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INTERACTION EFFECT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT: THE EFFECT OF WORKLOAD ON JOB BURNOUT AMONG UNIVERSITIES ACADEMICIANS: CASE OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The support comes primarily from the organization through supervisors but cooperation among the employees cannot be overlooked. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between workload and burnout dimensions (emotional exhaustion and disengagement) and identifying the interaction effect of social support with job burnout among academicians. The collected data is analyzed with the help of the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). The study objectives are reached with the help of regression and Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis. The findings of the study reveal that workload has positive relationship with burnout dimensions, while supervisory and colleague support influence the relationship between workload and burnout dimensions. The study tests these relationships with the help of JD-R model. The study highlights implications for individual employees, institutions and recommends measures at policy level concerning the work environment where academicians can respond in a productive manner.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, special attention has been given to the impact of stress on students drop-out, academic achievement, confidence and motivation of students. In comparison, less work has been done on the effects of teachers' stress, morale, resistance ability, motivation, and capabilities. The review of literature indicates that workload is an important and significant topic in research among academicians in higher education institutions (HEIs). At the dawn of the 21st century, plenty of changes have occurred in technology, working styles, and cultures, where such changes have created new challenges for all sectors. These changes have also given rise to distinct types of problems in

educational institutions. In consequence, unusual job-related demands have emerged in different sectors. These changes demand innovation in the organizational life which has also rendered the working environment more complex. The employees face different types of problems to handle innovation, technological changes, and advancements, which may also lead them into a state of stress (Khan, Yusoff, & Khan, 2014). Generally, stress in a working environment is the outcome of lack of requisite skills and training to cope with increased job demands that result in slowing down job performance, professional development and job productivity (Khan, Rasli, et al. 2014).

According to Winefield et al. (2003), the teaching profession is considered one of the less stressful professional sectors due to freedom and less workload in the working environment of higher education (Khan, Rasli, et al. 2015; Khan., Yusoff., & Khan., 2014). With the arrival of technology in the sector, job demands have multiplied, and academicians are expected to perform at many fronts in teaching, research, and administration. With particular reference to the developing world, academicians are in a very complex situation as they have to meet the requirements of revised policies for professional development and research productivity. On several occasions, they may feel intense pressure and may trigger exhaustion and job acquittal (Khan, Rasli, et al., 2014).

In 2002, a paradigm shift in the higher education sector of Pakistan to meet global market needs and productivity have led to increased incidence of job stress and burnout. In the scenario, academicians are also expected to concentrate on research along with teaching because the ranking and productivity of the institutions are determined not only by the number of students but also the number of Ph.D. faculty and the number of research publications. The present study uses the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model which explains that as job demands exceed in comparison to the available resources, the academicians suffer exhaustion. The findings are also based on the assumption of the conservation resources theory according to which less or lack of resources gives rise to burnout, which also suggests that to leave or quit the organization results decrease in commitment and performance level.

2. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The present study has both theoretical and practical implications. The originality and contribution of the paper are that it uses validation through the JD-R model of burnout by using a sample of 162 academicians from universities in Pakistan. The JD-R model consists of two main processes such as health and motivation processes. The study has used workload in the health process and has found that there is positive relationship between the workload and burnout dimensions especially emotional exhaustion and disengagement. The results of the study also establish the moderating or interaction effect of social support on the relationship between the workload with emotional exhaustion and disengagement. The study also extends the JD-R model of burnout to the moderating effect of job resources.

This study has practical implications for the individual, organizational and policymakers related to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). At individual level, the study is significant for academicians as it contributes to the level of awareness about workload and burnout. The study also reveals the importance of social support for decreasing the level of workload and burnout among individuals. Further, the study provides the antecedents and precedents of burnout among

academicians in university academicians. Similarly, the study attempts to develop coping strategies among academicians from a level of burnout and workload. The present study also informs academicians about the nature and scope of support from supervisors and coworkers in increasing or decreasing the level of workload, emotional exhaustion, and disengagement. In teaching profession, an academician needs to interact and develop interpersonal relationship with students, colleagues, and supervisors. In the present study, therefore, social support is one of the main dimensions of job resources that moderate the relationship between job demands and job burnout.

The study recommends provision for improving working conditions and to provide a congenial atmosphere with a view to reduce the pressure of job demands and to maximize utilization of the allocated resources within the organization. In this connection, Tytherleigh (2003) asserts that “an unmet need can frustrate employees and will continue to influence their behavior until it is satisfied; managers can therefore effectively work with employees by identifying the level of need which he or she is trying to satisfy and by attempting to build opportunities in the work environment that will allow them to satisfy their own needs” (p.1).

As revealed from the findings of the study, academicians have been suffering from burnout and it is therefore essential to draft a comprehensive policy for stress management. It will be helpful to involve the professionals in programs and workshops on burnout related problems in the education sector for better coordination between organization demands and individual aspirations.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cherniss (1980) as cited by Schaufeli and Buunk (2003) refers to burnout as “a process in which the professionals” (p.387) attitudes and behaviors change in negative ways in response to job strain’. This process, according to Cherniss, then, occurs as a result of three interlocking stages: (1) An imbalance between resources and demands (stress), (2) the immediate, short term emotional tension, fatigue, and exhaustion (strain), and (3) the appearance of a number of changes in attitude and behavior, such as a tendency to treat clients in a detached and mechanical fashion, or a cynical preoccupation with gratification of one’s own needs (defensive coping).

Burnout emerges from the working environment and has significant effects on the employees when job demands exceed the capacity of employees (Maslach, 2003; Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2016). In other words, burnout is feeling of disinterestedness, reduction in performance and weariness (Khan et al., 2015; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Since 1970s, burnout has been a widely recognized individual as well as an organizational problem that relates to people’s work-relationship and the subsequent difficulties that may arise in the relationship (Maslach et al., 2001). It has been measured by examining the teachers’ level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Burnout is one of such symptoms that has been noted for teachers’ dissatisfaction with their professional environment. In either case, loss or displacement of good teachers has repercussions for individuals and society. Teachers’ loss of enthusiasm and idealism for teaching profession affects student-teacher relationships, students’ achievements and teachers’ efficiency (Farber, 2010; Khan., et al., 2014; Mahmoudia et al., 2019). Burnout thus is negatively associated with well-being of teachers that ask for proper remedial measures.

The first factor of burnout, emotional exhaustion refers to “job-related demand stressor” upon an employee and the symptoms that lead to an increase in absenteeism and withdrawal from the profession. The second factor is depersonalization which refers to work-related stress and is characterized as a negative attitude towards clients, co-workers, and/or managers and its main factors include job-related failures and lack of control. The third factor of burnout is decrease in personal accomplishment due to unmet targets and organizational expectations and role ambiguity. It also refers to downward trend in the employee’s feeling of competence and success at the job. In order to properly appreciate job burnout, we need to know about stress, job stress, strain and their prevalence in higher education. Earlier studies of burnout focused mainly on the helping professions, but the present study focuses an educational setup to empirically examine the components of burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) and to develop hypothesis.

The existing literature considers workload one of the main predictors of burnout. According to Khan et al)2014(, workload is defined as work done in a specific time or the amount of work supposed to be done in a specific time. It is defined in terms of research productivity, professional development and time. Several researchers proved that workload has a positive relationship with burnout (Bakker et al., 2006; Blau, 2003; Demerouti et al., 2000). Some other studies found that workload had negative relationship with burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Elloy et al., 2001). It is felt in the profession due to lack of skills, career development, long working hours, number of students in classes, teacher shortage (Mullins, 2005; Teven, 2007).

Further, workload affects academicians’ performance and commitment and makes them more exhausted and burnout so that they develop a trend to quit a job. The workload is a widely used term and Meyer)1998(explains that it is the assigned work to academicians, while Soliman and Soliman)1997(view it in the sense of the duties and responsibilities of teaching, research and administrative duties. To facilitate the academicians, various types of resources are provided to enhance productivity and commitment at both individual and organizational levels. Furthermore, in the present study, the research uses the moderating effect of social support as a resource in the relationship between workload and job burnout dimensions particularly emotional exhaustion and disengagement. Theresearchers, Moeller et al (2013), Sun et al (2011) and Himle et al (1991) emphasize that social support can be the potential moderator between the demands and outcomes among the university academicians.

Job resource is another very important variable of the study. Bakker et al)2004(opine that resources are important to demands in an organization and are utilized to make easy the achievement of work objectives, to get personal growth and to decrease job demands. Job resources are thus meant to achieve goals of a job (Hobfoll, 1989). The resources are linked with physical, psychological, organizational or social views of jobs that reduce job demands and achieve goals, along with ensuring development and personal growth of employees (Chen & Chen, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). From the review, it is clear that social support is one of the causes of stress and burnout. Stress does not only arise due to workload but also due to insignificant social hold. Osipow and Davis (1998) estimate that social support consists of coworkers and friends. Social support reduces the effect of stressors and there is reliable proof that employee takes support from experienced persons (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Several researchers also note that support group is more helpful in preventing

burnout (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998).

The study assumes that social support can affect the relationship between job demands like workload and burnout dimensions, but no such study found the moderating effect of social support among academicians in higher education institutions in Pakistan. In addition, this relationship is based on recent new changes in market needs in the higher education system in Pakistan. The present study also extends the JD-R model of burnout among the academicians. JD-R model consists of two main factors: demands and resources, wherein the workload is used as demand and social support are used as a resource. The study more specifically examines the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 01: Workload has a positive relationship with emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 02: Workload has a positive relationship with disengagement

Hypothesis 03: Social support moderates the relationship between workload and emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 04: Social support moderates the relationship between workload and disengagement.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is cross-sectional and has a quantitative research design. The data has been collected from randomly selected 162 respondents including lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors and professors from public sector universities in Malakand Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan with the help of a self-administrated questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of four different sections. The first section relates to personal information including age, gender, marital status and education while the second section consists of workload items. The third section is about the level of and provision of social support items while the last section deals with burnout dimension items. SPSS software is used as an analytical tool.

4.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

Is there is a positive relationship between workload with emotional exhaustion?

Is there is a positive relationship between workload with disengagement?

Is social support moderates the relationship between workload and emotional exhaustion?

Does social support moderate the relationship between workload and disengagement?

4.2 INSTRUMENTS:

Workload has been investigated with the help of dimensions like workload demands, research productivity, professional or career and skill development and number of working hours. The workload is measured through 12 items including five items of Crespoand Bertrand (2013) and three items of Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011).

Social support has been investigated by categorizing it in the support from co-workers, supervisors, and organization. It is measured with the help of six items of Iverson et, al., (1998) having reliability value of 0.90 (Iverson et al., 1998).

Burnout is measured by the two dimensions of emotional exhaustion and disengagement using OLBI, the alternative inventory to MBI (Demerouti et al., 2010) that consists of both negative and positive sixteen items. Reliability values reported are 0.82 and 0.83 of Cronbach's alpha (Demerouti et al., 2010) (Demerouti et al., 2001; Demerouti et al., 2003).

5. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

For the purpose of collecting the research data, the questionnaire was individually distributed among the academicians with explicit confidentiality of the information. The process of data collection was completed from 162 respondents in a period of six months. However, different data tests were conducted such as normality, multicollinearity of the data and scanned the missing data.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the present study, Pearson correlation was used to measure the relationship of the workload with burnout dimensions: emotional exhaustion and disengagement among the academicians from HEIs of Pakistan. Table 1 shows that workload has positive relationship with emotional exhaustion and disengagement among academicians. The results of the study were in line with the studies like Khan et al, (2014). Further, it was also examined that as workload increased the level of emotional exhaustion and disengagement increased too. The determinants of job burnout within organization have been discussed in several studies like turnover, low productivity, absenteeism, job dissatisfaction, and reduced organizational commitment (Boyas et al., 2012; Yusoff, et al., 2014).

Table 1: Pearson Correlation.

	Workload	Emotional Exhaustion	Disengagement
Workload	1		
Emotional Exhaustion	0.455*	1	
Disengagement	0.454*	0.962*	1

*Significant at 0.001

For validating the findings of the present study, the regression analysis was used to measure the positive relationship of workload with emotional exhaustion and disengagement. In the model of regression analysis, independent variable workload was entered with dependent variable emotional exhaustion and disengagement. The findings in Table 2 show that emotional exhaustion and disengagement reveal 4.4% and 9.9% variances significance at $p < 0.001$ with $F = 24.390$ and 22.128 .

Table 2: Regression Analysis.

Step One	Emotional Exhaustion		Disengagement	
	Standardized β Coefficients	T-test scores	Standardized β Coefficients	T-test scores
Workload	0.171	1.746*	0.183	1.901
R	0.081		0.099	
R ²	0.044		0.054	
F Model	24.390*		22.128*	

*Significant at $p < 0.001$

6.1 HIERARCHICAL MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The analysis was conducted with the help of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis (HMRA). To achieve the objectives of the study, HMRA was used for the relationship between the moderating variable, dependent and independent variables. Because different studies examining the relationship among variables have used hierarchical regression methodology (Nyaoga & Kibet., 2010). Moderating equation is as follows:

$$\text{Step 1: } Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon \quad (1),$$

$$\text{Step 2: } Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon \quad (2),$$

$$\text{Step 3: } Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_1 X_2 + \varepsilon \quad (3),$$

where Y = Emotional Exhaustion, X_1 = Workload, X_2 = Social Support, X_1X_2 = Interaction effect of Emotional Exhaustion and Social support, ε = error term, β_1 , β_2 , β_3 are model's coefficients.

In this study, the objectives were analyzed by using HMRA model. In the model of HMRA, the independent variable- workload was entered with the dependent variable- emotional exhaustion as shown in Table 3. The Table shows that the F values are 68.496 and variation is 20.4% in emotional exhaustion. In the second model along with independent variable, the moderating variable- social support was entered with dependent variable- emotional exhaustion that showed 28.4% variation in the model. In the last step of the HMRA model, the interaction term of workload and resources, social support has entered the model with dependent variable- emotional exhaustion. Based on Table 3, 29.1% variation occurred in the model, while the interaction term was significant at $p > 0.05$.

Table 3: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis, between workload emotional exhaustion.

MODEL 01	Emotional Exhaustion	
	Standardized β Coefficients	t-value
Workload (W1)	0.455	8.276**
Adjusted R ²	0.204	
R ² Model	0.207	
F Model	68.496**	
Workload	0.284	4.693*
Social Support	-0.335	-5.538**
Adjusted R ²	0.284	
R ² Model	0.290	
F Model	53.443**	
Workload	0.287	4.757*
Social Support (SS)	-0.341	-5.661**
Interaction (W1*SS)	0.097	1.873*
Adjusted R ²	0.291	
R ² Model 03	0.299	
F Model 03	37.139**	

Note: a = Dependent Variables; *Significant at $p < 0.05$; **Significant at $p < 0.001$.

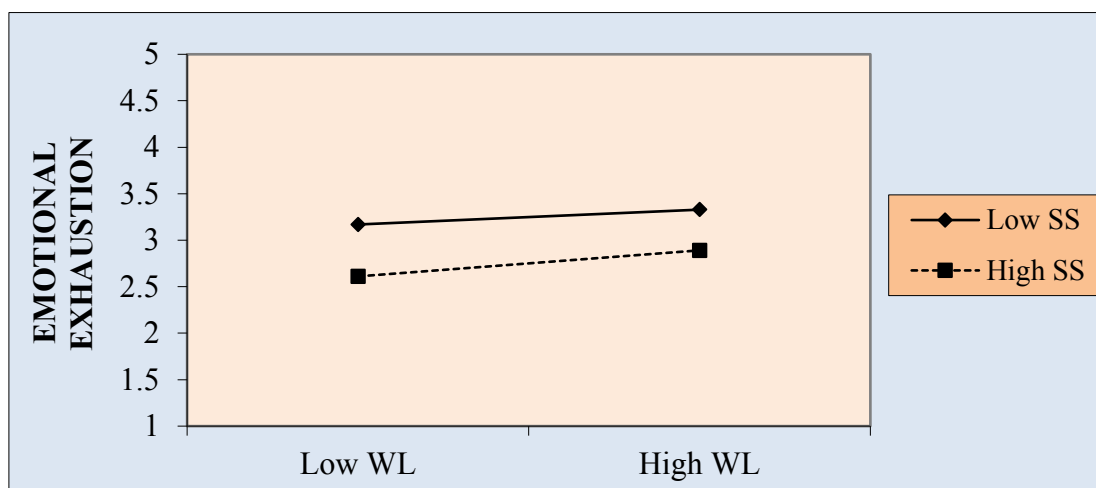


Figure 1: Moderating Effect of Social Support on Workload and Emotional Exhaustion.

Figure 1 shows the moderating or interaction effect of social support on the relationship between job demand dimension: workload and burnout dimension: emotional exhaustion among the academicians. The results of Figure 1 reveal when the level of social support is low, the effect of

workload on emotional exhaustion is high, while high level of social support lowers the effect of workload on emotional exhaustion.

The HMRA Model for interaction effect is as follows:

$$\text{Step 1: } Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon \quad (4),$$

$$\text{Step 2: } Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon \quad (5),$$

$$\text{Step 3: } Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_1 X_2 + \varepsilon \quad (6),$$

where Y = Disengagement, X_1 = Workload, X_2 = Social Support, $\beta_3 X_1 X_2$ = Interaction effect of Disengagement and Social support, ε = error term, β_1 , β_2 , β_3 are model's coefficients.

Table 4: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis, between workload and disengagement.

MODEL 02	Disengagement	
	Standardized β Coefficients	t-value
Workload	0.454	8.253*
Adjusted R ²	0.203	
R ² Model	0.206	
F Model	68.107**	
Workload	0.300	4.898*
Social Support	-0.302	-4.933**
Adjusted R ²	0.268	
R ² Model	0.273	
F Model	49.244**	
Workload	0.302	4.960*
Social Support	-0.308	-5.051**
Interaction (Wl*SS)	0.096	1.821*
Adjusted R ²	0.274	
R ² Model 03	0.282	
F Model 03	34.226**	

Note: b = Dependent Variables; *Significant at $p < 0.05$; **Significant at $p < 0.001$, Wl=workload, SS= Social Support

The analysis of moderation was carried out with the help of HMRA. In the model of the HMRA, the independent variable- workload was entered with the dependent variable- disengagement as shown in Table 4, that the F-values are 68.107 and variation 20.3% in disengagement. In the second model, along with independent variable the moderating variable- social support was entered with the dependent variable- disengagement that showed 26.8% variation in the model. In the last step of the HMRA model, the interaction term of workload and resources, social support was entered into the model with dependent variable- disengagement. Based on Table 4, 27.4% variation occurred in the model, while the interaction term was significant at $p > 0.05$.

Figure 2 reports the relationship between workload and disengagement with the moderating effect of social support among academicians. Figure 2 shows that as the level of social support is low, the effect of workload on disengagement is high while in reverse as the level of social support is high, the effect of workload on disengagement is low.

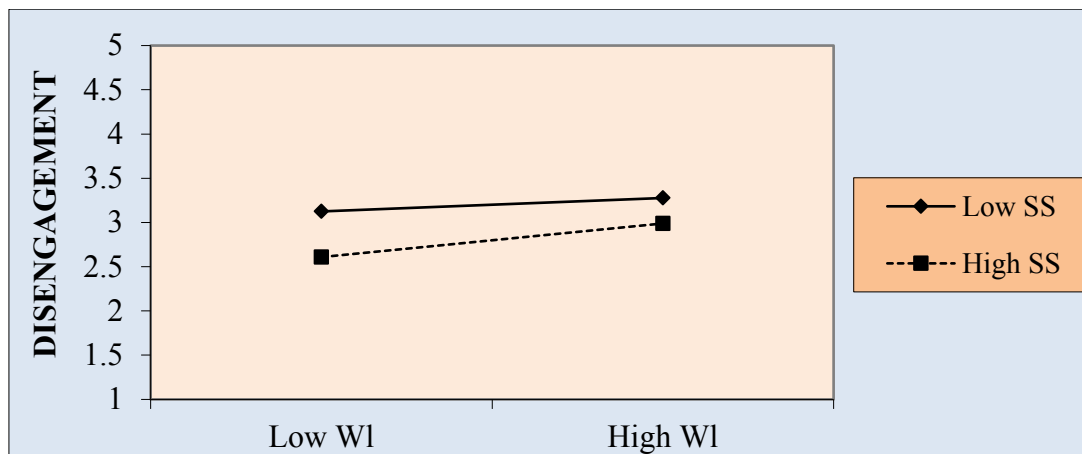


Figure 2: Moderating Effect of Social Support on Workload and Disengagement

7. CONCLUSION

During the analysis of data, the relationship between workload and burnout dimensions including emotional exhaustion and disengagement among the university academicians was examined. It was found that there was a positive relationship between workload with burnout dimensions. As evidence, the study cleared that increase in the level of workload on academicians increased the burnout level. The findings of the study corresponded with earlier studies in the field. For instance, Greenglass et al. (2001) reported that workload had positive relationship with emotional exhaustion (Devereux et al., 2009). Other studies conducted in hospital with data collected from nurses mentioned that workload was a main predictor of burnout especially emotional exhaustion (Maslach, et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Similarly, Male and May (1997) reported moderate level of workload in emotional exhaustion in ordinary school teachers. In 2000, a study diagnosed that emotional exhaustion occurred due to high working pressures and lack of resources (Demerouti, et al., 2000). A study reported that as workload increased, level of burnout (emotional exhaustion) also increased and vice versa (Bakker et al., 2005; Droogenbroeck et al., 2014).

In addition, the study also investigated the moderating effect of social support on the relationship between workload and burnout dimensions like emotional exhaustion and disengagement. The study found a significant moderating effect of social support between the relationship of the workload with emotional exhaustion and disengagement. Further, the study also revealed that increasing the level of social support especially supervisory support and coworkers support decreased the level of workload and burnout dimension. The results of the study were also parallel to other studies. Several studies had also revealed positive relationship between workload with emotional exhaustion (Bakker et al., 2005; Greenglass, et al., 2001), which indicated that higher workload caused emotional exhaustion among academicians (Acker, 2003; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Emotional Exhaustion due to work overload could be normalized with effective social support from supervisors and coworkers. The study results also corresponded with previous studies of the moderating effect of social support (Janssen et al., 2004). Similarly, academicians having high social support from coworkers were expected to positively value and evaluate their personal accomplishments. The results were in line with Himle et al. (1991) who held social support both instrumental and informational from co-workers to moderate the relationship between demands like workload and job burnout.

Moreover, the finding of the study also indicated that social support led to low disengagement. Consequently, the academicians having access to social support through coworkers and supervisors developed their personal relationships with their students. The findings were parallel to study of mental hospital workers by Leiter (1990), that reported burnout (depersonalization) lower with more mobilization of resources (family). Similarly, Bakker et al. (2003) conducted study on the moderating effect of social support of the relationship between job demands (workload, emotional demands, and physical demands) and job burnout (emotional exhaustion, disengagement) in homecare organization. Wheaton (1985) concluded that job resources (social support, autonomy, feedback) buffered the relationship between job demands and burnout.

8. AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIAL

Data can be made available by contacting the corresponding author.

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