, both H3a and H3b are supported. The results in Table 2 also reveal some significant effects of demographic variables. Specifically, employees with more education and longer tenure, and female employees report lower exhaustion, while more educated employees are less disengaged with their work.

Tables 3 and 4 present hierarchical moderated regression analyses results for testing the moderating effects of positive affectivity (H4 and H5). As shown in Table 3, the effect of the interaction variable (work overload * positive affectivity) on work-family conflict is not significant. Therefore, H4 is not supported. The interaction variable (work-family conflict * positive affectivity) does not significantly affect exhaustion (see Table 4). Thus, H5a cannot be supported. However, the same interaction variable has a significant negative influence on disengagement. Therefore, H5b receives support. The effects of the control variables remain generally similar to those reported in Table 2.

4. Concluding Comments

The results show that our overall model is viable and suggest that work overload is a significant predictor of work-family conflict and that work-family conflict intensifies both exhaustion and disengagement. Furthermore, they reveal that work-family conflict functions as a full mediator between work overload and exhaustion, and between work overload and disengagement. That is, employees with excessive workloads are incapable of balancing the demands and responsibilities of their work and family roles and, consequently, experience elevated levels of exhaustion and disengagement. Positive affectivity buffers the impact of work-family conflict on disengagement in that disengagement is weaker among employees higher in positive affectivity. These results conjure up some implications for practice.

4.1 Managerial Implications

Foremost, it appears that service managers would benefit from establishing and maintaining a family- supportive work environment which would permit employees to allocate sufficient time to their family responsibilities. Consequently, employees who would be able to balance the demands coming from work and family domains would face less burnout. Managers should also employ mentors to provide professional assistance to employees who may be facing heightened burnout. Service managers could arrange customer service training programs to teach their employees various ways to cope with problems occurring during service delivery. If employees learn effectively how to manage and fulfill their duties in the workplace, they are less likely to experience elevated levels of burnout.

Managers should also give priority to candidates with high positive affectivity during the selection and hiring process since such employees would be able to handle the detrimental effects of work-family conflict on disengagement better. These employees would also serve as role models to their coworkers for coping with work-family conflict and disengagement effectively.

4.2 Future Research Directions

The findings reported here should be considered in light of some study limitations. Our data are cross-sectional and do not allow causal inferences. Also data from a single source (employees) generally pose the problem of common method bias, although this did not seem to be a problem with the current data. Using longitudinal data from multiple sources in the future would be helpful in mitigating these concerns. In our study, we only considered work-family conflict. In future studies, incorporating family-work conflict and its family-related antecedents (e.g., family overload and parental overload) into the model would enhance our understanding concerning the mediating role of interrole conflicts on burnout in a more holistic way. Finally, replications of this study in different sectors (e.g., banking) and/

or tourism and hospitality settings (e.g., airlines, travel agencies) would be helpful in cross-validating our findings.

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ABSTRACT

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND BURNOUT IN FRONTLINE SERVICE JOBS: DIRECT, ME-DIATING AND MODERATING EFFECTS

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This study develops and tests a model where work-family conflict is posited as a mediator between work overload and burnout (exhaustion and disengagement), and positive affectivity as a moderator of the relationships between work overload, and work-family conflict and burnout. Data for the study were collected from a sample of 620 full-time frontline hotel employees in Turkey. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was employed in analyzing the data. The results show that work-family conflict fully mediates the impacts of work overload on exhaustion and disengagement. Also positive affectivity reduces the effect of work-family conflict on disengagement. Implications of the empirical results and directions for future research are delineated in the study.

In this study we develop a model and test eight hypotheses that are based on the precepts of the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory [16]. We contend that work overload is a predictor of work-family conflict which influences the two dimensions of burnout (exhaustion and disengagement). In other words, our model proposes that work-family conflict acts as a full mediator between work overload and the burnout dimensions.

In the remainder of the paper, we present our hypotheses. This is followed by discussions of the method and findings of our empirical study. We conclude with implications of the results and directions for future research.