

A Study on the Mediating Role of Work-Family Conflict in the Effect of Workload Perception on Professional Burnout of Employees in the Energy Sector *

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Abstract

Previous research could not yield consistent results concerning the relationship between workload perception and dimensions of professional burnout. The present work examines the mediating role of work-family conflict (WFC) in the relationship between workload perception and the dimensions of professional burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment). The population of this study consists of employees employed in 21 electricity distribution companies operating in the energy sector in Turkey. 221 usable data were obtained through the survey method. The data were tested with the SmartPLS 4 analysis program. The analysis found a significant positive relationship between workload perception and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and WFC. However, no significant correlation between workload perception and lack of personal accomplishment could be identified. Moreover, the study results confirmed a significant positive relationship between WFC and the three dimensions of professional burnout. Considering the mediating relationships, it was revealed that WFC plays a complementary partial mediating role in the relationship between workload perception and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Likewise, the full mediating role of WFC in the relationship between workload perception and a lack of personal accomplishment was confirmed. This research contributes significantly to literature and practice by showing that lack of personal accomplishment develops when workload perception turns into WFC.

Keywords: *Workload Perception, Work-Family Conflict, Professional Burnout.*



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1. INTRODUCTION

Energy, which is used in every area of daily life and represents the basic input of production, emerges as a necessary element for increasing the welfare level of nations (Koç & Kaya, 2015). Therefore, the energy sector is among the most critical and competitive sectors. As energy demands continue to increase and sustainability concerns come to the forefront, energy companies are under significant pressure to ensure both operational efficiency and continuous innovation (Dash et al., 2023). Employees in the energy sector usually face stressful and challenging situations in the workplace, such as long working hours, time pressure, high work targets, excessive workload, overtime, excessive emotional demands, and low job flexibility. It is stressed that unless the necessary measures are taken in this respect, employees' stress levels will increase (Gümüştekin & Öztemiz, 2005), professional burnout and turnover intention will increase, and employee performance will decrease (Zincirkıran et al., 2015).

Professional burnout refers to a chronic state of exhaustion, which emerges due to long-term exposure to emotional and physical demands in individuals' jobs (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion (depletion of emotional resources), depersonalization (cynical attitude and detachment from work), and lack of personal accomplishment (decreased sense of competence at work) (Bakker et al., 2004). While there are studies in the literature supporting that workload perception is an antecedent of professional burnout (e.g., Yaku et al., 2020; Deniz & Kaya, 2021; Çıngı & Şantaş, 2023; Bartram et al., 2023; Mücevher & Çetinceli, 2023), the available studies (e.g., Portoghese et al., 2014; Woranetipo & Chavanovanich, 2021; Azizoğlu et al., 2022) could not yield consistent results specifically on the sub-dimensions of professional burnout.

In line with the job demands-resources theory, job demands comprise factors (such as time pressure and workload) that decrease health and energy and cause significant mental disorders over time and, ultimately, low employee performance (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). To meet higher job demands, employees initially tend to exert maximum physical and mental effort to effectively manage occupational stress, even at the expense of their health. Consequently, additional workload, time pressure, and work-life imbalance create a state of burnout that can considerably threaten the well-being of employees. In other words, professional burnout usually occurs because of high job demands (workload perception) and inadequate work resources (attention, energy, and time) that employees can use (Adil & Baig, 2018).

On the other hand, the high workload perception may threaten employees' energy and time, creating conflict since the time spent at work cannot be devoted to family and social activities (Lingard, Francis and Turner, 2010). According to the job demands-resources theory, employees who invest in resources (energy and time) in order to meet high job demands (workload perception) may have few or no resources left to manage their family activities and, therefore, may experience work-family conflict (WFC). Empirical research has also confirmed that workload perception impacts WFC (Macit & Arıncı,

2018; Göde, 2019; Şimşek & Koç, 2020; Korkmazer & Aksoy, 2020; Altıntop & Aydınlan, 2021; Türk, 2022; Sadiq, 2022; Galardo & Trottier, 2022). Nevertheless, this relationship has not been discussed in the context of the energy sector. Considering a great need for technicians, engineers, and other skilled workers due to the energy sector being capital- and technology-intensive (Dash et al., 2023), it makes sense to investigate the correlation between workload perception and WFC.

Additionally, in line with the job demands-resources theory, being unable to cope with WFC or manage the conflict can create stress and tension, leading to professional burnout (Bagherzadeh et al., 2016; Balogun, 2019). Evidence obtained from numerous studies demonstrates that WFC is an antecedent of professional burnout (e.g., Burke & Greenglass, 2001; Amstad et al., 2011; Haines et al., 2013; Lizano et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2018). However, the aforementioned relationship has not been examined on employees in the energy sector, and it has been minimally researched specifically on the sub-dimensions of professional burnout, and consistent results have not been obtained (Halbesleben, 2009; Balogun, 2014; Balogun, 2019; Jia and Li, 2022; Yarifard et al., 2023). It is essential to investigate these research gaps because providing necessary recommendations to decrease the impact of workload perception and WFC on the dimensions of professional burnout among employees in the energy sector can contribute to theory and practice.

Based on all the discussions, a research model was developed in the current study using the job demands-resources theory and tested with the SmartPLS 4 program. The model argues that the WFC of employees in the energy sector will mediate the positive relationship between workload perception and professional burnout dimensions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Workload Perception and Professional Burnout

Professional burnout comprises three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. The first dimension, emotional exhaustion, includes physical or mental wear and tear, fatigue, and a feeling of loss of energy. The second dimension, depersonalization, means separating oneself from others, exhibiting cold emotions and reacting negatively to the attitudes of others, losing logic, and becoming irritable. Finally, lack of personal accomplishment can be expressed as an individual's perception of himself/herself as inadequate in professional terms, feeling unsuccessful in business life, and thinking that all his/her efforts to respond to incoming requests are inadequate (Portoghese et al., 2014; Azizoğlu et al., 2022). Especially Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) asserted that the three dimensions of professional burnout develop as a result of sequential progression over time. Specifically, researchers found that “emotional exhaustion occurs first, which leads to the development of depersonalization, which in turn causes a lack of personal accomplishment” (Alarcon, 2011; Portoghese et al., 2014). On the other hand, some researchers in the literature argue that

the lack of personal accomplishment is not among the dimensions of professional burnout (Tayfur and Arslan, 2012).

Workload perception involves many factors, such as physical and mental tasks, amount of work, time, and complexity. Workload perception in the job characteristics dimension is among the factors that affect burnout (Bolat, 2011). Several studies demonstrate that professional burnout is a consequence of high workload (e.g., Öztürk & Erdem, 2020; Phillips, 2020; Yaku et al., 2020; Deniz & Kaya, 2021; Çıngı & Şantaş, 2023; Bartram et al., 2023; Mücevher & Çetinceli, 2023).

Upon reviewing research on the sub-dimensions of professional burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment are mentioned among the consequences of workload (Male & May, 1998; Karacaoğlu & Çetin, 2015; Xiaoming et al., 2014; Azizoğlu et al., 2022). Moreover, some researchers have identified a significant positive relationship between workload and emotional exhaustion (Greeenglass et al., 2001; Garrosa et al., 2010; Portoghese et al., 2014). On the contrary, some researchers have reported a significant positive correlation between workload and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, but the absence of a significant relationship with a lack of personal accomplishment (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Woranetipo & Chavanovanich, 2021; Tayfur & Arslan, 2012). As is seen, research on professional burnout sub-dimensions could not yield consistent results. Hence, filling the above-mentioned research gap can contribute to the literature.

According to the job demands-resources theory, professional burnout results from high job demands (workload, role conflict, and job pressure) or low job resources (time, energy, attention, social support, autonomy, and skill variety). This can be explained by the job demands-resources model, suggesting that workload can be perceived as a job demand, and if this job demand is exceeded, it may cause a higher level of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2014). The main purpose of this theory is to research job characteristics as antecedents of job strain and explain the significance of the balance between two categories of job characteristics (job demands and job resources). Especially the imbalance between these two categories of job characteristics causes employees to experience job stress and strain, including anxiety and burnout (Taris & Schaufeli, 2014).

Based on all these discussions, it can be assumed that workload perception is an antecedent of professional burnout sub-dimensions. Researchers in the literature mostly investigate the relationship between workload perception and professional burnout in service sector employees such as education, health, and tourism. There is no study on energy sector employees among the studies conducted, and the inconsistent results of the research on professional burnout sub-dimensions make the present study significant. Therefore, the following hypotheses were established in this study in accordance with the assumptions of the job demands-resources theory;

H1a: Workload perception has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion.

H1b: Workload perception has a positive impact on depersonalization.

H1c: Workload perception has a positive impact on the lack of personal accomplishment.

2.2. Workload Perception and WFC

As indicated by the job demands-resources theory, individuals aim to acquire and maintain personal characteristics (self-efficacy), circumstances (promotion), and individual resources (energy and time). Individuals may experience stress when these resources are threatened or lost (Hobfoll, 1989). Following the framework in question, it can be argued that workload is a job demand representing energy consumption in terms of time and psychological resources. For instance, the more time an individual spends at work, the more he/she may experience WFC since he/she does not have sufficient resources (time) to fulfill the roles expected of him/her at home. Resource consumption may occur because of a high workload, which can adversely impact individuals' role performance in the family and cause WFC (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

The literature review found no studies that reveal a generally positive relationship between workload perception and WFC (e.g., Göde, 2019; Şimşek & Koç, 2020; Korkmazer & Aksoy, 2020; Altıntop & Aydın, 2021; Türk, 2022; Sadiq, 2022; Galardo & Trottier, 2022). On the other hand, there is no study in the literature on employees in the energy sector. The following hypothesis was established in the present work according to the job demands-resources theory by considering that the workload perception of employees in the energy sector positively impacts WFC:

H2: Workload perception has a positive impact on WFC.

2.3. WFC and Professional Burnout

WFC represents an inter-role conflict that emerges when the resources allocated (energy and time), the tension experienced, and the behaviors expected from a role (work role) make it challenging to fulfill the obligations in another role (family role) (e.g., Carlson et al., 2000; Wang et al., 2012a). Netemeyer et al. (2005) indicated that role conflict creates pressure on emotional and cognitive resources, and individuals begin to believe that they cannot cope with all the expectations imposed on them in different roles. The aforesaid inter-role conflict originates from the inability to fulfill family responsibilities arising from work roles or work responsibilities arising from family (Wang et al., 2012a).

Previous researchers have demonstrated that the greater the WFC is, the greater the professional burnout an individual may experience (e.g., Alarcon, 2011; Mete et al., 2014; Laeeque, 2014; Wang et al., 2012b; Kremer, 2016; Macit & Ardiç, 2018). Whereas some of the few studies on the dimensions of professional burnout reveal the positive relationship between WFC and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Boles et al., 1997; Karatepe & Tekinkuş, 2006; Halbesleben, 2009; Jourdain & Chenevert, 2010; Ozor 2015; Tayfur & Arslan, 2012; Jia & Li, 2022), others have identified a significant negative relationship between WFC and lack of personal accomplishment (Fang, 2017; Yarifard et al., 2023). On the other hand, studies from Nigeria have identified a positive impact of WFC on burnout

and its dimensions (Balogun, 2014; Balogun, 2019). Consequently, it is seen that no definitive conclusion can be reached in the literature on the effect of WFC on professional burnout dimensions.

The current study uses the job demands-resources theory in order to explain the relationship between WFC and the dimensions of professional burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to the above-mentioned theory, individuals' coping skills and abilities decrease because of accumulated resource losses (time, energy) (WFC occurs), which can lead to more significant psychological distress in the form of burnout (Ratnaningsih & Idris, 2023). Accordingly, the following hypotheses were developed in accordance with the job demands-resources theory:

H3a: WFC has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion.

H3b: WFC has a positive impact on depersonalization.

H3c: WFC has a positive impact on lack of personal accomplishment.

2.4. The Mediating Role of WFC

Few empirical studies have indicated that WFC mediates the relationship between workload and burnout (Peeters et al., 2005; Karatepe et al., 2010; Mansour and Commeiras, 2015; Mansour and Tremblay, 2016). The study by Tayfur and Arslan (2012) revealed that WFC mediates the relationship between perceived workload and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

The job demands-resources theory can explain the mediating role of WFC in the relationship between perceived workload and professional burnout. According to the job demands-resources theory, employees with a high workload perception as a job demand consume valuable resources, such as time, energy, and emotions that are necessary for their family lives because they have to transfer their resources to their work lives (Lapierre and Allen, 2006). Individuals who face this loss of resources cannot fulfill their professional and family responsibilities simultaneously due to a lack of resources, and consequently, WFC may occur (Mansour and Commeiras, 2015; Mansour and Tremblay, 2016). To cope with WFC, individuals consume more resources, and thus, they cannot fulfill both their work-related duties and family responsibilities and may suffer from emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment (Tayfur & Arslan, 2013; Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018; Erdem, 2020). This study proposes the following hypotheses based on the assumptions of the job demands-resources theory:

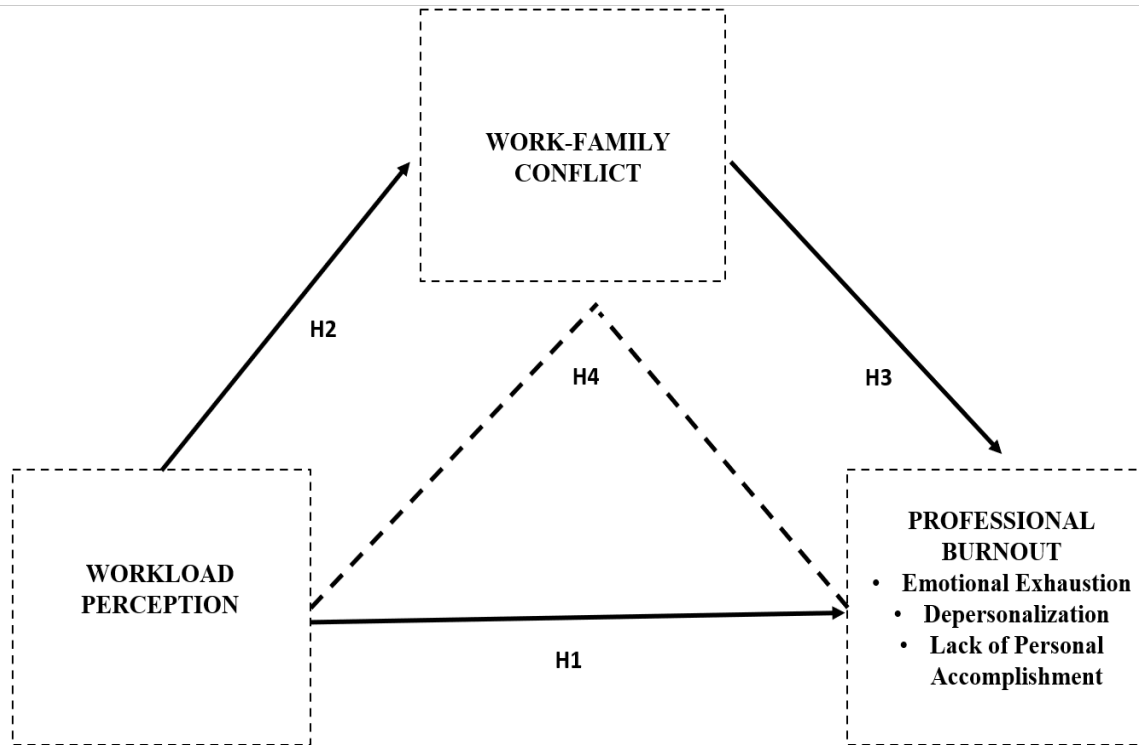
H4a: WFC mediates the significant positive relationship between workload perception and emotional exhaustion.

H4b: WFC mediates the significant positive relationship between workload perception and depersonalization.

H4c: WFC mediates the significant positive relationship between workload perception and lack of personal accomplishment.

Figure 1 displays the research model.

Figure 1. Research Model



3. RESEARCH

3.1. Population and Sample of the Study

Turkey has 21 electricity distribution regions and 21 electricity distribution companies (Ertilav & Aktel, 2015). This study’s population consists of employees employed in 21 electricity distribution companies operating in the energy sector in Turkey. Between August and October 2023, data was collected from employees of 21 electricity distribution companies using the survey method via Google Forms. 258 participants answered the survey and 221 usable data were obtained.

Concerning the participants’ demographic characteristics and professional experiences, 52.5% of the study participants are female, and 54.8% are in the 30-40 age range. Table 1 shows that 72.3% of the participants are married, 58.8% have a bachelor’s degree, and 32.1% have professional experience between 11 and 15 years.

The current research was performed with the Ethics Committee Approval Certificate of Istanbul Topkapı University Academic Research and Publication Ethics Board dated 10.07.2023 and numbered E-49846378-050.01.04-2300007954 and following the rules of scientific research and publication ethics.

Table 1. Demographic Data

	Demographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	117	52.9
	Male	104	47.1
Age	20-30	22	9.9
	30-40	121	54.8
	40-50	71	32.1
	50-60	7	3.2
Marital Status	Marital Status	159	72.3
	Unmarried	61	27.7
Education	High School	26	11.8
	Associate Degree	28	12.7
	Degree	128	58.2
	Master's Degree	35	15.9
	Doctorate	3	1.4
Experience	0-1 years	7	3.2
	2-5 years	33	14.9
	6-10 years	59	26.7
	11-15 years	71	32.1
	15+ years	51	23.1

3.2. Development of the Data Collection Tool

The survey form of the study, prepared in line with its purpose, consists of four sections. The first section includes questions about the participants' demographic characteristics, the second section includes questions to measure workload perception, the third section includes questions to measure burnout level, and the fourth section includes questions to measure WFC level.

The 11-item "Workload Perception" scale, developed by Peter Son et al. (1995) and adapted to Turkish by Derya (2008), was utilized to measure the workload perception level. The scale has a one-dimensional structure comprising 11 items.

The "Burnout" scale, developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) and adapted to Turkish by Ergin (1993), was employed to measure the level of professional burnout. The Maslach Burnout Inventory has a 3-dimensional structure comprising 22 items that determine the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment level. The personal accomplishment scale was reverse-coded and defined as a lack of personal accomplishment.

To measure WFC, the 5-item WFC scale, developed by Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996) and adapted into Turkish by Korkmaz and Erdoğan (2014), was used. All scales are 5-point Likert scales (1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree).

3.3. Data Analysis and Findings

The data were entered into the SPSS program for statistical analysis. Partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to verify the hypotheses in the study. The data were

tested with the SmartPLS 4 analysis program, whose assumption is based on PLS-SEM. SmartPLS 4 software can be utilized to analyze non-normally distributed data and in studies with small samples. In SmartPLS software, data are analyzed in two steps using structural equation modeling techniques along with the measurement model.

3.3.1. Evaluation of the Measurement Model

When analyzing in the SmartPLS 4 analysis program, the measurement model is analyzed first. When evaluating the measurement model, factor loadings should be checked first. In the analysis of the measurement model, the LPA1 item, which belongs to lack of personal accomplishment, WP7 and WP8 indicators, which belong to workload perception, and the DPS4 item, which belongs to depersonalization, were excluded from the analysis since they were below 0.700, and the analysis was repeated. As seen in Table 2, the values of the items belonging to the constructs are above 0.700. Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and rho_a values were examined to evaluate the internal consistency reliability of the survey. It can be stated that the data are statistically reliable if all of Cronbach's alpha, CR, and rho_a values are higher than 0.700 (Hair et al., 2019). Table 2 displays that Cronbach's alpha, CR, and rho_a values are higher than 0.700 for all latent variables. This study complies with internal consistency reliability criteria.

The average variance extracted (AVE) is employed to measure convergent validity. Calculating AVE for each component allows for evaluating the convergent validity of factor loadings, which is an essential tool for evaluating the reliability of factors. Table 2 contains the results for convergent validity. The results in the table demonstrate that all AVE values are higher than 0.500 and convergent validity is met.

Table 2. Measurement Model Results

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	P-Values	Cronbach's Alpha	rho A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Emotional Exhaustion (EM)	EM1	0.786	0.000	0.929	0.938	0.941	0.641
	EM2	0.865	0.000				
	EM3	0.875	0.000				
	EM4	0.758	0.000				
	EM5	0.847	0.000				
	EM6	0.804	0.000				
	EM7	0.737	0.000				
	EM8	0.809	0.000				
	EM9	0.706	0.000				
Lack of Personal Accomplishment (LPA)	LPA2	0.793	0.000	0.899	0.944	0.917	0.613
	LPA3	0.720	0.000				
	LPA4	0.743	0.000				
	LPA5	0.819	0.000				
	LPA6	0.763	0.000				
	LPA7	0.850	0.000				
	LPA8	0.785	0.000				
	Work-Family Conflict (WFC)	WFC1	0.894				
WFC2		0.936	0.000				
WFC3		0.926	0.000				
WFC4		0.917	0.000				
WFC5		0.853	0.000				

Table 2. (Cont.)

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	P-Values	Cronbach's Alpha	rho A	Composite Reliability	AVE					
Workload Perception (WP)	WP1	0.725	0.000	0.926	0.931	0.939	0.631					
	WP2	0.766	0.000									
	WP3	0.743	0.000									
	WP4	0.833	0.000									
	WP5	0.756	0.000									
	WP6	0.889	0.000									
	WP9	0.855	0.000									
	WP10	0.826	0.000									
	WP11	0.736	0.000									
	Depersonalization (DP)	DPS1	0.728					0.000	0.853	0.875	0.901	0.696
		DPS2	0.895					0.000				
DPS3		0.911	0.000									
DPS4		0.895	0.000									
DPS5		0.791	0.000									

The present study considered discriminant validity along with internal reliability and convergent validity. Discriminant validity investigates the level of correlation between the modeled constructs and shows how different the modeled constructs are from other constructs (Hair et al., 2010). Discriminant validity was examined with three methods in this study. First, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was evaluated. In the aforesaid method, the square root of the AVE value should be greater than the correlations between the constructs. The square roots of the AVE values (values shown in bold) of each of the constructs in Table 3 are higher than the correlation values in the current rows and columns. Hence, all constructs provide discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5
DP	0.835				
EM	0.708	0.800			
LPA	0.437	0.519	0.783		
WP	0.494	0.592	0.278	0.794	
WFC	0.518	0.718	0.366	0.659	0.906

The heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) is the second method used in the study. The discriminant validity of the measurement model was checked using this method. An HTMT value less than 0.85 is appropriate for the accuracy of discriminant validity between constructs. No construct has a value higher than 0.85, as shown in Table 4. Therefore, it can be stated that the discriminant validity of the measurement model was confirmed according to the HTMT criterion.

Table 4. HTMT

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5
DP					
EM	0.791				
LPA	0.444	0.509			
WP	0.548	0.621	0.271		
WFC	0.571	0.756	0.347	0.700	

A third method, cross-loading values, should also be analyzed to examine the study's discriminant validity. The high indicator loadings (bold values) in each construct in Table 5 demonstrate that the cross-loading values required for the discriminant validity of these constructs are appropriate (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Hence, the results meet all three methods required for discriminant validity in each construct.

Table 5. Cross-Loadings

Items	Depersonalization	Emotional Exhaustion	Lack of Personal Accomplishment	Workload Perception	Work-Family Conflict
EM1	0.504	0.786	0.391	0.381	0.563
EM2	0.556	0.865	0.432	0.540	0.652
EM3	0.575	0.875	0.420	0.514	0.640
EM4	0.577	0.758	0.367	0.457	0.561
EM5	0.651	0.847	0.403	0.553	0.631
EM6	0.584	0.804	0.481	0.601	0.634
EM7	0.621	0.737	0.379	0.338	0.434
EM8	0.563	0.809	0.469	0.464	0.528
EM9	0.477	0.706	0.399	0.313	0.460
DPS1	0.728	0.465	0.254	0.323	0.324
DPS2	0.895	0.651	0.414	0.490	0.479
DPS3	0.911	0.666	0.382	0.436	0.475
DPS5	0.791	0.556	0.386	0.378	0.430
LPA2	0.320	0.387	0.793	0.231	0.267
LPA3	0.242	0.242	0.720	0.153	0.131
LPA4	0.533	0.611	0.743	0.317	0.438
LPA5	0.256	0.318	0.819	0.171	0.230
LPA6	0.272	0.291	0.763	0.108	0.158
LPA7	0.330	0.422	0.850	0.245	0.324
LPA8	0.221	0.300	0.785	0.138	0.219
WFC1	0.462	0.608	0.277	0.622	0.894
WFC2	0.452	0.648	0.327	0.624	0.936
WFC3	0.458	0.680	0.364	0.581	0.926
WFC4	0.498	0.678	0.335	0.601	0.917
WFC5	0.474	0.634	0.352	0.557	0.853
WP1	0.399	0.446	0.241	0.725	0.404
WP2	0.364	0.485	0.149	0.766	0.579
WP3	0.405	0.463	0.241	0.743	0.483
WP4	0.438	0.523	0.259	0.833	0.520
WP5	0.326	0.368	0.218	0.756	0.491
WP6	0.470	0.534	0.229	0.889	0.595
WP9	0.402	0.508	0.256	0.855	0.658
WP10	0.311	0.416	0.235	0.826	0.509
WP11	0.397	0.462	0.156	0.736	0.429

Finally, analysis was performed using the 5000 resampling method to reveal whether the indicators of each construct in the measurement model were statistically significant. The analysis shows that each indicator is loaded statistically significantly on the construct it belongs to.

3.3.2. Evaluation of the Structural Model

According to the structural evaluation criteria, the problem of multicollinearity, path coefficient, R^2 value explaining the percentage rate of the endogenous variable, and Standardized Root Mean Square (SRMR) and Normed Fix Index (NFI) values are examined.

Whether there is a multicollinearity problem is assessed according to the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value. The VIF values of all variables in the current study (see Table 6) are below 3. The above-mentioned result indicates that there is no multicollinearity problem. After multicollinearity control is ensured, the significance between the latent variables of the model is assessed, and the path coefficient is employed to determine whether there is a correlation between the dependent, independent, and mediator variables. P and t-values should be obtained to examine direct and indirect impacts using the bootstrap method. Analysis was conducted by creating 5000 resamples. According to the study's first finding, the correlation between workload perception and emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.208$; $t = 2.597$; $p = 0.009$) is positively significant. Likewise, the relationship between workload perception and depersonalization ($\beta = 0.270$; $t = 2.722$; $p = 0.007$) is positively significant. Hence, hypotheses H1a and H1b were accepted. Nevertheless, when the relationship between workload perception and lack of personal accomplishment is examined, it is seen that the relationship in question ($\beta = 0.064$; $t = 0.619$; $p = 0.536$) is insignificant (see Table 6). Accordingly, hypothesis H1c was rejected.

According to another result of the research, the relationship between workload perception and WFC is positively significant ($\beta = 0.659$; $t = 14.349$; $p = 0.000$). Therefore, hypothesis H2 was supported. Similarly, all of the relationships of WFC with emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.581$; $t = 8.470$; $p = 0.000$), depersonalization ($\beta = 0.340$; $t = 3.606$; $p = 0.000$), and lack of personal accomplishment ($\beta = 0.325$; $t = 3.556$; $p = 0.000$) were positively significant, and hypotheses H3a, H3b, and H3c were accepted.

The R^2 value, measured as the percentage of the total variance that can be attributed to the internal constructs of the model, determines the model's ability to explain data. Upon examining the R^2 values in Figure 2, it was found to be 0.434 for WFC, 0.539 for emotional exhaustion, 0.309 for depersonalization, and 0.137 for lack of personal accomplishment, and these values can be considered good.

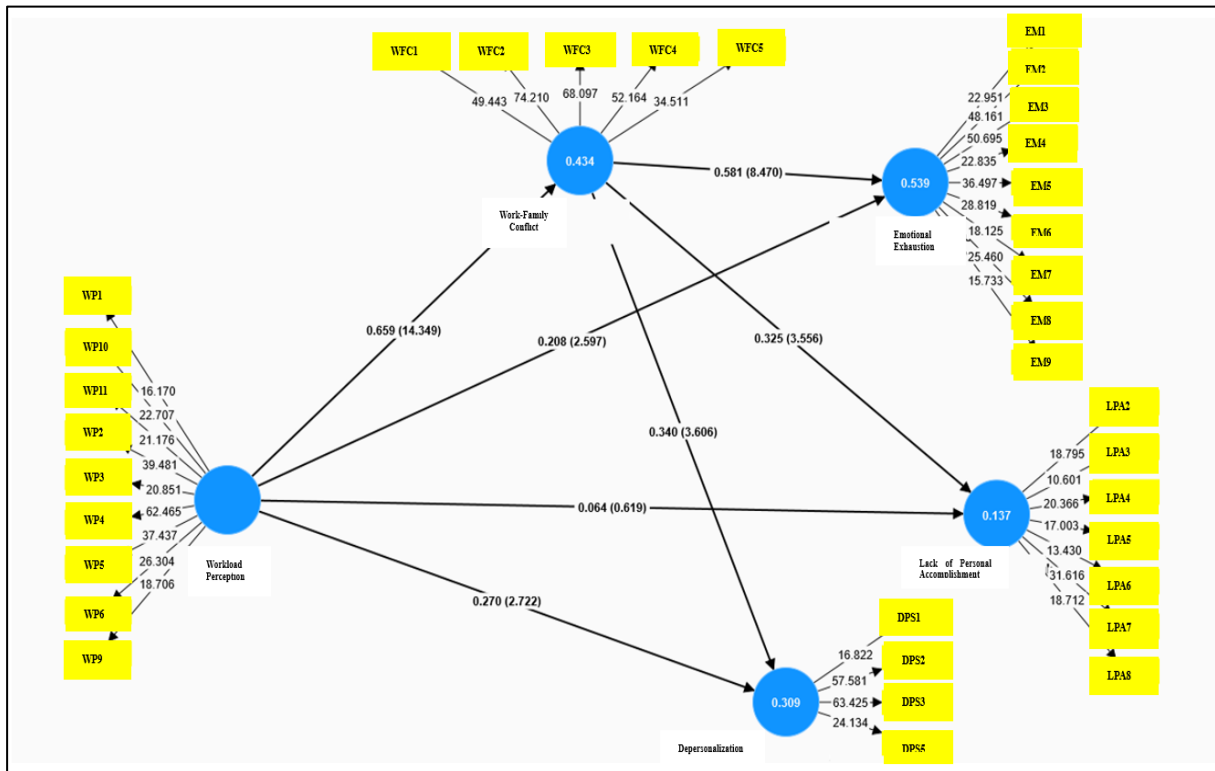
SRMR is defined as the mean of the standardized residuals between the observed and predicted covariance (Pavlov et al., 2021). An SRMR value of 0.08 or lower is accepted as optimal. The SRMR value calculated in the model is 0.052. It is desired that the NFI value should be greater than 0.80. Since the NFI value of the current model is 0.83, these values indicate that the model is compatible.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing

Path Coefficients	Coef (β)	S.D.	T-Values	P-Values	Adj. R ²	f ²	VIF	Confidence Interval Bias Corrected		Conclusion
								Lower Level	Upper Level	
WFC→ DPS	0.340	0.094	3.606	0.000	0.309	0.095	1.768	0.159	0.527	H3b Supported
WP→ DPS	0.270	0.099	2.722	0.007						
WFC→ LPA	0.325	0.091	3.556	0.000	0.136	0.068	1.768	0.437	0.710	H3c Supported
WP→ LPA	0.064	0.103	0.619	0.536						
WP→ WFC	0.659	0.046	14.349	0.000	0.434	0.768	1.000	0.557	0.740	H2 Supported
WFC→ EM	0.581	0.069	8.470	0.000	0.540	0.414	1.768	0.115	0.482	H3a Supported
WP→ EM	0.208	0.080	2.597	0.009						

By examining the effect size (f^2) value, it can be found whether an independent construct significantly impacts the dependent construct. The f^2 values of the present study vary between 0.054 and 0.768, and it can be stated that the independent construct has moderate to large effects on the dependent constructs (Gefen et al., 2011). According to the results, workload perception significantly impacts WFC, whereas WFC significantly impacts emotional exhaustion.

Figure 2. Results of the Structural Model



The mediation procedure employed by Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010) was followed in order to test the mediating effect of WFC in the relationship between workload perception and professional burnout (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and lack of personal accomplishment). Table 7

contains the test results for the mediating effect of WFC. The findings demonstrate that WFC is the mediator variable in the relationship between workload perception and emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.383$; $t = 7.028$; $p = 0.000$). To determine the level of mediating effect, the correlation between workload perception and emotional exhaustion was assessed, and since the above-mentioned effect was also significant ($\beta = 0.208$; $t = 2.597$; $p = 0.009$), it was concluded that WFC has a complementary partial mediating role. Therefore, hypothesis H4a was supported.

According to the results, the mediating role of WFC in the relationship between workload perception and depersonalization was confirmed ($\beta = 0.224$; $t = 3.416$; $p = 0.001$). When the relationship between workload perception and depersonalization was evaluated to determine the level of the mediating role ($\beta = 0.270$; $t = 2.722$; $p = 0.007$), the relationship in question was significant, and it can be said that WFC has a complementary partial mediating role. In line with this, hypothesis H4b was supported.

Furthermore, the results supported the mediating role of WFC in the relationship between workload perception and lack of personal accomplishment ($\beta = 0.214$; $t = 3.411$; $p = 0.001$). It is seen that the direct relationship between workload perception and lack of personal accomplishment is insignificant ($\beta = 0.064$; $t = 0.619$; $p = 0.536$). Accordingly, WFC fully mediates the relationship between workload perception and lack of personal accomplishment. Hence, hypothesis H4c was confirmed.

Table 7. Mediation Analysis

Path Coefficients	Coef (β)	S.D.	T-Values	P-Values	Confidence Interval		Conclusion
					Bias Corrected Lower Level	Upper Level	
WP→ WFC→ EM	0.383	0.054	7.028	0.000	0.284	0.496	H4a Supported Complementary Partial Mediation
WP→ EM	0.208	0.080	2.597	0.009	0.043	0.359	
WP→ WFC→ DPS	0.224	0.066	3.416	0.001	0.107	0.362	H4b Supported Complementary Partial Mediation
WP→ DPS	0.270	0.099	2.722	0.007	0.062	0.455	
WP→ WFC→ LPA	0.214	0.063	3.411	0.001	0.079	0.329	H4c Supported Full Mediation
WP→ LPA	0.064	0.103	0.619	0.536	-0.152	0.257	

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1. Discussion

The present study investigated the mediating role of WFC in the relationship between workload perception and the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment sub-dimensions of professional burnout in a sample of employees of 21 electricity distribution companies operating in the energy sector in Turkey. In this regard, the four research questions, (1) Does workload perception impact the sub-dimensions of professional burnout?, (2) Does workload perception impact WFC?, (3) Does WFC impact the sub-dimensions of professional burnout? and (4) Does WFC mediate the relationship between workload perception and the sub-dimensions of professional burnout?, were analyzed with the data collected from 221 employees of 21 electricity distribution companies operating in the energy sector.

In line with the first hypothesis, it was found that workload perception significantly positively impacts the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions of professional burnout. Accordingly, hypotheses H1a and H1b were accepted. The result mentioned above supports the researchers argument that workload perception, which is indicated among the work-related stressors, positively impacts emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, the dimensions of professional burnout (Male & May, 1998; Xiaoming et al., 2014; Karacaoğlu & Çetin, 2015). Contrary to this result, it was observed that workload perception is not significantly correlated with lack of personal accomplishment, the sub-dimension of professional burnout, and hypothesis H1c was rejected. The aforesaid result supports the researchers who assert that workload perception does not significantly impact the lack of personal accomplishment, which is attributed to an individual feeling unsuccessful and thinking that all efforts are inadequate to respond to demands (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Tayfur & Arslan, 2012; Woranetipo & Chavanovanich, 2021). This result confirms the assumptions of scientists who assert that professional burnout develops due to sequential progression changing over time (Maslach et al., 2001). In this respect, it can be stated that workload perception in employees of the energy sector first creates emotional exhaustion, and then depersonalization develops. Workload perception did not directly lead to a lack of personal accomplishment in energy sector employees.

Another result of the study demonstrated that the impact of workload perception on WFC was significant. Hence, hypothesis H2 was accepted. The above-mentioned result supports studies in the literature and strengthens the existence of this relationship (Mansour & Tremblay, 2016; Korkmazer & Aksoy, 2018; Macit & Arđınç, 2018; Göde, 2019; Şimşek & Koç, 2020; Korkmazer & Aksoy, 2020; Altıntop & Aydınıtan, 2021; Türk, 2022; Sadiq, 2022; Galardo & Trottier, 2022). Likewise, in line with another result of the study, the relationships between WFC and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment are significant. Accordingly, hypotheses H3a, H3b, and H3c were accepted. In the literature, studies investigating the impact of WFC on the dimensions of professional burnout are both limited and have not yielded consistent findings. This result supports the researchers

defending the idea that WFC is an antecedent of emotional exhaustion (Halbesleben, 2009; Karatepe & Tekinkuş, 2006; Jourdain & Chenevert, 2010; Tayfur & Arslan, 2012; Balogun, 2014; Ozor, 2015; Balogun, 2019; Jia & Li, 2022; Yarifard et al., 2023), depersonalization (Tayfur & Arslan, 2012; Balogun, 2014; Ozor, 2015; Balogun, 2019; Jia and Li, 2022; Yarifard et al., 2023), and lack of personal accomplishment (Balogun, 2014; Balogun, 2019).

The findings of the research on the mediating role of WFC demonstrate that WFC has a complementary partial mediating role in the relationship between workload perception and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Therefore, hypotheses H4a and H4b were accepted. The aforesaid result supports the study by Tayfur and Arslan (2012), asserting that WFC mediates the relationship between workload perception and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Finally, according to the study results, WFC was found to be a full mediator in the relationship between workload perception and lack of personal accomplishment. Hence, hypothesis H4c was supported. This result contributes significantly to the literature and practice by showing that the lack of personal accomplishment develops when workload perception turns into WFC. The current work supports the few studies in the literature indicating that WFC mediates the correlation between workload and professional burnout (Janssen et al., 2004; Peeters et al., 2005; Karatepe et al., 2010; Mansour & Tremblay, 2016) and strengthens this correlation.

4.2. Theoretical Contributions

The current study has several theoretical contributions. It contributes to the literature by revealing that employees in the energy sector are exposed to a high workload. The first finding of the present study shows that workload perception impacts emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, but not the lack of personal accomplishment and supports the researchers who assert that the three dimensions of professional burnout develop as a result of sequential progression changing over time (Maslach et al., 2001; Alarcon, 2011; Portoghese et al., 2014), thus, strengthening this assumption.

The second finding of the study strengthens the job demands-resources theory by providing an appropriate framework for understanding how employees' time and energy (i.e., resources) are depleted due to their workload perception (job demands), leading to WFC.

The third finding of this study further strengthens the position of the job demands-resources theory by indicating that WFC is an essential factor that threatens employees' energy and resources and that long-term exposure to such stressors will, over time, cause emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of personal accomplishment.

The fourth finding of the study strengthens the assumptions of the job demands-resources theory by demonstrating that WFC has a complementary partial mediating role in the relationship between workload perception and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

Based on the job demands-resources theory, the last finding of the research contributes significantly to the literature by confirming that WFC fully mediates the impact of workload perception on the lack of personal accomplishment in an industry (energy) characterized by significant work-family balance problems.

4.3. Practical Contributions

Along with theoretical contributions, the present work also makes practical contributions to organizations and individuals. First, the current study underlines the importance of employers implementing actions to decrease employee workload in the energy sector. Hence, it is essential for organizations in the energy sector to address workload perceptions. The study results indicate the positive impacts of workload perception on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Therefore, it can be recommended that managers establish appropriate working hours, coordinate regular working hours and days off, and reduce workload by increasing work and rest periods.

The second finding shows that workload perception is an antecedent of WFC. Particularly working conditions such as long and irregular working hours (including evenings and weekends), lack of paid leave to deal with family matters, lack of a flexible work schedule, pressure to complete a job, and unpredictability of the end time of workdays are indicated as reasons for high WFC (Lingard & Sublet 2002, Lingard et al., 2010). In this respect, alleviating the workload will decrease the negative impacts on the work-family interface, thus reducing WFC. Since workload perception is defined as a major reason behind WFC as excessive job demands drain the energy and time of employees, it can be recommended that management plans this appropriately through voluntary part-time working hours, compressed work weeks, working from home, flexible time, and family leaves. Such strategies can decrease WFC by helping employees fulfill their family roles. Moreover, management can organize employee training programs to maintain boundaries between work and family roles.

The third finding indicates that WFC impacts emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. Especially managers and supervisors can encourage employees to spend their free time on non-work-related activities.

The fourth finding demonstrates the complementary partial mediating role of WFC in the relationship between workload perception and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and the full mediating role of WFC in the relationship between workload perception and lack of personal accomplishment. Hence, managers can reduce bureaucratic procedures that increase workload perception, organize training programs so that employees can use their time correctly and effectively, and offer facilities such as nurseries and kindergartens to establish work-life balance. Thus, professional burnout can be decreased by preventing WFC caused by workload perception.

4.4. Limitations and Recommendations

This study attempted to reveal the mediating role of WFC in the relationship between workload perception and professional burnout of employees of 21 electricity distribution companies operating in the energy sector with a limited sample group. The present research findings were obtained based on the subjective opinions of the energy sector employees who contributed to the study. In this case, the objectivity of the study can be questioned. Future studies can be performed with a more comprehensive sample. Furthermore, this study stresses the mediating role of WFC in the relationship between workload perception and professional burnout. Future studies can examine other concepts that may mediate between the two concepts.

For the study, ethics committee permission document dated July 10, 2023 and numbered E-49846378-050.01.04-2300007954 was obtained from the İstanbul Topkapı University Ethics Committee.

The study has been crafted in adherence to the principles of research and publication ethics.

The authors declare that there exists no financial conflict of interest involving any institution, organization, or individual(s) associated with the article.

The corresponding author of the study contributed to the planning of the research; the second author of the study contributed to data collection and analysis, the literature review and discussion and results sections.

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