

Emotional Exhaustion and Employee Health and Well-being - The Mediating Role of Supervisor's Emotional Support

Priya George ^{1*}, N.V. Sreedharan ²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Commerce and Management, Amrita School of Arts, Humanities and Sciences, Kochi, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham University, India.
priyagorg123@gmail.com

² Professor, Department of Commerce and Management, Amrita School of Arts, Humanities and Sciences, Kochi, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham University, India.
sreedharannv25@gmail.com

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to analyse the Effect of “Emotional Exhaustion” on the “Health and Well-being” of in the IT (Information Technology) industry employees. The study also analysed the effect of mediating variable (Supervisor's Emotional Support) on the connection between Emotional Exhaustion” as well as its “Impact on Health and Well-Being” of employees of IT industry. The present study expands upon past work related to Employee Stress and its effect on employees health and well-being. Over the last 25 years, there have been substantial changes in the workplace. The expansion of information technology, the globalisation of numerous industries, organisational restructuring, work contracts, and work schedule have drastically altered the nature of work in different organisations. Consequently, the health of the employees has been severely affected. The participants in this research were 449 IT workers from Kerala, India. Data was gathered using a standardised questionnaire that the authors designed. The analysis of the data revealed that Emotional Exhaustion has a significant negative effect on the Health and Wellbeing of IT professionals. The inclusion of a mediating variable (-supervisor’s emotional support) partially mediates the link with emotional exhaustion and employee health and well-being.

Keywords: Emotional support, Supervisor, Emotional exhaustion, Health and well-being Information Technology

1. Introduction

Clinical In the last few decades, there has been an extensive amount of research in exploring the connection between psychological health and stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout (Ventouratos & Cooper, 2005;Wilson et al., (2005); Southwick et al., 2005; Michael (2009).Researchers and practitioners have widely acknowledged that health and well-being can negatively impact employees and enterprises. Employees with a history of poor health are likely to be less effective, take poor decisions and often be absent from work (Boyd, 1977). Their contributions to the organisation’s overall productivity are also likely to diminish gradually (Price & Hooijberg,1992). Individuals may incur several physiological, psychological, and/or emotional expenditures (Bourbeau, Brisson, & Allaire, 1996; Johnson et al 2005). In reality, the whole magnitude of consequences and expenses to employees and companies are only now becoming evident.

According to Verma et al. (1989), Well-being is defined “as the subjective pleasure, enjoyment, gratification with one's place in the world of job and life experiences, a sense of accomplishment, usefulness, belonging, and the absence of anguish, dissatisfaction, or anxiety”. Brinkman (2002) asserts that a person's perception of their overall quality of life is often connected to their sense of well-being. According to research on exhaustion, "burned-out" employees run the risk of being habitually exhausted, underperforming and less engaged, (Lizano, 2015), posing a challenge to management. Well-being is operationalised according to Noblet and Rodwell (2005) as both cognitive well-being and satisfaction in the workplace. A healthy workforce, from the standpoint of well-being, denotes the presence of positive energy in employees, which should eventually lead to happier and more productive employees (Harter et al., 2002).

Emotional support is described as the network of social transactions and interactions (i.e., behavioural, emotional, and cognitive) whose purpose is to supplement the human resources necessary for adaptive coping as per requirement (Sarason & Duck, 2001). Several past studies have highlighted the necessity of emotional support in handling job-related stress and in prohibiting emotional exhaustion (Maslach et al., 2001). A substantial corpus of studies emphasises the significance of work place support in reducing stress as well as enhancing well-being (Gurung et al. 1997).

1.1 Literature Review

Firstly, a person's experiences at work, whether they are physical, mental, social or emotional, have an impact on the job. Moreover, these experiences tend to "carry over" into contexts outside of work. Employees devote approximately a third of their active hours to their jobs, and are likely to bring their work home (Conrad, 1988). The recognition that an employee's professional and private lives are not distinct from one another, but rather connected and entangled with reciprocating implications, has made the crossover between work and personal life a significant area of inquiry (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). As an illustration, the extra mental and physical pressures placed upon the mind and body as a consequence of work-related and daily life stress can lead to negative health conditions and emotional states (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994). The well-being of personnel relates to their spiritual and physical healthiness, but the phrase "well-being" can embrace, wide assortment of challenges. It covers the benefits an employee should receive to ensure his health.

Employees feel emotional exhaustion when they encounter a psychological and physical imbalance that might affect the procedures and working circumstances of employees, hence impacting corporate performance (Muis et al., 2021). In a study with 672 police officers at Kaohsiung in Taiwan, Wu (2009) demonstrated that an increase in job demands results in enhanced emotional exhaustion. However, it was discovered that more job control had a negative correlation with emotional exhaustion. Similarly, emotional exhaustion was negatively related to employee's mental health. Based on the findings of a longitudinal study conducted with older blue-collar workers, Nahum-Shani et al (2011) have showed that reception of emotional support by employees is strongly related with improved well-being. Portoghese et al., (2017) have examined the link between emotional exhaustion, role stress, and a supportive colleague atmosphere among healthcare employees. They collected the aggregated data of 738 healthcare employees nestled inside 67 teams across three hospitals in Italy. Using a multilevel regression model, they revealed that low concentration at work was substantially associated with emotional exhaustion. The study demonstrated that a supportive colleague atmosphere mitigated the connection between emotional exhaustion and lack of role definition.

According to Cropanzano et al., 2003), the most significant sign of burnout is emotional exhaustion, which denotes a state of chronic physical and emotional fatigue and depletion (Maslach & Jackson, 1984). Emotional exhaustion has a connection to both organisational and personal outcomes (Banks, 2012). For instance, employees who are emotionally exhausted are more likely to consider leaving their jobs, show poor job performance, be less satisfied with their jobs, and have a lack of commitment (Swider & Zimmerman (2010); Alarcon (2011); and exhibit organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB) less often (Cropanzano et al., 2003). Moreover, psychological depression and family issues are often experienced by emotionally exhausted employees (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Kahill, 1988; Cropanzano et al., 2003).

Although job exhaustion among human service employees has been extensively examined, the influence of exhaustion on the mental, behavioural, and physiological well-being of employees has received less attention.

2. Research Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional research design technique, in which information was gathered from the respondents at a certain period (Mann, 2003). The population of the study were information technology (IT) professionals working across renowned organisations in the state of Kerala. The final size of the sample was estimated using Morgan's (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970) table for determining sample sizes for studies. The study

adopted a mix of convenient sampling technique and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling allows researchers to draw a sample of respondents for their research study by basing it off of the recommendations of individuals who share a certain attribute with the target population (Crouse & Lowe, 2018). In total 600 questionnaires were administered. However, only 449 responses were considered for the final analysis with response rate of 74.8 percent. In total 449 respondents have participated in the study.

Based on Maslach and Jackson's (1986) Maslach Burnout Inventory, a twelve-item scale was constructed to assess emotional exhaustion. The scale, emotional exhaustion, evaluates the rate with which an individual feels emotionally overextended and fatigued due to employment. To measure emotional support, the Communication Based Emotional Support Scale (CBESS) developed by Weber and Patterson (1996) was adapted. The CBESS questionnaire, which consists of thirteen items, assesses perceived emotional support. To evaluate the effect on employee health and well-being, a six-item modified version of the Psychological General Well-Being Index Scale (Grossi et al., 2006) was employed. Each question on the scale was scored using a five-point Likert scale, with a range of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the questionnaires was ascertained by performing face validity by administering the questionnaires with a team of five experts from academia. Face validity measures the extent to which respondents or users perceive that the items on an assessment instrument correspond to the intended concept and assessment objectives. Face validity analyses the different aspects of the survey instrument including aesthetics, practicality of administration, readability, uniformity in terms of style and formatting procedures, and linguistic clarity (DeVon et al., 2007). A few changes were made in the questionnaire that was based on inputs provided by experts. A pilot test with a small sample of 50 respondents was conducted. The instrument's reliability was confirmed by measuring the coefficient of reliability (Cronbach's Alpha).

2.2 Procedure

An electronic version of the surveys was sent to each participant as an e-mail link and they were asked to provide their responses. The research respondents were given an elaborate description detailing the study's objectives and the goal of the data collection.

3. Results

3.1 Data Analysis and Discussion

Table 1 displays the findings of the descriptive statistics for the variables such as emotional exhaustion, emotional support, employee health and well-being. The table presents normality analysis using Skewness and Kurtosis parameters and reliability analysis results.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis (N=449)

Variable	No. of Items	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's Alpha
Emotional Exhaustion	12	3.73	0.45	0.678	0.133	0.922
Emotional Support	13	3.46	0.35	0.029	0.344	0.788
Impact on Employee Health and Well-being	6	3.78	0.45	0.650	0.487	0.842

From the table 1, it is evident that the study participants have rated highest mean score for "Impact on Employee Health and Well-being" (M=3.78, SD=0.45), followed by "Emotional Exhaustion" (M=3.73, SD=0.45) and Emotional Support (M=3.46, SD=0.35). In addition, the skewness and kurtosis values of all research variables fall below the threshold range of -2 to +2, showing that the survey instrument has successfully satisfied the criteria for meeting normality standards (Cain et al. 2017).

Table 1 also presents result of reliability analysis performed using the parameters coefficient of reliability namely Cronbach's Alpha. It can be observed that all of the variables values are more than the recommended value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2011). This confirms that the study variables are trustworthy for performing all statistical measurements.

Hypothesis H1: Male and female IT employees do not differ significantly in their mean rating on emotional exhaustion

The hypothesis was examined using Independent sample t-test, with "gender" operating as the independent variable and "emotional exhaustion" operating as the dependent variable.

Table 2: Independent Sample t-test between Gender and Emotional Exhaustion

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Male	237	3.62	0.46	5.16	0.00**
Female	212	3.84	0.44		

Note: **: Significance at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From Table 2, it is concluded that male and female respondents of the study have significantly differed on the mean rating on Emotional exhaustion ($t=5.16$, $p=0.000$). The level of significance was 0.01 levels. Hence, the hypothesis that "Male and female IT employees do not differ significantly in their mean rating on emotional exhaustion" was rejected at 1% level of significance. The results are clearly supported by the finding of previous studies that female employees feel greater levels of stress, exhaustion and burnout than male employees (Pines & Zaidman, 2003; Tytherleigh et al., 2007; Zaidman, 2003; Michael et al., 2009).

Hypothesis H2: Married and unmarried IT employees do not differ significantly in their mean rating on emotional exhaustion

The hypothesis was examined using Independent sample t-test, with "marital status" operating as the independent variable and "emotional exhaustion" operating as the dependent variable.

Table 3: Independent Sample t-test between Marital Status and Emotional Exhaustion

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Married	239	3.92	0.58	3.71	0.00**
Unmarried	210	3.72	0.56		

Note: **: Significance at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3, shows that married and unmarried IT employees of the study have significantly differed on the mean rating on Emotional exhaustion ($t=3.71$, $p=0.00$). The level of significance was 0.01 levels. Hence, the hypothesis that "Married and unmarried IT employees do not differ significantly in their mean rating on emotional exhaustion" was rejected at 1% level of significance.

The results clearly support the finding of past studies that married employees are highly susceptible to experience greater level of stress and exhaustion when compared with unmarried ones (Griffin & Clarke 2011). Females confront dysphoria in the workplace, which has a ruminative effect on their negative feelings, leading to magnified

and extended durations to unhappiness as well as increased distress (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). Males, meanwhile, have a tendency to respond via behaviour and diversion, so alleviating their emotional pain (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). Furthermore, compared to men, the female social role of providing assistance to others is more stressful (Kessler et al., 1985). Michael et al. (2009) found in a prior study that females are frequently subject to more job stress as compared to males in the workplace. Therefore, it is vital to attempt to comprehend and control the job stress of female employees in the Information Technology sector.

Hypothesis H3: Male and female IT employees do not differ significantly in their mean rating on Impact on health and well-being

The hypothesis was examined using Independent sample t-test, with “gender” operating as the independent variable and “Impact on health and well-being” operating as the dependent variable.

Table 4: Independent Sample t-test between Gender and Impact on Health & well-being

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Male	237	3.87	0.46	3.99	0.00**
Female	212	3.7	0.44		

Note: **: Significance at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4, clearly sho that male and female respondents of the study have significantly differed on the mean rating on Impact on health and well-being ($t=3.99$, $p=0.000$). The level of significance was 0.01 levels. Hence, the hypothesis that “Male and female IT employees do not differ significantly in their mean rating on Impact on health and well-being” was rejected at 1% level of significance.

Hypothesis H4: Married and unmarried IT employees do not differ significantly in their mean rating on Impact on health and well-being

The hypothesis was examined using independent sample t-test, with “Marital Status” gender operating as the independent variable and “Impact on health and well-being” operating as the dependent variable.

Table 5: Independent Sample t-test between Marital Status and Impact on Health & well-being

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Married	239	3.90	0.62	2.69	0.01**
Unmarried	210	3.74	0.64		

Note: **: Significance at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5, clearly shows that married and unmarried IT employees of the study have significantly differed on the mean rating on Impact on health and well-being ($t=2.69$, $p=0.01$). The level of significance was 0.05 levels. Hence, the hypothesis that “Married and unmarried IT employees do not differ significantly in their mean rating on Impact on health and well-being” was rejected at 1% level of significance.

Hypothesis H5: Emotional exhaustion impacts employee health and well-being

Hypothesis H6: Emotional support mediates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and its impact on employee health and well-being

Structural equation modelling (SEM) using AMOS 21.0 software tool was used to test

the hypothesis H5 and H6. Figure 1 shows the direct effect of Emotional Exhaustion on Employee health and well-being.

Figure 1: Direct Effect of Emotional Exhaustion on Employee Health and Well Being

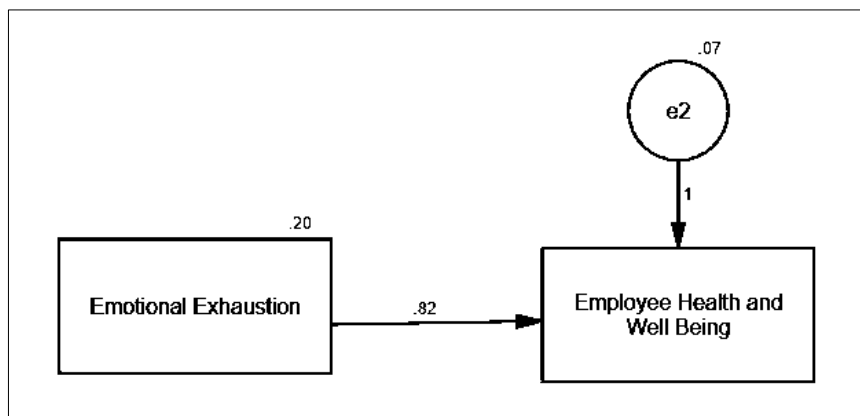


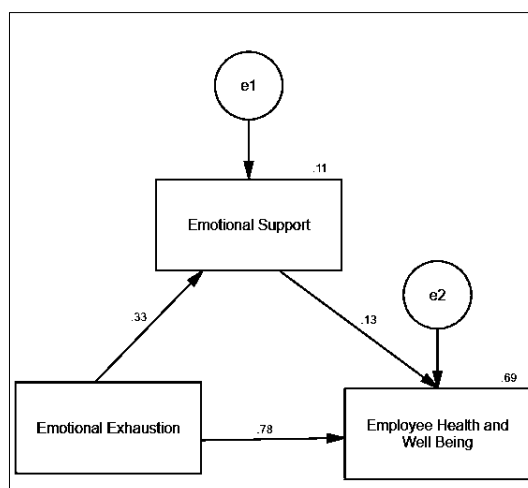
Table 6 shows the value of standardised beta estimate of 0.82 for the effect of emotional exhaustion on employee health and well-being. This effect was significant at 0.01 level. Thus, the hypothesis that “Emotional exhaustion impacts employee health and well-being” was accepted at 0.01 level.

Table 6: Direct Effect of Emotional Exhaustion on Employee Health and Well Being

Outcome	Predictor	Beta Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Result
Employee Health and Well Being	Emotional Exhaustion	0.82	0.03	26.70	***	Significant

The indirect effect emotional support has on the relationship between employee health & well-being and emotional exhaustion is tested using the structural model shown in Figure 2 and the results are presented in Table 7.

Figure 2: Indirect effect of emotional support on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and impact on employee health and well being



From Table 7, it is evident that emotional exhaustion significantly affects both emotional support and employee health and well-being.

Table 7: Indirect effect of emotional support on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and impact on employee health and well being

Outcome		Predictor	Beta Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Result
Emotional Support	<---	Emotional Exhaustion	0.33	0.04	7.24	***	Significant
Employee Health and Well Being	<---	Emotional Support	0.13	0.04	4.72	***	Significant
Employee Health and Well Being	<---	Emotional Exhaustion	0.78	0.03	24.19	***	Significant

Using a mediating variable (Emotional Support), the indirect effect was measured between by Emotional Exhaustion and Employee Health and Well Being. From Table 7, it is evident that the mediator variable (Emotional Support) has a significant impact on the relation between the predictor variable (Emotional Exhaustion) and the dependent variable (Employee Health and Well Being). However, the path coefficient between Emotional Exhaustion and Employee Health and Well Being has reduced from 0.82 to 0.78. Thus, it is inferred from the mediation analysis that “partial mediation” is reported because of the Emotional Support (Mediating Variable) on the association between Emotional Exhaustion and Employee Health and Well Being.

4. Findings

Exhaustion, stress and burnout are found as common phenomenon among IT employees. Health and well-being of IT employees are significantly impacted by the nature of their job which demands increased time commitment and intellectual work. Female employees of the study are experiencing greater difficulties because of Emotional Exhaustion and stress in comparison with their male counterparts. Similarly, married IT employees have reported increased level of exhaustion and impact on health and well-being when compared to their unmarried counterparts.

Emotional Exhaustion is seriously affecting the health and well-being of IT employees. From an analysis of past studies, it can be concluded that emotional exhaustion affects every aspect of well-being negatively. The findings of the current study are consistent with the job burnout theory, which asserts that emotional exhaustion is a defining characteristic of burnout..The current study's findings are consistent with the job burnout theory, which contends that emotional exhaustion is the characteristic of burnout. It has been shown that emotional support mediates the link between mental exhaustion and employee health and wellbeing.

5. Scope for the Future research

The study can be expanded further for other industry as well like manufacturing, tourism, healthcare services and education sector. A cross comparison study can be conducted to study the quantum of impact on exhaustion on health and well-being of employees. Further, the impact of stress along with exhaustion on productivity and job performance can be studied as a separate study.

6. Practical Implications

Numerous earlier research (Burke et al., 2010; Jahrami et al., 2013) have thoroughly examined the effect of emotional depletion on the affective/psychological well-being component. Continuous exposure to job pressures depletes the personal resources of employees, resulting in emotional exhaustion (Lizano, 2015). Working

circumstances and the demands of the workplace are a major source of stress and research indicates that the design of work may have large implications on employee well-being, health, and health care costs. Redesigning work or enhancing the work environment, taking into account both job-related and interpersonal components, may decrease stress that causes emotional exhaustion (Banks, et al., 2012). Strategies for flexitime might be implemented that enable staff to deal with stress in a healthy way, as these programmes have showed that they offer advantages including less stress and greater independence (Baltes et al., 1999). Any workforce management solutions aiming to guard the health and well-being of personnel must shield employees from emotional exhaustion. Future qualitative and quantitative research studies must thoroughly investigate workplace interventions treating emotional exhaustion in order to produce effective, evidence-based workplace solutions. Providing employees with opportunities to contribute to workplace enhancements is a constructive way to promote their health and well-being.

7. Conclusion

The present study suggests developing effective workplace interventions at the supervisory and organisational levels of business organisations that stop or alleviate emotional exhaustion in employees is crucial for sustained maintenance of well-being of employees of IT organisations. Training interventions such as skills that are useful in coping with stress, goal planning, time management, and emotional regulation), as well as programmes that include relaxation, meditation, and physical activity can be conducted. Another important strategy that business firms can adopt is to encourage supervisors to support employees' personal needs. Supervisors that promote family-supportive behaviours have shown encouraging results for health and work-life balance. Employers are also at an advantage since employees whose supervisors received this training are observed to have improved performance of job, greater satisfaction in jobs, as well as reduced intentions to leave. Research indicates that excessive work expectations can lead to an undesirable effect on employee health and well-being. The study suggests IT organisations to sustain appropriate staffing at all times to keep manageable workloads (Kelly et al., 2021, Harvard Business review). Organisations should take active measures to cultivate employees' sense of belongingness. Enhancing the well-being of employees may be accomplished by cultivating a culture at workplace that fosters the formation of supportive relationships between employees and their co-workers in the workforce. In line with previous findings (Loscocco et al., 1990), the present study also supports the notion that work-related social and emotional support effectively promotes well-being among both women and men.

This study corroborates the findings of prior studies on emotional exhaustion and its link with employee health and well-being. This study has made significant contributions to current literature by presenting evidence of the multidimensional and cross-level interaction relationships between emotional support and employee health and well-being.

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